

University of Louisville

## ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

5-2019

# The actor's rhythm, internal beat.

Lashondra Cherell Hood

*University of Louisville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>



Part of the [Acting Commons](#), and the [Performance Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hood, Lashondra Cherell, "The actor's rhythm, internal beat." (2019). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3180.  
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/3180>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact [thinkir@louisville.edu](mailto:thinkir@louisville.edu).

THE ACTOR'S RHYTHM, INTERNAL BEAT

By

LaShondra Cherell Hood  
B.A., Alabama State University, 2016  
M.F.A., University of Louisville, 2019

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Colleges of Arts and Sciences of the  
University of Louisville  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2019

Copyright 2019 by LaShondra Cherell Hood

All rights reserved



THE ACTOR'S RHYTHM, INTERNAL BEAT

By

LaShondra Cherell Hood

B.A., Alabama State University, 2016

M.F.A. University of Louisville, 2019

A Thesis Approved on

April 2, 2019

by the following Thesis Committee:

---

Dr. J. Ariadne Calvano

---

Dr. Baron Kelly

---

Dr. Karen Chandler

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of Felicia Battle.

Thank you for your special love and support.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my mom for always listening to my ideas. I would like to thank my professors for their encouragement, especially my advisor Ariadne Calvano. She was a great listener and advisor. I appreciated Ari's ability to push hard and when to listen. Writing was a challenge for me, but I appreciated the faculty challenging me and not giving up on me. Also, I thank Jessica Key for encouragement, Charles Nasby for positive energy, Melissa Shepard for courage, and most of all Blair Potter for all of the above and then some! In addition, a special shout-out to the writing lab consultants Liz Soule and Anna-Stacia Haley for their guidance, patience, and encouragement. These special consultants never made me doubt my ideas, but always encouraged me to explore them. Finally, special thanks to Kiara Levitt/Crew, Chloe Sutton, my classmates Terry Tocantins and Lauren Dobbs, and my roomies Kala Ross and Brittany Patillo for being great friends. God has placed some amazing people in my life; I would be remiss if I did not take the time to say thank you!

## ABSTRACT

### THE ACTOR'S RHYTHM, INTERNAL BEAT

LaShondra Hood

May 10, 2019

This thesis is a conversational document that will examine the manifestation of the auditory (hearing) and motor (physical motion) cortex of the cerebrum and how this connection influences character physicality in theatre. In this thesis, *The Mountaintop*, written by Katori Hall, is used as a gateway to conducted research on music and rhythm as it affects the body and creating physical character choices. By reflecting on personal musical exploration, that of my peers, and students, it is concluded that this method can be used for all stages of character building and performance experiences. The various backgrounds of the subjects – students and peers – confirmed the findings with traditional and nontraditional creative minds, with each participant physically responding to various rhythms and music. This exploration was performed on a spectrum from a general lens to a focused nuanced perspective for specific characters by seasoned performers.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Rhythm & Physicality.....	15
Chapter 2: Action from Music.....	41
Chapter 3: Rhythm & Language.....	69
Conclusion .....	87
References.....	96
Curriculum Vitae.....	101

## INTRODUCTION

"Music has the power to alter moods drastically. It can free your emotions, then nourish them; it can enliven a low mood, help your mental clarity, and even lend energy to your physical being. Music can even produce mental, emotional, and physical effects" (Blache 8).

Music plays a pivotal role in my life, as I have realized recently. Music is there for me in times of distress, of joy, and even healing. My journey with music is personal, but it is also what connects me with other people. As long as I can be moved by music, then I know I still feel; I am activated because I am sensitive to the sounds and the physical actions the sounds evoke. This sensitivity is needed as an actor; empathy and sensitivity is imperative. Music underscores all of the most important parts of my life.

If I re-imagine my life as being a car, I would say that God is the gas and without Him, I do not move to the next step. Other fluids such as water and oils are necessary to a functioning vehicle, which I would equate to friends, family, and music. Music is the water; it ensures that I do not overheat with stress, but instead is always filtering through me. Music has began to shape how I

approach theatrical characters lately and I am excited to continue this exploration in the next chapter of my life!

Music has influenced my weight loss journey, my mental state, and my spirituality among a host of other aspects of my life. I have a personal connection to music in a similar way that scientists and practitioners have a relationship to discovering the power of it! Considering music as an influential source for performance is nothing new. Musical influence has been studied by practitioners such as Konstantin Stanislavski, Eilon Morris, and Oliver Sacks, a neurologist, who focuses on the music and its effects on the brain. Through personal experience and research on the power and physical manifestation of music I find that songs stimulate character choices and inspire dynamic nuances. I used the character Camae from *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall to facilitate an investigation of this notion. This investigation explores the influence of rhythm and music over the physical body, the literal text of the script, song selection, and the amalgamation of these elements to the character process.

#### *THE MOUNTAINTOP*

At the University of Louisville, each third-year M.F.A. candidate is required to perform a thesis role. I was honored to be assigned the role of Camae from *The Mountaintop*. This play is the reimagining of Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr.'s last night on Earth. Playwright, Katori Hall, merges the fantastical with realism and draws heavily on historical information and thorough research, yet is able to activate theatrical elements. For me, sometimes the beauty of theatre is that it is not like the real world but there are endless possibilities, not tied to realism.

*The Mountaintop* is set at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4th, 1968. Dr. King is in the midst of working on a speech when he is encountered by a young African American maid named Camae; she is there to deliver him, and his coffee. After many flirtatious exchanges with Dr. King, the audience eventually discovers that Camae is an angel sent to take Dr. King to "the other side."

Camae is a beautiful, sassy, potty-mouthed angel sent to aid Dr. King in his transition. he is fun, young, and vibrant but has a bigger mission than flirting with Dr. King. In the play we learn that for Camae to gain her wings, she has to get Dr. King to Heaven by 6:01PM. In my initial reading of the play, I wondered why the playwright created such a person to help Dr. King, considering who he was in that time. However, once I stopped judging my character, Camae, I realized that she is the perfect person. She is open and down-to-earth that she gives Dr. King permission to be the same way. For a while, he just got to be himself as opposed to the iconic figure we all

know him to be. Camae, Dr. King, and *The Mountaintop* marked the end of my M.F.A. degree and the first step in this research journey. The beginning sparked from my first year in the program and a lifelong music connection.

#### WHO'S WHO

Before moving any further, there is something to be said about the practitioners and scientist selected. Konstantin Stanislavski, Eilon Morris, and Oliver Sacks were all chosen for my foundational research in order to strengthen my claim. Oliver Sacks is a neurologist that studies the effects of music on the brain, he is not the only scientist that studies this, however, he is so passionate about his particular study because he has experienced the use of music first hand. When he had to go through the process himself, it changed his connection to his work. As a result, he has been able to make some amazing breakthroughs due to his dedication. Even in the midst of exploring other resources to support my claim, the other scientists tended to mention Oliver Sacks and his research. He was referenced several times in the documentary and other articles. For this project, I thought it would be best to use him as a direct source as opposed to quoting Sacks' same information indirectly.

Another scholar whose work I found useful was Eilon Morris. In the book, *Rhythm in Acting and Performance: Embodied Approaches and Understanding*, Morris laid the

foundation for my work with different practitioners that he has thoroughly explored all in the binding of two covers. Even though I cannot just take his word on any of these exercises and theories alone, Morris acts as an encyclopedia. He offered a nice perspective and he compiled a lot of the theatre practitioners in the same book. This book gave easy access to what has been said about music and rhythm in the theatre. He even introduces Stanislavski "Tempo-Rhythm" as a part of his book.

After engaging with Morris' book, I was still drawn to the exploration of tempo-rhythm with Stanislavski the most. Stanislavski Tempo- Rhythm work was inspired by Dalcroze and research on Eurhythmics. I decided that I was introduced to theatre by way of the Stanislavski method, thus the importance of understanding musicality in theatre through his lens.

#### PERSONAL MUSICAL CONNECTION

"Calm down, LaShondra, calm down!" This was a phrase I muttered to myself often during my first semester at the University of Louisville as tears were soaking my face. Although these words were not enough usually to make me find peace, this phrase did become ritualistic as it marked the initial moment of finding peace during one of the hardest transitions of my young adult life. Almost every day, I would start with "calm down," cry a little, call my

mom, pray, and end with performing some outrageous song to purge myself. My first semester was the peak of stressing which I attempted to self-heal with music. I used songs that expressed my current state then cried until I felt cleansed, or I chose music that was full of energy to express the exact opposite until it pulled me out of the rut. Music is God's way of calming me down in order to receive the answers to my prayers. Some of my ritualistic songs include Twerk music born out of the New Orleans bounce era, hymnals, and motivational songs like "Golden" by Jill Scott.

Over the years, my weight has been one thing that has been able to truly affect me. It was hard in high school and college to go shopping, because I would be extremely hurt if I could not wear something that was presumably the "right" size. Whenever I had to get the next size up, there were bound to be tears involved, sometimes resulting in leaving the store altogether. Because of my weight I thought that I would attempt to defy all "fat girl" associations. I wanted to do everything that was not expected of me. Laziness and Twinkies™ were unfortunately strong connections in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama when it came to fat girl stereotypes. A common running joke involved Twinkies, which made me avoid eating them altogether. One of the other unfortunate "fat girl" associations is laziness. I attempted to join every active

program that I could, not to lose weight necessarily, but to prove to people and their generalizations made about plus-size women, wrong. Although momentarily it was satisfying to beat that stereotype, there have been some instances where I would end up putting more stress on my body to accept these unspoken challenges.

For a while in high school, I participated in marching band, show choir, track and field, and volleyball. I stayed busy, but I was not losing weight. Later, in my undergraduate program I started getting interested in dance. I took a few dance classes, did a few shows, and even joined the campus dance company. This was the first time that I really started to lose weight. I joined for the exercise, but got lost in the music so intensely that it no longer felt like a chore in the way that previous activities did. The music inspired and motivated me. I started to see physical results and it boosted my self-confidence; I was ecstatic. However, after my senior year, I was no longer around dance and gained the weight back. That was until I began crafting my playlist of songs that motivated me again to dance. The tempo and style of music reinforced my motivation. The gym did not seem so bad when Beyonce supported me through songs like "7/11" or "Shining." During this time of working out while listening to crafted playlists, coupled with a desire to succeed, I lost 38 lbs. Music played a significant role in that



process. When I get lost in the songs, I run a little longer, I jump rope a little faster, and get my heart rate up a little higher. I can, because music is!

Lastly, my spiritual has grown because of the influence of music. Studies show that all types of music influence people in different ways. Churches are great examples for places that have been known for music as an influential source. In a Black Baptist Church the hymnal of preparation is always slow and right before the sermon, it prepares the listeners to hear and receive the word. Although some churches have shied away from focusing only on traditional hymns, most still prescribe to slower praise songs; they too believe in the power of music.

Because of this same power and spirit music possesses, growing up with spiritual parents there were certain songs that I was not allowed to listen to. My parents opposed certain types of music because of the influence over my young mind. They felt that some songs taught me too much about life in a negative light or caused my brothers and I to be much more aggressive. My parents felt that music could inspire aggression; I used this as inspiration. I began to manipulate my mood in other situations with the aid of music. I used the power of music to influence every part of my prototype character, Camae from *The Mountaintop*. The decision to use music as a guide is a culmination of my

parents' influence on my childhood, actor training with Dr. Baron Kelly, and life experiences.

#### CREATING CHARACTER TO A NEW BEAT

When characters have no other way to express themselves they use the power of song. This is something I have heard for years while working at a musical theatre summer camp in Birmingham. Now, this is *not* the time in my thesis that I share I am a secret musician or have hidden heightened vocals with which I am just waiting to be discovered, but this is where I share my plan to allow music to continue to affect me in my daily journey. Music has been guiding me and millions of other people for years, now I just want to bring my attention the musicality of life.

Originally, I thought this musical approach was just something that works for me, but seeing as music can be a universal language, I would like to suggest that music can be an additional acting technique. Music, based on many years of research, is one of the few things in life that can be labeled universal. Although we humans have certain songs culturally embedded in our minds and we have certain associations, the idea that music provokes humans is across the globe.

In the documentary, *The Music Instinct: Science and Sound*, neuroscientists did research to see how much of these said responses were based on western culture or other

cultural teaching as opposed to being an individual and innate reaction. The lead scientist in this experiment was Daniel Levitin who is both a musician and a scientist. Levitin understood the use of music as artist and as a man of science. To get the results the researchers went to a tribe in North Cameroon to the Mandara mountain range that has always been remote and isolated. The people of the tribe do not intermingle with other people outside of the tribe and have never attended a church outside of their own to see if they could identify the emotions associated with each piece of music. The scientists did this study with the young and the old and each time came up with the same results. The body understands and responds to music. So, I wondered, why can't music be used in every step of the process as a way to explore the depth of the character? It can! I have used this approach with students not, creating character, on a cast member to distinctly create multiple characters, and on a stale scene to reactivate the work. By considering this isolated tribe just as much as I do other factors like my students or the cast, it proves that literally any person from any cultural background has the ability to be influenced by music. The actor's instruments are limited to the body and the voice, but it does not mean that actors cannot revise old methods and use music to activate ourselves.

Terrence Rafferty is a New York film critic. He is also the author of a published article suggesting that there has been a "Decline of the American Actor." According to the article published in *The Atlantic* he suggests that "American actors are lacking in training because they grew up in front of the camera too fast" (Rafferty 3). Although this article deals mostly with film actors, the foundations of modern actor training is the same. The foundation, as practiced in the western world, mostly derives from the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, the Russian theatre practitioner best known for his contribution to character building. Using this reading and personal experiences, I am suggesting that the foundation is still solid but the way in which actors build character may need to be revisited. I want to offer a new approach to the character building process by offering the use of a new medium – music. Due to the fact that the auditory cortex and the motor cortex are so closely connected Oliver Sacks (neurologist known for studying music effects on the body) and other scientists have discovered a plethora of contexts in which music activates the mind and the body. This list includes babies, people with Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and optimal athletic abilities. In theatrical studies such as the Alexander Technique, actors are taught that the mind and the body should not be thought of as two separate entities, but instead since they strongly influence one

another they should almost be considered one. Thus, the actor's instruments are both the voice and body/mind which are interrelated. Since this is the case then the idea that music itself can directly influence both the actor, and the character being portrayed, is not too far fetched.

Actors with a relationship to music will be able to identify the themes of music in the same way they would analyze character in a script with the aid of the Stanislavski method. In Stanislavski's approach to character analysis, the actor is required to identify their goal, obstacles and discover background information, all of which would be useful in the selection of music. I argue that all other character choices can be explored and discovered through music.

Historically, many practitioners alluded to the use of music in the process but have never explored it in depth as music relates to character building in its entirety. Susanne Bing, a theatre practitioner, talks about music for character building for improvisation. Konstantin Stanislavski introduces tempo-rhythm towards the beginning of the process for the internalization of the tempo and how fast actions happen and the external force connected to the communication. Although he offers some physical exercises, I associated his work with the text mostly because both tempo and rhythm stem from his original way of working before the actor can move on.

Because of the power of music, I am suggesting music is the gateway into any character once the actor finds that character's song. It is imperative to understand the physicality of a character in order to distinguish self from the character but how does one do that without "putting on a new walk"? Practitioners that have mentioned the use of music includes, but are not limited to: playwright August Wilson, actor/director/ professor Dr. Baron Kelly, and actor/director Ernie McClintock, all African American theatre practitioners. Both Wilson and McClintock access theatre through instruments and how they complement one another in Jazz or Blues bands. Their work encouraged actors to apply each character to an instrument of the band. These practitioners are urging the actor to go beyond just the sound, but analyze how each instrument operates in the whole ensemble. They are asking for the justification, the importance of each instrument. With these practitioners encouraging instrumentation to be explored in depth, and by the actor doing so, the actor would need to justify the choices. The actors would need to understand everyone cannot be the drums. These practitioners have asked the actor to engage with the character in an entirely new way. My job as an actor in this process is to extend this idea of character creation by way of music. The exploratory method in this thesis asks

actors to re-engage with role development by infusing it with music throughout the process.

The following chapters will explore the creative process with music using Camae, from *The Mountaintop*, at the forefront. I will analyze the script, rehearsals, and the production process as they relate to music, myself, and Camae. The subsequent chapters will investigate my use of music in this process, and suggest how it can be applied to others. This thesis ultimately will be an overview and synthesis of existing music-based character developmental practices.

Extending beyond Camae, I am interested, in general, in the use of character informed by music. I have taken what other scholars have offered about music in both their theatre practices and from the medical field in order to support my claims. Also, I have applied this work to my classes at the university, involving theatre peers in my classes, and the cast of the show I am directing. These studies gave me a visual outside of myself to see if I can get other participants to come up with their own physical choices using the same guidelines.

## RHYTHM AND PHYSICALITY

"One cannot define rhythm, but nevertheless one can state that at the heart of any great performance there is always rhythm." -Peter Brook, theatre director (Morris 3).

Have you ever wondered what about a song evokes a certain movement, or thought? Why do you have the impulse to snap for one song, sway to the second, and simply bob your head to the last one? These are some of the questions that got my brain juices percolating when it came to creating Camae.

A prototype, as used in science, is the preliminary model of something, the foundation; this is precisely what Camae, from *The Mountaintop*, will act as in this thesis. I am not claiming to be the first person to ever use music in acting for character development. I am simply urging actors to consider using music throughout the process to aid their discoveries and create more dynamic characters. The use of music is intended to be an extension of the research. This music does not replace the traditional ways of understanding character, but should make the actor engage in a more creative and in depth way. The foundation of my research is inspired by and rooted in Konstantin Stanislavski's ideas of tempo-rhythm, Eilon Morris'



research on rhythm and movement, and Oliver Sacks' research on the musical influence on the brain. Although these are my main sources, there are other practitioners making discoveries in their respective fields that are worth mentioning in order to support my claim.

My research begins with the idea of music in a holistic form; however, at its most basic and purest level, I am also commenting on rhythm, which has been studied since Ancient Greek theatre (Morris 8). When songs are in their whole, complete form they include all of the elements to create the song. However, we rarely acknowledge the role that individual elements play in the grand scheme of things. Some of the most basic elements of music and musical sounds are: rhythm, melody, and harmony. It is imperative to understand rhythm as it relates to music in general to grasp the definition, but also in order to apply it to the process of character development. Rhythms, patterned recurrences of events in time, form a large part of our lives (Auer 4). Rhythm greatly influences how an actor utilizes songs for character development. The goal is to find a song that resonates with that character and actor on a personal level, that reflects the character's internal rhythm (which will be discussed in detail later). The actor will explore a mixture of songs, genres, artists, and sounds, in order to better articulate layers of the

character they are portraying through their relationship with the song.

Throughout this chapter, I isolated a few instances of my use of music to explore Camae through physical choices such as her walk and plastiques, a term that will be defined later. This type of work has been explored through different lenses by practitioners and prior approaches to music and character development include the work done by the French actress, Susanne Bing:

Students began to create simple characters, for example, by dramatizing the song "Frere Jacques" thus utilizing music, dance, and some ensemble elements: The group also improvised their own version of *Sleeping Beauty* emphasizing its rhythmic elements... *Sleeping Beauty* developed into a small production thus providing the students with a way of integrating musical principles as well as qualities of improvisation and movement into their performances... Suzanne Bing ran a course that focused on further integrating the principles of music, text, and physical movement, attempting to discover how these elements could be incorporated within dramatic performances (Morris 87).

The main difference between Bing's work and my approach is that her students were not using a script. They were asked to create a whole character just off of the music as opposed to further developing characters based on script analysis. I am modifying this type of research to add to the list of contemporary approaches to character development in order to strengthen performance, understand music rhythm and the physical manifestations of it. In Morris' book, he quotes Bing regarding the integration of

musical principles, and in the same way, I want to bring awareness to rhythm in the script as related to each character. Great playwrights have a way of allowing each character to have their own rhythm in speech thus playing a role in creating three dimensional characters. It is the actor's job to discover these subtle differences in the script and investigate what the character/ playwright is communicating through this specific language. Rhythm is most identified with music thus it is important to understand it as it relates to music first. However, by allowing the rhythmic elements and other musical characteristics to affect the performer, the actor can begin to find new physical actions. Although I am not creating characters in the same way as Bing, our use of music in the creative process is similar as it is concerned with character development. After acknowledging the power of music in my personal life, it sent me down a rabbit hole of other discoveries of music/rhythm in relation to the mind and body.

#### Discoveries in Science and Music

After many years of hypothesizing and investigating, scientists have been achieving many breakthroughs concerning the power and the human need for music. There have been many studies proving the extensive power of music conducted by neurologist Oliver Sacks, and a host of other

scientists. Sacks explains his germinal connection to music after a rock climbing accident. During the accident, he tore off his quadriceps tendons of his left leg and damaged nerve endings. After surgery, he had forgotten how to walk but during the recovery period received a cassette of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. Then, in physical therapy, suddenly, this song came back to his mind vividly with such a natural rhythm that his walking ability came back. He was able to move around the room. Post recovery, he wanted to know why his body responded to music the way it did. He found an older lady who had undergone surgery with a similar issue. While speaking with this elderly woman, she shared that her leg had become quite useless. During the interview, he asked if her leg had been able to move since her injury. She commented, "yes it had, once, at a Christmas concert by itself." Because of this response, he decided to examine the response her leg had to music. It is important to note that the generational differences between: the woman, Sacks, me are ever-present, yet music still affects us. Through his research, he discovered that this involuntary response "indicated that whatever was going on, or not going on, with her nervous system, music could act as an activator, a de-inhibitor" (Sacks). Because Sacks had to use music for himself I think his relationship to his research is enhanced.

Music can kick start damaged or inhibited motor system into action again such as the vivid imagining of the

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto. When I stood up in the hospital the rhythm or beat of the music was crucial for me. For my patient with a fractured hip, it wasn't just the rhythm it was the melody with its movement, its momentum was also important (Sacks).

Breakthroughs continue in the medical field regarding the effects of music. Another example about music affecting the body is proven through a study of people with Parkinson Disease.

Parkinson's disease is a disease of the nervous system that worsens over time. People who have Parkinson's disease shake involuntarily. They find that their muscles become rigid and stiff, and they lose the ability to make any spontaneous movements. They walk in a recognizable manner with a typical gate in which the body is bent flexed (Weiner 11).

However, even in the midst of losing control of their nervous system and motor functions, music still has a natural, sometimes involuntary, effect on the body. In Sack's research with music therapy and Parkinson's patients, he finds that "some patients could walk and talk but only in a jerky broken way, without a steady tempo and something with incontinent accelerations – with such patients, music modulates the stream of movement or speech, giving them the steadiness and control they so lacked."

There is a strong bond between the part of the brain responsible for movement (the motor cortex) and the part of the brain responsible for interpreting sound (auditory cortex). The studies done with the Parkinson patients provided evidence for just how strong those two parts of the brain are. Even when a person no longer has complete

control of their motor system the connection remains. If there is this strong connection for people that are not trying to manipulate their bodies using music, imagine the outcome of an actor crafting the response. Once the actor chooses the right song, they are on track to allowing this motor/auditory connection to do the rest. The right song, as I like to define it, is a song that activates both the character and the actor. The term "right" implies that there is also a wrong song. In fact, there are many! In a field where so much of the work involves knowing and believing in self, it is easy to become selfish and the work, in this case song selection, becomes masturbatory. The actor needs a proper stimulant to activate him/herself and the character.

The relationship between motor and auditory systems has been investigated by asking people to tap to a beat, or where it cannot be given verbally as with infants or animals by observing whether there is any spontaneous synchronization of movement with an external musical beat. The linking of auditory and motor systems seems universal in humans, and shows itself spontaneously, early in life...What is more remarkable is their finding that listening to music or imagining it, even without any overt movement or keeping time, activates motor cortex and subcortical motor systems, too. Thus the imagination of music, of rhythm, may be as potent, neurally, as actually listening to it (Sacks 241).

There have been recent studies on the human brain and how it recalls music. In the documentary, *The Music Instinct: Science and Song*, the neuroscientist and musician Daniel Levitin, conducted a study on the street by pulling random

pedestrians from the street to sing their favorite tune at the moment. The researcher wanted to see how well the human species could recreate rhythms from songs, how well they could remember. He conducted this by matching up the original recorded song with the pedestrian's reenactment to see how clearly and quickly the participants were able to recall the songs. The researchers determined that if the song has a steady rhythm it can be returned to mentally, it can be remembered. The pedestrians overall were able to recall the tune by humming or singing it on the beat and most of them were spot-on with the rhythms of the song. The brain is not only able to process these rhythms as they are happening, after catching the beat the brain begins to complete the beat as it is happening. The brain then is then completing the beat, predicting the beat, and storing the beat at the same time.

Although all the elements can play a role in the choice of song for each character, I will begin with rhythm as directly correlating with the energy of the song. Rhythm lays the foundation for the melody and harmony to find a steady beat.

For most people, it is the rhythm that provides the energy of music, be it great or small (Gaston, 1968b p 17). Ludin and Farnsworth both suggest that tempo, an important attribute of rhythm, is of primary importance in influencing mood response to music. Rhythm characterized by detached, percussive sounds tends to stimulate muscular activity. March and dance music usually have definitive and repetitive rhythms that appear to stimulate physical movement. The more percussive, staccato, and accentuated music the

greater the apparent physical response to it. Whenever the underlying beat is clearly defined even a casual listener is likely to respond with some overt physical response (Boyle 32).

Understanding the physicality of a character is the hardest part of character building for me, yet the most crucial to developing a realistic and holistic character. Characters are whole when they are three dimensional, when they are both complete and lacking nothing. This is where nuances of the character lie, those subtle changes that some people do not notice individually, but appreciate on the larger performance spectrum. For me, the physical life is what separates good actors from great actors; great actors can mentally, vocally, *and physically* embody another person. These actors begin to understand the internal rhythm of the characters that manifests itself externally. I argue that the walk is imperative to complete the transformation and have a full body experience, yet is the hardest to obtain. Human walks are just as much a part of us and distinguishable as our voices. We can see a person that we encounter and often determine that it's them before we can completely make out a face.

#### THE PROCESS OF SELF AND CHARACTER

After perusing through my old journals from Voice and Movement classes here at the University of Louisville, I realized the plethora of self discoveries I made since I started here. Both my Voice and Movement Professors



encouraged, directly and indirectly, a deeper understanding of self. I have had a hyper-awareness about self, personal ticks, and physical habits in the last two years that I never noticed since I have been in the theater. Examples include: my walk and how I "sit in" my hip, trod in a slow and steady rhythm. To sit in my hips is the expression I use referring to how I shift my weight into my hips more drastically than others may. On several occasions, I noted that from exercises in the movement class, meant to establish a movement vocabulary, that my walk was always slower than everyone else's normal walk. These newly discovered habits are what I will classify as my "default self," a buzz phrase I have grown quite fond of since being at the university. The more I understood about myself, the further I could go with character development. Awareness, to start naming my habits and natural responses, gave the agency to make new or deliberate choices in the rehearsal hall. This is not to say that an actor must abandon all of the sense self to create every character. However, this is to suggest that the more you understand yourself, the easier it is to craft and further your natural response into something beyond just self. This is especially important in the physical aspects of acting.

As I examine old clips of my young acting days from my mom's collection of performance videos, I see my growth. I use my voice and energy in distinct ways that were suitable

for the characters I was playing; however, the way in which I used my body remained the same most of the time. The smaller nuances and rhythms in my life help define my default self, so why shouldn't the character live with their own layers too? The more actors understand and bring attention to their default selves and the more they understand the character, the easier the shift will be. The actor would have then gained the starting point(self discovery) and a finishing point(whole character) by understanding this vital information. Actors that neglect the importance of self and habitual patterns lack the starting point and then the ones that mistake their personal walk as every character's walk lacks complete transformation.

A major characteristic of the physical life of the character is the walk and navigation of the space. However, for me, the walk is the hardest thing to change. The challenge is to make the walk appear seamless and natural, but personal walks are something that people practice daily without thinking about it. People experience their personal walking rhythm for most of their lives so to understand a character's rhythm is an interesting and personal process. I offer music to performers as an avenue to get out of one's head and as an extension of the actor's prior personal practices. This suggestion is to avoid some of the

awkwardness that creeps into some actor's bodies as soon as a director brings attention to the physical body.

Listening to music is one of those few times that I do not have to think too hard about my body and how to maneuver it. The music directs me and I obey; I understand what I am supposed to do with the music. Based on the prior research of Sacks, Levitin, and Zatorre, all of whom are neuroscientists studying music, I would suggest that the influence of music should be one of the few instances where people should not have to think about physical awkwardness or how to move. When actors, or people in general, overthink movements we tend to appear awkward and unsure of ourselves. These are two things actors would not want to do on stage. As a result, sometimes actors end up overcompensating and over exaggerating changes in a walk to communicate that we are walking "differently," outside of our default selves. Though no audience member can say that it is "blank" actor's walk, they can say that it was not realistic. However, if the song stimulates us, even people that can't dance, have certain proclivities when it comes to ways of moving. This movement can be based on their choice of song or interest in certain types of music; the possibilities are endless. For instance, people usually gravitate to a certain type of music, it is something that they like. Yet even if they cannot dance, they find some way to respond even if it's just a head nod or foot tap.

## APPLYING MUSIC AND PHYSICALITY

In this process, it is one thing to use one's self for the experience, it is another to confirm it with scientific evidence. However, to see this type of work from people who do not engage in acting in any way is quite inspirational. I am a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Louisville and I am currently teaching an Introduction to Communication through an acting class. For the midterm, my students were assigned a movement and music exercise. They selected a poem as their text and their only form of verbal communication. Yet they are required to allow the external stimuli of music to affect mood, physicality, and interpretation. Before they added in text, there were times where I simply played a random song and told them to carry out the same actions as their original action, but to allow the music to influence them. Prior to class, they were instructed to prepare a scene with any song they selected and that I would provide the second song at random in order to get them to simply respond to what they were hearing. In this class, one of the main foci is to understand full body, active listening. What amazed me about this group was that I only had two theater majors enrolled; yet, I saw drastic transformation from even the shy students, when it came to music response. This work reminds me of Susanne Bing and her aforementioned research. One student in

particular has a habit of overthinking, everything sometimes so much so that she tends to become filled with anxiety and it's hard to get through the assignment. Yet, as she began to engage with the music there was a sense of freedom that she gave off. She was still very quick in the presentation but she was about to tell a complete beginning, middle, and end because she was not overcome with fear.

#### PHYSICAL MOVEMENT AND *THE MOUNTAINTOP*

In order to understand Camae, first I must understand blackness. Music is one of the few things that survived the Middle Passage with some of my ancestors. Camae's relationship with blackness in the script influenced me to explore more in this way. For example, Camae's strength in blackness to name actions done against blackness and name white wrongs out loud affirms for me that she is not accidentally black, but that she is proud and unapologetic. There are at least three types of shameful black people: some people hang their heads low, when it comes to their melanin and never have the strength to call wrong a wrong. Others attempt to "pass" and abandon their blackness. Some aspire to court white people as a marker of their success. In all of these examples, they are not attempting to acknowledge their blackness. In the script, when Camae is standing on the bed and impersonating Dr. King and is

juxtaposed with scenes in which black people who are ashamed of being black. Although this method of imitation lightens the situation because of the comedic relief, Camae is still calling out some very real issues with the world and crimes against melanated skin. "When our white brother beats his fist upon our flesh, when he greets us with nigger and go back to Africa" (Hall 17). She is making her voice heard as a proud Black woman.

People that are ashamed of who they are do not speak out about injustices; they draw the least amount of attention to themselves. She continues in this speech saying,

Our Godly crowns have been turned to ashtrays by white men at lunch counters all across the South. We are fighting to sit at the same lunch counters but WHY? We need to build our counters, our own restaurant, our school, our own neighborhood, the white man ain't got nothing I want!" (Hall 17).

The role of God in the African American perspective holds a weight evoking a sense of royalty used in the aforementioned quote. This is comparing blackness to a heavenly realm which reflects the pride and beauty that Camae accepts blackness as. Then she continues that line by declaring that the white man is tarnishing that beauty and attempting to turn it into something deadly.

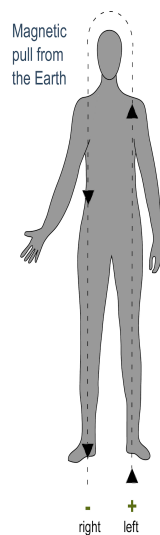
Physical awareness should come into play as early as possible: from the research stage, the rehearsal hall, warm-up and then into the performance. It should not just happen towards the end of the process when it is time to mount the show, but in the beginning. The more one understands what is going on mentally from the text, the more they can explore physicality.

Warm-ups happen before each rehearsal and the actual show, but should be very specific to each performer's needs. A general group warm-up can be helpful, but does not always help everyone. Each actor is unique and each character we play is varied on a spectrum and may require innovative forms of preparation. Part of my personal warm up is to first activate LaShondra the actor, then activate the character, in this case, Camae. I use music as a way to do this because of my response to music as a black woman in my everyday quotidian life. As an artist, it is imperative for me to warm up physically, mentally, emotionally, vocally, and energetically based on what is needed of me in the show. In *The Mountaintop*, because there are only two players on the stage the whole time, the energy and physical warm-up become more demanding for this role.

For the role of Camae, I used Spotify™ to create a playlist dedicated to just Camae. This playlist included "Fingertips" by Little Stevie Wonder and about twelve other songs. These songs were selected to begin the merging and

activation process of Camae and myself for both the rehearsals and shows. Within this warm-up, the physical elements were an integral part of this sequence.

More specifically, I started with twerking as a physical warm-up in which I physically rid myself of excess tension. Twerking uses energy, by focusing and redirecting my energy to my pelvic region. Brittney Cooper, a contemporary black feminist, is at the forefront of pushing the envelope and challenging traditional ways of navigating the world. She specifically covers some aspects of Hip-Hop feminism and twerking in her book, *Eloquent Rage*, in ways that are particularly intriguing. She is very strong advocate on these two highly criticized black art forms. Cooper suggests that:



southern black booty shaking music, the kind of stuff you twerk to, is where she finds her most productive synergy between the sacred and the profane, the place where she feels the most bodily freedom to let all her emotions- particularly the uncomfortable ones like fear and anger- hang out and find freedom of expression (Cooper 216).

This approach to twerking resonates strongly with me. Twerking, for me, has nothing to do with outside stimulants like the male gaze or being overtly sexual, but everything



to do with the freeing of oneself. This dance requires my complete attention, begins the grounding process in order to find Camae, and is the nucleus of her energy source. As for the other generations and accepting the way of working, there is only so much to be done:

History suggest that there is no one clear manifestation of approaching middle- age: when you and your closest friends conclude that the younger generation is " going to the dog." ... The favorite parental target in 1962 is the new dance rage, the Twist. Listening to group of local ladies sound off recently, I realized that I had heard a remarkably similar descriptions myself once-- when I learned how to jitterbug! So did my father, he admitted privately when he did the Charleston.... As a student of American culture, I am willing to argue more: that the Twist is valid manifestation of the Age of Anxiety; an outward manifestation of the anguish, frustration, and uncertainty of the 1960s; an effort to release tension which, if suppressed and buried, could warp and destroy. In our dancing, as an ideology and diplomacy, we show who we are, and what America is in the twentieth century.... The tempo of the times is mirrored in the tempo of the music (Fishwick 123).

The cycle continues; the disapproval of earlier generations may always be the culture of the introduction of new dances. At one point, I debated whether to talk about twerking as part of my process because of the negative associations. However, I concluded that to disown that part of my process is to disown me. Twerking was needed for my personal activation.

Aside from just being a part of the cycle, I would argue that twerking encompasses most of the African derived dance characteristics that are introduced by Barbara Glass. Glass is the coordinator of minor in Professional Writing

at the Ohio State University. In her book, *African American Dance: An Illustrated History*, she identifies ten African derived dance characteristics and explains each one. Glass relays that based on her research the characteristics are as follows: African movement vocabulary, orientation to the Earth, improvisation, circle and line formations, importance of the community, polyrhythms, percussion, pantomime, something in hand, and competition.

Again, in order to understand Camae, first I must understand blackness. Among other reasons, I chose music is because it is one of the few things that survived the Middle Passage with some of my ancestors. In my physical world, twerking is a befitting way to ground myself for this role considering her personality and occupation. This grounding process is wildly different than the approach I might take if I were taking on a grandma role and needed to be grounded.

Unfortunately, twerking has been deemed a highly sexual and vulgar dance; however, I believe that it depends on the interpretation and the gaze of the outsider. Twerking requires special attention to the grounding of oneself; it asks for a sense of balance, thus a circular motion of energy through the body and the Earth. There is no way to truly choreograph twerking; therefore, there is always a level of improvisation. Usually when twerking is taking place people innately form a circle in which the

energy is given and received which in turn begins to form a sense of community. Lastly, this form of dance can always evoke a sense of competition. Often times within the black community, a person dancing in the center of the circle with high energy is seen as a challenge in which another person will match or beat that level of energy first introduced. Twerking embodies the "challenge accepted" mentality that Camae has. For instance, in the script, Dr. King asks Camae what would she do if she were him. She checks to see if he was serious "You really wanna know what I'd do?" (Hall 17). He confirms his original answer... challenge accepted! This is the moment of her big speech, mentioned above when she is on the bed impersonating Dr. King. She imitates his mannerism, but interjects what she thinks he should say.

Other songs within my Camae playlist gave a sense of emotional journey and themes that I should experience as Camae. I originally was going to start with just a playlist of songs from the 1960's but it did not do everything that I needed as the actor for the mental and physical portion so I decided to combine the two. I had songs about being hurt and defeated, songs to connect to Camae's objectives that I had in the scene and songs of beautiful rebellion (a term that will be later defined). Though some of these songs were chosen for the mental portion of character building, they were all different kinds of songs and had

the power to create a specific mood. Therefore, I mention them as part of the physical process because mood effects physicality.

My personal journey for Camae was a good example of the need to understand my personal proclivities and default self before an attempt to start character development. It is imperative to know what habits I have that could benefit the role and which ones might contradict the characteristic of the character. I mentioned some of my habits that have been brought to my attention over the past few years: really leaning into my hip and a fairly slow paced walk were the two things that I brought awareness to in the rehearsal process. Through the process, based on the textual analysis, I ended up selecting the song "Fingertips" by Little Stevie Wonder. I selected this song because of the energy that it creates, politics of the young black man at that time, the sexy connection in the song to the harmonica, and the fun.

#### APPLYING CLASS ACTIVITIES TO CAMAE

One of the biggest themes I toyed with in the process was what is considered sexual/ or sexy; this was especially a challenge with the music and ideas of the 1960's.

Comparatively, the 1960's were very conservative and nothing was really overtly sexual in the same ways that we read into sex appeal today. I was very interested in how I

activate this flirtatious, almost seductive, side without doing too much within the time period of the 1960's. Something about the song, "Fingertips" makes me want to make small seductively circular motions in a dainty way. This reminded me of my movement class. In the class, we were introduced to the plastiques and corporels a Jerzy Grotowski based exercise. The way I have come to understand and interpret the plastiques and corporels has been associated with activating characters and choices in different ways. The plastiques require that the participant brings awareness to each joint of the body and explores all options of circular motion. This occurs within a wide spectrum of speeds and sizes of the motions while restricting movement from all other parts of the body. The participant is practicing isolation and awareness in each area of the body. This action includes but is not limited to: the neck, ankles, shoulders, knees etc.

With this type of response to music I challenged myself within the show to always find at least one dance move from the warm up and incorporate it in the show for the evening. My personal responses were explored extensively throughout the rehearsal process, so extensively that some movements never made it to see the light of day again. Not all movement is good for the character on stage, but *is* good for the exploration process. When there is no wrong way in the rehearsal

process there is a sense of freedom. Even an epic fail is good and welcomed in the early stages of the process; this allows me as the actor to act on impulse.

However, I journaled about and vividly remember randomly going into plastiques one day when I heard "Fingertips." Although my initial thought about this song was not "sexy" when it came on a random 1960's song shuffle from YouTube, after tracking my physical impulses and watching Stevie Wonder in a video I quickly changed my mind. The way in which my body responded to the song was sexy. I had a personal, exciting challenge that I posed to myself to see how many ways I could incorporate a plastique into each run of the show. This was almost like a performance game that kept me alert and active. Eventually this extended beyond plastiques into other forms of movement/ dance.

In the show, there were tons of slightly circular hip, wrist, and ankle actions for Camae as a direct pull from the plastiques. My favorite example was with my dangling foot. I discovered this through exploration in the warm up process during rehearsals. In the show, I could be caught at any given moment blocked in the down stage right chair making dainty flirtatious circles with my ankle. I have a bad habit of only manipulating the voice when it comes to employing new creative tactics. I decided every time I felt the urge to vocally be sexy I would send that

energy through the body and communicate the same idea physically. If my legs were crossed it was natural and common for the action to go to my ankle; I followed my impulses to twirl and flick my ankle about quite suggestively at times. This ankle flick was not to distract my fellow castmate, but at times was used to distract the character or was used in response to something the character Dr. King had done physically. Sometimes it could be as simple as his puff of the cigarette or slight tilt of the head that could spring this ankle into motion. Watching and being invested in my castmate allowed my responses to come organically.

These responses are not like blocking, which the director has set and must happen, but are small tools that help create Camae and give her life, a tool box of options. Most human beings do not respond to everything the same way and neither should characters. If the other actor inflects their voice slightly different then I can no longer circle my foot the same way as the night before. However, the beautiful thing is that because I have explored potential options through the music that I have other motions ready that allow me to respond to him truthfully. The tempo of the song is not completely steady, there are a few times that both Camae and Stevie Wonder made drastic rhythm changes which inspired me to also do that with the ankle circles in the show.

I journaled about three ways of using this action based on the song's influence on the action and tempo. Once, the ankle was in response to Dr. King in defiance or agitation. In the script, Dr. King corrects Camae. Camae says "garbage men" and Dr. King boldly corrects her by saying "sanitation workers." The foot sprang into action as a slight response to this correction. Camae does not become combative, she allows him to finish talking but the initial need to retaliate verbally was physically communicated in the ankle. After a moment, the same action flows into a response to her attraction to him. Even though Camae was not happy with being corrected, her infatuation with Dr. King overruled her momentary annoyance allowing the tempo to adjust to the slow syncopated down beat of the same guiding song "Fingertips."

The next use of this found movement was for a distraction. There are times where Camae does not agree with King's approach to something; so when there were no lines, I tried to do slight physical flirting in order to ease him into another discussion. Based on the script, most times my efforts did not work, but it was important to commit as though I thought I would be successful in the distraction.

W.E.B. DuBois introduced the idea of double consciousness. This is to bring attention to how black people must have a keen awareness about what they are doing



and how they are doing it. They must always be aware of how their actions will be accepted by their own people and by others. In that same idea, I believe that actors will also be split in between two modes of thinking. There is the thought pattern as the actor, the business side, and there is the thought process as the character, the creative side. The only thing about this action is that the timing has to be just right. If I do this action too fast or too long, then it will pull focus from my fellow castmate. I must always be aware as an actor of my physicality no matter how far into character I allow myself to go.

This rhythm of the motions I discovered through my musical response is the difference between the expression of anger, annoyance, and flirtation. Since it was brought to my attention that I tend to only manipulate the voice for characters, it has been my mission to see how I can use my body language more. The ankle twirl was used as one aspect to define my spectrum of physical flirting. As a result, I used other dainty areas of the body to help communicate some of the same flirty ideas. The timing of this delicate action was everything. These are the same types of choices that I developed through my response to music. I usually do not find value in the plastiques alone when it comes to character work; however, I do find it in music. It is a lovely discovery when I just allow impulses to happen, connecting them with learned tool such as the

plastiques instead of forcing it in a warm-up for the appeasement of others. I appreciate having certain special tools in my actor tool bag that, even if I do not use these special tools often, I know I have access to them and know them thoroughly for future use.

On this journey to make these characters three dimensional, it is extremely important to know them inside and out, but to know self even more. Each actor should know the physical choices available by way of their own body for their specific character. Beyond that, when using music as an option, the performers must also understand what activates them personally and as the character and allows the music to elevate them to the next level of understanding: more nuanced characters.

## ACTION FROM MUSIC

### THE SONG JOURNEY

Consider the process of finding music in terms of the character as another layer of research for the actor. Unlike play location or time period which are both traditionally explored to create characters, music to create choices is not *typically* something researched for their development. However, musical exploration is valuable; music can *also* inform actors about the character. Music is a strong reflection of the times and what is socially accepted or provocative. In my search to find the right song, I started with the 1960's Top 100 Billboard Charts™. The right song, as I like to define it, is a song that activates both the character and the actor. The right song is the foundation of the inspirational playlist. All other songs are only to further complement the influence of this song. As for *The Mountaintop* process, I selected "Fingertips" and nine other songs to explore Camae. I have only officially used music as it pertains to a whole show once; however, I am interested in exploring if the foundational song should always be a song set in the time of the play. Even if the foundational song is not

specifically from that time period, it is crucial to have the songs of the times to be a part of this process.

During the song selection, the actor must ponder and articulate why a song works for that character or why a song does not work for that character. Ultimately, this selection process is leading back to text and character analysis in order to support all physical decisions. These specific physical choices will be explicated later based on each song of my Camae playlist. My development of character through music is its own process, but a very useful one.

Now, the selection of the "right" song can become a trap that eats up time for an actor; however, this is the same time that an actor potentially wastes receiving the same physicality notes from the director. Notes, that actors begin to overthink. This nuanced musical exploration could alleviate that discrepancy all together by inspiring a plethora of acting choices for the actor allowing them a list of options. This musical exploration gets the actor thinking about their character in a different way, just as the type of music that people listen to says a lot about them. This way of working may lead the actor to make clichè choices at first, but allows for a deeper understanding of the character as the research is happening. For instance, this gives permission to really allow impulses to guide the physical action. Performers tend to end gain, and attempt to skip over process. However, if a song simply makes you

head nod, there is no need for it to be some dynamic action it just needs to be able to evolve into a nervous tick or other subtle physical choice. The problem is never that an actor starts from a cliché place; the problem comes in if the character development stops there. For instance, people that listen to gospel songs are usually associated with spiritual or religious views. If a script even mentions the character's spirituality, it may be good to start with gospel songs of the time period. In this example, let's say the song of choice is an old Baptist hand clapping, toe tapping song like "The Blood Still Works" by Malcolm Williams and The Great Faith Choir. With this song, the rhythm is so strong that it eventually seeps into the subconscious and can start to create a natural tick for the character.

This is the same way that I used *The Mountaintop* script when it came to Camae. For Camae, I found some of the same themes and issues mentioned in the script and connected them to themes and issues of the songs. Every genre or song of a specific time period is not appropriate for every character. However, all it takes is one song that may connect the actor to the next song, the next one could be perfect. This is not a foolproof plan, but what it does guarantee is that the actor is forced to engage with the character on a deeper level because each song requires justification.

## CHOOSING "FINGERTIPS"

I used "Fingertips" for physical character choices because it has a level of playfulness in it, but also in the 1960's as a black performer it just means a lot that Stevie Wonder was able to experience some of these opportunities. This song reflects and encompasses major ideas that Camae seems to reflect. For instance, little Stevie Wonder adds an element of playfulness to the song when he jumps back on stage and plays "Mary Had a Little Lamb" in the middle of the song. It was spontaneous in the same way that Camae has a lot of fun, random elements that seem to arise in this scene that the audience wouldn't assume.

Within this exploration, I am suggesting that the character and the actor, both need to have their musical needs satisfied. This is not to say that it has to be the actor's favorite song, but it needs be something that the actor can listen to and attempt to absorb for the improvement of the character. Within my playlist, not only did I have "Fingertips," but I had nine other songs which prepared me for the whole show experience. I am not, nor will all of me ever be the same as all of Camae; however, I used my Camae playlist to transcend my body beyond my default self. I would say that "Fingertips" was my foundational song, but these other songs also helped to develop my character.

Song Number One

The first song in my playlist was a fun twerk song in order to get out of my head and body from my day. Twerking, as defined by Webster's dictionary, is a sexually suggestive dance characterized by rapid, repeated hip thrusts and shaking of the buttocks especially while squatting (Webster). Twerking is seen as a risqué type of movement, yet there is something very freeing about the dance. This freedom allows me to be open and receptive to the actions happening onstage through my scene partner. In theatre, this is called listening and responding. For the average person listening is restricted to just the ears. Yet, it stretches beyond the limitation of the ears in the performance world. Listening becomes a full body experience in a show, but the actor must be sensitized and hyper aware in order to respond. Full body listening includes the actual words, the inflection of the words, body language, spacial relations and a host of other physical/ visual elements.

However, because of the negative associations of twerking, there is something almost dangerous when I talk about getting caught doing this dance. I was sharing a dressing room with the actor Xavier Harris, who played Dr.King, and there is a level of respect that I would like to keep between this ensemble considering this is a two person show. Additionally, one of my students from the acting class I was teaching was working in the dressing

room as part of her school requirements. I made it my business to get this dance in before Xavier, or anyone else for that matter, got there. This is to ensure the level of professionalism that I strive for in the rehearsal process. The problem is not the dance itself as much as it is with how others perceive it. There is a thin line between reclaiming my process and respecting myself and others in their processes.

For me, twerking can be a vulnerable state, but also very liberating. This sense of freedom for any process is important when it comes to the development of any character. It is interesting how freeing the dance is for me physically and yet I am still restricted within it because of the perception of others. I wonder if Camae experienced this same restriction as a black woman who was mentally free but had restrictions when talking to people outside of her race, the same restriction because of others? Even if twerking specifically is not for an actor, in order to allow vulnerability, every actor should find what works for them to create an uninhibited state.

The song of choice was "Booty Hopscotch" by Kstylis. The lyrics of this song hold no value for me personally, but the energy of the song is evident in the rhythm. This song is the beginning of the process for me. It is physically and symbolically shaking off of the stressors of the day. It is important to be aware that the things that



stress me out are not the same as Camae's stressors. To keep my personal physical and emotional stress with me and then take on Camae's struggles could be a mental overload. Therefore, I must rid myself of anything that could potentially block or hinder Camae from using my body as a vessel.

Twerking is also befitting as a way to approach character considering Camae's nighttime employment. Aside from her professional duties of being a maid, the script alludes to Camae also being a woman of the night. Camae alludes to her occupation in the last monologue "sacrificed my flesh so that others might feel whole again. What else was a poor black woman, the mule of the world here for" (Hall 36)? Therefore, activating the risque parts of the body brought awareness and attention to that and how to use them later. This risque use of the body continued through the playlist, but was also explored with an older sound in songs from the 1960's.

#### PUSH DA BUTTON

Push Da Button was taken from the Broadway hit, *The Color Purple*. This song breaks all of the rules! This character, a woman, Shug Avery was singing about a topic that was usually never introduced by women. According to the Top 100 Billboard™ songs, the first few years of the 1960's still sounded very much like the 1950's. Therefore, Camae

was bound to have been familiar with the current and older sounds of the time. Therefore, even though this musical was written years after the 1960's the research done for the shows still supports the 1950's/1960's sound. This song is literally about sex but based on the social norms of the times that topic is almost taboo. I truly believe that based on Camae's rebel spirit throughout the play that a juke joint, hole-in-the-wall with illegal moonshine would not be too far fetched. While exploring character through music, I began to think of how I can find sexy music of that time. The way society thinks of "sexy" now as opposed to what was sexy and socially acceptable then has changed drastically when it comes to how open and accessible it is now. When I originally started in this role, I was getting frustrated because I couldn't find anything. Eventually, I started trying to approach this character from a more creative standpoint. I searched through Broadway musicals set in the same time period or earlier. One might say that these songs would not be the same because these musicals were written after the actual time. However, whether the songs were around during this time with the explicit lyrics or not, the idea of the music and the use of the music is exactly like what other songs outside of music sounds like for that time. In spite of the fact that *The Color Purple the Musical* was produced in the early 2000s, the musical was centered on the sounds of the 1940's and 1950's.

Although this was not the time of *The Mountaintop* anything preceding the 1960's time period is fair game considering they all influenced the next generation.

4 A.M.

Next, I used "4 A.M." by Melanie Fiona to tap into my emotions. This song is about a woman that is hurt by a man that is cheating on her. It is 4 a.m. in the morning, and he is still not home; she suspects that her lover is cheating in a nightclub. At the top of the song, there is a steady down beat that reminds me of a clock. Tick... tock... tick... tock is the sound often associated with the audible observation of time. When I hear the "tick," I equate it with the idea that time is on my side. It is aspirational because of the lift in pitch due to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) [I] sound in "tick." Yet, it is directly followed by the lower sound of "tock" reminding us of the annoyance of time. However, can you imagine if the clock cycle was comprised of only "tocks?" This would be a steady stream of downward energy created by the IPA [a] sound in "tock." I get the same feeling of downward energy at the top of the song "4 A.M."

This dragging energy is the first major sound that the listener hears in this song. This down beat is setting the tone for the rest of the song. This beat happens a millisecond before Fiona starts with the first words. The

"tock" in the song is as persistent and depressing as the clock on the wall. Within the song, there were a few elements that appealed to me to add this song to my Camae playlist. The depressing pressure of time was one of those reasons. I am drawing parallels to the steady drum of this song because of the sound it produces and the feeling it evokes. This rhythm throughout the song, just like the race of time, underscores all of Camae's tasks in room 306 and in my life. I do not like to feel too much pressure on me in my regular life. I work well under a decent amount of pressure because it helps me to produce my best work, but when I feel like I am racing the clock envisioning the "ticks" of the clock can send me to a highly emotional place.

This song allows me to access a vulnerable place. This is an emotionally fueling song for me, the actor. This song, in the past, could very often make me cry. It was not emotional because I have ever experienced a lover cheating on me, but because Fionna effectively communicates this hurt with the ambiance and her voice. I also chose this song because of the emotion Fionna added to the song vocally. In my voice class, we talk about slack vocal folds. This is where the speaker is allowing more air than normal to escape causing the vocal folds to vibrate in an unnatural way causing the voice to produce a raspy sound.

In this case, Fionna manipulated her voice to sound sadder and less sexy.

The goal was not to cry from this song or in the show. This process has nothing to do with emoting, but everything to do with allowance. I want to allow this character to use my physical body as a vessel to tell her story, unfortunately, her story is not all happy. This vulnerability sensitizes me, the actor, to be open and receptive to all parts of this character; I should be open to the beautiful and the ugly parts of Camae. Camae according to Dr. King is physically pretty. He tells her multiple times throughout the play. " You sho'll is pretty, Camae" She responds "that bout' the third time you done told me that"(Hall 14). Beyond her physical beauty, her fun, flirtatious personality tends to lighten situations that could be heavy considering the real threats and constant fear Dr. King lives in. I consider this to be a beautiful gift. Something that could be considered ugly about Camae is her potty mouth or actions that she admitted to doing while she was alive. Therefore, without this activation, I could not be as receptive to her emotional journey and be able to allow Camae access. The activation is for me the actor, but everything about the song should be crafted towards my personal version of Camae. The same play is performed a hundred times, but each performance

must stand the test of time because it is always the individual actor's particular take on the said character.

While working with songs like "4 A.M.," at first, I found the lyrics to be a hindrance. I could not get out of the fact that she was singing of something that Camae does not experience in the actual script. In the song, the artist is singing about a man cheating on her and is still out at 4 am as she waits at home. However, when I listened beyond just the lyrics, the emotion is there regardless of the situation. Fionna is experiencing what Camae is experiencing; hurt. Aside from that, this song provoked thought about if Camae had ever been cheated on, and her relationship status before she died. I have a tendency to make everything as perfect as possible in my character analysis. However, if theatre is supposed to reflect real life everything is not perfect for anyone and everyone does not get a "happily ever after." As I approached this song, I wondered what it was like for Camae to try to keep a man and be a lady of the night? Eventually, this job would have to stop or any relationship would end.

Within the text, Camae does not seem to be a very emotional person so when she does completely open up at the end, it is something worth noting. In the beginning, Camae alludes to being raped by her uncle, yet brushes it off as though it was unimportant conversation. Rape is such a touchy subject to discuss, but I think it is even harder

for the people that have had to endure it. In the middle of a compliment by Dr. King commenting on her beauty, Camae responds "I know. Even my uncle couldn't help himself. You have fun tonight?" (Hall 9). She then continues with normal conversation never acknowledging what she commented on; her statement was matter of fact. The process of that action, of being taken advantage of could traumatize a person, but in the action be overwhelmingly vulnerable unless they put up a defense mechanism. Never again would Camae want to feel that exposed so she learns to joke and make light of the situation. Yet by the time we get to the end of the show she is emotional; and it's because she is broken.

4 A.M. did not present any specific actions like "Fingertips" but it assisted in the physicality and downward pull on energy for the end of the show. This song was befitting because they both experienced hurt and a form a brokenness. Fionna is broken hearted and Camae is broken, physically and emotionally.

#### DANCING IN THE STREET

The book *Ready for a Brand New Beat* explores the power of the song "Dancing in the Street" by Martha Reeves and The Vandellas and its many uses in the 1960's. Although this song started out simply as a fun dance song of the time, it became the song of political movements across the United States, challenging many ideas. Before I knew the actual

history of the song, I selected it for my playlist because it reminded me of Camae. Camae is a bright woman who makes a lot of bold points, but the comedic elements of her lines seem to calm down her radical nature. Camae does not prescribe to grammatically correct verbal communication, but she clarifies the situation before one assumes she cannot speak or lacks an extensive vocabulary. Camae challenges Dr. King asking him "How are my oratorical skills" "See youen think I knew them kind of words"(Hall 19). Camae is the human form of "Dancing in the Street." She is a radical, but in the most beautiful sense of the word because it is hidden. The hard pills that she is dishing out are easier to swallow because they taste like sugar.

During my M.F.A. performance training a professor once said that "the only way to make a statement is to affect the daily." This song, from its start, evokes a sense of fun. However, I think this song is a good example of the previous statement. If people are dancing in the streets for a cause and they end up blocking the roads, then to the naked eye it just looks as though people are having fun. Yet, it forces bystanders to take in the cause because it is affecting their everyday life. For Camae, the comedy is her "dancing" but her words are her "in the street" moment. An example is when Camae is on the bed impersonating Dr. King. Dr. King is a very well known figure and people tend



to have their thoughts and expectations about who he is in the world. However, when Camae is standing on the bed saying "F\*\*\* the White man" it seems like a joke by way of her presentation, but after saying it so many times it eventually forces people to hear her (Hall 18).

When I hear "Dancing in the Street," my response to it is not like some of the other physical responses I had to other songs. The response to this song was not as formulated or prescriptive. The other songs had very distinct imagery that came to mind. The imagery of these other songs influenced clear physical motions that were similar whenever I was physically responding to those songs. "Dancing in the Street," however, was not so strict when it came to my physical response. The response was like a dance party. The best way to describe my movement is through the physical movement vocabulary offered by Rudolf Laban, a famous dance and movement specialist. Among other contributions, Laban is widely known for his movement analysis. He offered a codified method of communicating movement through movement notation and effort. Although the notations are not widely taught anymore, his movement efforts have been adopted into theatrical language and are now widely discussed in theatre programs all across the country and beyond. The systematized movement language creates the effort actions: wring, glide, punch, float, press, flick, dab, and slash. Each one of the efforts are

comprised of the following components in order to identify one from the other: focus, indirect or direct; weight, strong or light; speed, quick or sustained.

In the dance, there was always a sense of freedom. Nothing was ever direct in the use of the body, especially when it came to my arms. They had no specific path of motion that they were expected to follow. My body was usually light in weight and quick in speed and exuding freedom. There were no movement restrictions to this dance. I could find all types of movements with this song without battling my impulses. Sometimes I had to make myself explore a different way of movement to a song (and usually still ended up naturally falling into my initial impulse). I thought it would be beneficial to explore a spectrum of movement so I would make myself inhibit my initial response. This inhibition however, did not work for songs like "Fingertips" no matter what, I ended up back to the plastique circular motions.

In my journal, I have two drastically different responses on two days that just happened to affect me differently for the run of the rehearsal. In one instance, I did a dance that is associated with the title "The Jerk" (old school). This dance starts as a slow proximal undulation and extends through the arms. The arms simultaneously alternate up and down as a result of the

core's initial energy. With the efforts in mind, I would say that the core was doing a non traditional "press." When I think of press, I have very specific imagery and the exertion of energy. It is easier to imagine "press" when it follows the quotidian way of pressing something. However, I think within this undulation based on the qualifiers, I see it as a press. The motion starts with the chest protruding and the shoulder blades attempting to clinch together. This motion is ,in Laban terms, sustained, direct, and heavy, which are all the elements of press action.

However, the arms are not pressing in this dance move in the same way the core is. "The Jerk" is interesting in that the distal and the proximal body parts are not doing the same efforts. The arms tend to be a lot quicker in action and is then transferred into a punch. The speed is the element that makes a punch differ from press. The chest ends in a punch to articulate the end of each segment of the dance move, but the undulation within itself is press. The arms are a response to the chest articulation. The chest changes the slow steady rhythm and stops abruptly causing the arms to be affected.

Another response that I had to this song was the mashed potato dance from the 1960's. During my graduate period movement class, we were introduced to this dance. This class focused on studying physical movement within a

specific time period selected prior to the semester. This was extremely beneficial because it was set for the 1960's based on the season's plays at the university. In this class, I was scared at one point that my work and feedback from my professor would not work in tandem with the director's vision so I tried to separate the two. However, I believe that some of the dances from class seeped into my subconscious and reappeared through my exploration of music in the rehearsal hall. The class served me as Camae without any conflict views.

#### FOCUS AND TRUST IN ME

"Focus" by the artist, H.E.R., and "Trust in Me" by Etta James were selected because of the atmosphere they set with the sound, but also the lyrics. Normally, I do not pick songs based off of lyrics because they can become a trap. One of the limitations of the lyrics is that it's hard to use the song as a whole for motivation. It's easy to drown out all of the other elements of the song and never be inspired by the intricacies of the song as a whole. However, these songs helped me to simplify and remember my smaller objectives of the scene. I can always remember my super objective, the main goal my character is trying to pursue, but all of the smaller objectives and mini goals are harder for me to remember. However, I used the themes

of these songs as returning points to refocus why Camae is there in room 306.

The song and the theme of "Focus" was simple to remember. The chorus is literally saying to "focus on me." At the top of the song, there is a magical sound that is created with the harp. The imagery that came to me is like a fairy godmother appearing, which is appropriate considering Camae is an angel. As the lyrics relate to Camae, before she can complete her mission, the first step is to simply get Dr. King to focus on her. She cannot begin to prepare him for a smooth transition home until there is open communication and she gains his trust. Camae will never achieve that until she has his focus. The harp sound underscores the song in its entirety with a quick steady rhythm. Although this sound fades to the background, if I zone out from the rest of the song, it tends to become mesmerizing and a bit hypnotic. Hypnotic being the induction of a state of consciousness in which a person apparently loses the power of voluntary action and is highly responsive to suggestion or direction. The idea of getting Dr. King to focus on Camae and be slightly hypnotized by her charm and flirtation allows Camae to guide a lot of the energy in the room.

The most important part of this song is the chorus, to help me remember smaller objectives, and the atmosphere.

This is the feeling I embodied at the top of the show, a cool, calm, and collected overtone. Once the door opens, the cool vibes begin. This is activated with the line "Well, I been called quickie Camae befo'" (Hall 6). This is the first line that Camae and Dr. King have with direct contact as opposed to the barrier, the door, between them. At this time, Dr. King was one of the most famous African Americans in the country. Camae could have gotten too excited to meet Dr. King and been star struck, yet she was able to remain focused on her mission. Just prior to this moment Dr. King was on the phone ordering his coffee and the waiter asked for his autograph. Meeting Dr. King was an honor and a huge deal for people in that time, and if he was still around it would have been just as much of an honor too.

As for "Trust in Me," I used this song the story's angelic reveal. Immediately prior to this moment, Dr. King had a panic attack and to calm him, Camae called him Michael. Michael was Dr. King's "Christian" name (Hall 23). In order to gain Dr. King's trust back, Camae lights the cigarette with her mouth. By doing this she reveals her secret of being an angel and her higher purpose. She needed him first to trust that she was an angel, since she needed his trust to prepare him for the other side. Although the lyrics of the song were meant one way, almost all were easy to translate into Camae's mission.

Trust in me in all you do  
Have the faith I have in you  
Love will see us through  
If only you trust in me  
Come to me when things go wrong  
Cling to me and I'll be strong  
We can get along...  
Stand beside me all the while  
Face the future with a smile  
Trust in me and  
I'll be worthy of you (Etta James)

I previously mentioned the study that discusses how well the human mind can recall music. By revisiting this song, it is easy to recall Camae's purpose. "Trust in Me in all you do" is the first line of the song. In terms of Camae, she is saying from the moment of revelation forward that Dr. King can trust her; /she I will get you to the other side. Next line of the song is "have the faith I have in you." Camae is encouraging Dr. King to have the same amount of faith in himself as she and his supporters do. She is confirming that he can trust the foundation that he has already laid. The third and fourth lines confirm that "love will see us through, if only you trust in me." Camae needs Dr. King in order to gain her own wings. The love he has for others will guide them both to the other side. However, he must have trust in her.

As the song continues, it says "come to me when things go wrong, cling to me and I'll be strong, we can get along, if only you trust in me." Camae is telling Dr. King to come to her for support. He literally "clings" to Camae after the pillow fight when he realizes that it really is

time to go home to the other side. The parentheticals says that "King's eyes well with tears and the strong grown man dissolves into the child no one ever saw. He slides down on top of her crying. Crying his heart out. Sobbing. And Camae holds him. And rubs his back as if he were a child"(Hall 35). The mission is almost complete. He is trusting her more and more. In the last section, the song says "stand beside me all the while, face the future with a smile, trust in me and I'll be worthy of you." She will be beside him and will show him the future. Initially she was reluctant about showing Dr. King the future. Dr. King requests to see the future saying "Let me see it," Camae responds I don't know if you can handle it, it might break your heart." Eventually she gives in, "I'll let you see, but when you're called you'll have to come. I'ma have to take you home tomorrow"(Hall 38). When I thought about the line of facing the future with the smile it reinforced my decision to select this song for the playlist. Life moves on after Dr. King, but it moves in a way that it does post Dr.King because of him. This is something Dr. King should smile about. Although he is about to face death soon, his people are about to experience a little more of life soon. After all that they have been through in the room together, Camae finally releases all of her monologue. She is finally worthy of being in the presence of Dr. King. I, LaShondra,



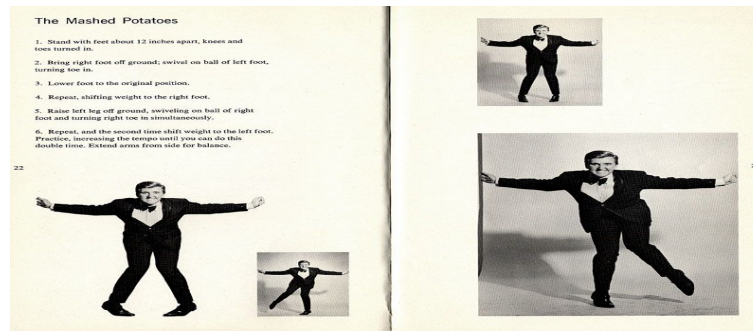
was already a fan of this song through it's used in the film *Cadillac Records*, but it was perfect for Camae.

Aside from the lyrics, "Trust in Me" evokes slow dancing imagery. There is something about slow dancing that has allowed it to stand the test of time all these years. Along with this song, I want to recreate the themes of slow dancing. In the same way, this type of dance has certain themes associated with it. I wanted to imaginatively create the same feeling with Camae and Dr. King. Slow dancing is very intimate. Intimate does not have to mean sexual as much as it means personal. In slow dancing, one achieves intimacy through closeness. I wanted to communicate a mental and spiritual closeness between Camae and Dr. King through her body even when she was not physically close to him. This was a wonderful acting challenge. One of the ways I did this was I matched the actor playing Dr. King's breath. In my Introduction to Communication through Acting class, the textbook talks about how we, as people, begin to communicate with each other, we mirror what the other person is doing. In this case, breathing together is a sense of connection that I can achieve while being on the other side of the room. The breath is very personal and changes in climatic moments. A person's breath is their life itself, the foundation of their existence. Allowing breath to be the connector I chose required intense full body listening.

## PRECIOUS LORD

"Precious Lord" was chosen because of the sentimental connection to Dr. King. This is Dr. King's favorite song, but was also supported by the text. Camae is an angel, an extension of God's own hand. Camae says "tomorrow when it's time you gone have to take my hand, I have to take you home tomorrow" (Hall 26). It was speculated amongst the people that Dr. King felt it in his spirit that he did not have much longer to live. It is argued that in his Mountaintop speech was he confessed that he was ready. "The real Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his Mountaintop speech said "I'm not fearing any man. I have seen the promised land" (King). I personally translated and interpreted this into "Lord when you are ready, I'm ready for you to take my hand." This song was a good connection to spirituality for both Camae and Dr. King. They both needed the Lord to take their hands. Camae had to gain her wings and she thought it was just about King, but this was her chance to get it right also. This song is representational of their spiritual journey and a mental and spiritual release into God's hands. After exploring all these songs, there were lots of physical actions and internal energies that started to arise.

## OBVIOUS VISUAL CHOICES



In my Period Movement class, we learned about the mashed potato dance and other dances of the 1960s. This is where the person executing the dance rises to the balls of their feet while simultaneously turning the toes inward and outward raising alternating legs. As the leg rises it goes outward and is bent at the knee. When the leg is raised it is slightly bent at the knee and is alternated in between two feet twist. To be clear there was never a good opportunity to do the full blown mash potato, not that I have discovered through the first run, but there were motions that were inspired by it. I used this motion the most when Dr. King was on the phone with God. How many times I used it per show varied, but it was usually seen at least once. I used this motion in response to Camae being right. It was my full body expression for "I told you so" or "that's what you get"/ "well, you had it coming." The night the University of Louisville recorded the show this motion was in response to God not caring to hear the grand introduction of Dr. King's title but instead, corrects Dr.

King and calls him by his birth name. He corrected it and seemed to have been "knocked off of his high horse." During this section, I did the mash potato inspired motion. This was to communicate, "well you had that one coming, God is nobody to be played with." At that moment, it felt like the moment after a petty sibling argument when mom finally takes your side. This action was a slight taunt to Dr. King.

In the last chapter, I talked about the walk being an important element of transformation. I also touched on how it is good to understand personal habits in order to utilize them or actively remember not to use them for the character. As I look back over my walk in *The Mountaintop*, one thing that I question is once I use the music from the time period how do I continue to bring awareness to the physical exploration for Camae's age? For *The Mountaintop*, I channeled the twist, a dance introduced from my 1960's period movement class, in Camae's walk as a way to bring attention to the time period and the way they navigated the space then. However, I wonder by using the stiffer "twist" arm articulation if I ever physically made her older than what I should have been communicating.

A good reference video for the twist dance is Chubby Checker on YouTube. In this dance, his lower half is quite loose and especially looser and more fluid than times prior

to this era. Yet, his arms seem to still have a stiffness. They swing at the shoulder connection, but they are bent at the elbow and tend to stay that way. The elbow does not experience the same quality of flow as the shoulders do. This is not to say that his arms do not swing at elbows, but I am noting that the more Chubby Checker got into the dance by going lower to the ground the less freedom found in the arms.

In the show, I was very aware of the switch in my natural walk. It has been brought to my attention in class and mentioned in the previous chapter. This is one of my personal habits that I found to be very helpful when it came to creating Camae. This natural sashay of mine was useful for the flirtatiousness of Camae, but it did not mean that I should not explore other options before I decided on this one. Nor, did it mean that even if that was the foundational walk that it could not stand to be adjusted. After the exploratory phase, I started experimenting with the arms. I journaled about switching so hard one time that I said that it made my body feel like I had done the twist too long. This is where the snowball effect of the twist inspired arms came into play.

Within this exploration, the actor's journey is the only one that matters when it comes to music selection. The music is there for them to engage physically with the

character on a deeper and more creative level. The playlists are there only for the actor. It is a sacred moment that the actor *can* invite other people into, but is not required. Now, this should all fall under the director's vision, but only for the play in its entirety when it comes to the show as a whole. However, even the director is not granted any special privileges of needing to know the songs. Only if a particular approach is not working, they encourage the actor to keep exploring songs or to find different use of the songs already selected.

Throughout the process, the more I narrowed down songs the more I had to think about Camae and the justification of choices. I found the best choices were the songs that seeped into my subconscious. I had listen to the songs and analyzed them then they produce instinctual justified choices. The more I engaged with text and the songs the more frequently the choices came naturally. Although not all of my physical choices from the dance were used during the performance, I liked having the option to make different choices in the rehearsal as opposed to my habitual awkward response of not knowing what to do with my physical body.

Each song of my Camae music playlist was selected for a specific reason. They all hold their own weight for me as the actor, or for Camae. All the songs were needed and

crafted to inspire nuanced choices but not each one songs had the same level of engagement. That may even be noticed in the analysis with each song. Every song served its purpose, but should not be compared. They all activated something different, but some were guaranteed personal, quick, mental /physical warm-ups whereas others were deeply rooted in just character.

## RHYTHM AND LANGUAGE

To perceive the rhythm of a character means to understand the role. To find the rhythm of the drama is to find the key to its presentation - Yevgeny Vakhtangov (qtd. Morris 55).

## HISTORY OF RHYTHM AND LANGUAGE

As I embarked on my graduate journey at the University of Louisville, I thought I knew about script analysis and all of the many components. I knew about the objectives and operative words; how to apply tactics and mark beat shifts; all about script notations and yet, there was more to learn. My undergraduate program laid the foundation of script analysis skills, but my M.F.A. program offered the tools to help me continue to build my craft, a life skill. In this program, I was introduced to the importance of sounds and sound patterns. My professors made me realize that even the smaller elements of the words can change the value of the word and inspire new choices.

One aspect that I appreciate about this department is that my classes are all intertwined spontaneously when it comes to script analysis. It is beneficial that the tools I am learning in voice and movement classes work in harmony.



These classes furthered my understanding of acting and fueled me in performance and theory-based classes. In my voice class, attention to text was introduced through Cicely Berry. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre Voice and Speech Coach, Berry, emphasizes the power of theatre considering the text. She suggests text to be the foundation that propels the actors to make solid choices based on the words and sounds provided. This awareness enhanced my speaking points in my performance theory class when introduced to J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* because I understood the power of words performatively first.

Before this program, I never considered how the smaller elements of each word as it connected to the larger picture. For example, meter in rhythm beyond iambic pentameter in classical texts or monosyllabic lines were never brought to my attention prior to this program. Iambic pentameter is a rhythmic flow usually associated with William Shakespeare where the meter is in a "short- long" rhythmic phrase. The words in the long, stressed position usually lend themselves not only to flow, but also to communicate the most important ideas. I bring this up to say that this is identifiable on the page, there is a visual rhythm laid out in the same way that there is a rhythm in the spoken word for Camae. After looking at the

visual patterns, the actor can begin to reflect these visual elements verbally.

Also, this idea of rhythm dates back to Ancient Greece (Morris 13). Iambic pentameter is one of many meters used and "links between qualities of rhythm and descriptions of mood and character can be found within the studies of music, poetry, and dance...different Greek meters were associated with certain characteristics and moods communicated through the rhythms" (Morris 13). These meters include Trochee, long-short; Dactyl, long-long-short; Anapaest, short-short-long etc. In my acting class, we talk about how to activate the emotions through the vowel. As for the monosyllabic lines, they are not simply associated with classical text but are used throughout literature, meaning each word in the line is only one syllable. Camae employs monosyllabic lines throughout *The Mountaintop* script. It was interesting how many lines were monosyllabic, but it was a nice challenge to see how they should be activated and manipulated for effective communication.

"What, you thank us po' folk can't talk? You thank we dumb?" (Hall 19). This is a monosyllabic line that ends in a question mark. This line could be stated as a genuine question, but the rhythm of this line also allows the actor to activate this in a more accusatory manner. The natural choppy feeling of this line coupled with the slight pauses

can be a choice and can communicate a threatening tone. Another choice is syncopation and jumping right on Dr. Kings lines; this could communicate being defensive.

As actors, the more we understand human behavior and communication the easier our job becomes through clear communication. To better understand the ideas of rhythm and language, I used a book called *Language in Time: The Rhythm and Tempo of Spoken Interaction* by Auer. In this book, the author goes into detailed analysis of speech patterns and how to communicate effectively based on the rhythms that are produced. Auer introduces the difference between conversational tones/rhythms and presentational tones/rhythms. This book examines sociolinguistics with an in-depth analysis of language. Sociolinguistics according to Webster is the following:

study of human speech including the units, nature, structure, and modification of language in relation to social factors, including differences of regional, class, and occupational dialects, and gender differences. (Webster)

Although I am not married to Auer's specific language, the concepts that are introduced gave me concrete structure to ground my ideas of *The Mountaintop's* language. This helped me to further investigate King's and Camae's social similarities and differences in order to better understand how they operate within the context of turn-taking.

Since sociolinguistics examines language from different ethnicities, social classes, and gender, the characters in the show have a unique relationship to all three qualifiers that in turn creates drastically different characters. Based on the perception of Dr. King, he was the representation for the culmination of all three aforementioned factors. Dr. King had an image to uphold based on his ethnicity, aspiring social class, and gender. All of these factors imbued how his middle-aged black male body operated in the 1960s. In order to advance in the world, even a small step forward at that time, King understood that language in his position could not be a barrier, his skin and intelligence were enough. Dr. King is a very articulate man, but *The Mountaintop* was also written in a personable manner. Katori Hall is a skilled playwright. She captured the iconic and the human side of Dr. King. Based on the language in real life and in the script, Dr. King is highly poetical in his big speeches.

Well nobody said it was gonna to be easy. Nobody said it would happen in an instant. Everybody said we'd never get there. But then again nobody thought we'd make it this far. can I get an amen? I said can I get an amen! You have wandered the desert the flaming sands burning your feet. But you are standing at the edge of Canaan the mountaintop made of the dreams of men and women who have paid the ultimate price with their lives. Children of the Nile, you must rise, as you can no longer walk weary through this world with willow backs. Your time is now I tell you NOW! The baton may have been dropped. But anyone can pick it back up. I don't know where in the race we are, but pick up the baton and pass, pass, pass it along this futon is no longer the burden my image can bear. (Hall 42)

As a performer primarily dealing with text in most processes, I found this book to be informative. It offered the vocabulary to better shape the general ideas I had of Dr. King's and Camae's uses of language into something more grounded. Auer helped me to contextualize my linguistic discoveries from the script, especially as it related to text and rhythm:

Coordinated turn-taking is surely one of the phenomena of human interaction most intimately linked to rhythm. It seems natural that the question of 'when' to be calm and ratified speaker is tied to the question of appropriate timing for a next speaker's utterance. When the instruments of rhythmic analysis are applied to turn transitions in English conversation, a large number of cases are found in which an isochronous sequence spans the floor switch. That is, current speaker establishes a clear rhythmic pattern just prior to a transition... Transitions of this sort we have called rhythmically integrated. When they occur, interaction is to all appearances proceeding as usual there is no sign of anything amiss in the flow of appearances proceeding as usual; There is no sign anything amiss in the flow a conversation. Unproblematic turn taking therefore is not simply a matter of absence of overlapped talk and or gaps but rather depends on a sense of rhythmicity which makes it possible to predict when the first stressed syllable of a next speaker's turn is due (Auer 202).

In short, this portion of sociolinguistic theory is spot on when it talks about turn taking and finding the rhythm. It is hard to articulate when it is on(which is why receiving notes on pacing were hard), but everyone can tell when it's off. This is something that I named in my journal as "finding our groove." When Xavier Harris, my acting partner and I found the rhythmic groove, we did not receive many

notes on rhythm. Part of our process with the director was that he would make us rate the run before offering any feedback, one way or the other. I must say once again, my acting partner and I couldn't always communicate how to fix the rhythmic issues but we could definitely feel it in our runs and would be forced to honestly grade ourselves accordingly.

Based on my classes and Auer's book on language, I have concluded there are at least two ways actors need to understand rhythm as it relates to the script; the rhythm/musicality of the words, and the way they link, and the way which our vocal choice affects it. Varied elements of words based on their sounds tend to evoke different feeling and are associated with certain connotations.

Previously, I mentioned the sounds in the description of "4 A.M." about the aspirational sound of the "tick" and the depressing sound of the "tock" as being drastically different just based on the sound associations subconsciously. I would argue that this idea should not be too far-fetched for lay minds to understand because readers also have certain sounds associated with certain emotions. However, the rhythm that I am speaking of is not limited to audible rhythm. This attention to rhythm also extends itself to the visual rhythm on the page. In the same way, I introduced full body listening as discussed by Alan Alda. The visual rhythm is also telling of the audible rhythm and

how things appear on the page. One thing that caught my attention in the first reading of *The Mountaintop* was the spoken word piece at the end of the first show. At first glance, I knew that it was different from the rest of the script just based on the lay out of the page. The normal visual rhythm of the written language is from half inch margin to half inch margin on the opposite side. However, "Isochronous beats, syncopated/early beats and silence /late beats as described may be thought of as a set of rhythmic tools with which speakers configure their speech in time"(Auer 56). These are some of the official words for elements that help actor's craft communication, or miscommunication because it happens at the wrong time. In performance timing is everything. Performers have two things that they should always keep in mind: they need their actor goals and understanding and the character's goals. In general, the actor has two hours or less to communicate an entire plot effectively. If the show takes too long the actor potentially loses an actor goal of keeping the audience's attention; timing plays a huge role. If the timing and pacing is not right, the actor's goal is not complete.

#### THE MOUNTAINTOP AND THE USE OF LANGUAGE

Good sources of motivation to continue in this way of working was my director, Johnny L. Jones constantly giving

the note of pacing and rhythm and the reading *Rhythm in Acting and Performance Embodied Approaches and Understanding*. As I look back to my journal of rehearsal notes and thesis ideas, I noticed that almost every day I scribbled a note that Johnny made mention of the pacing and rhythm. He was obsessed! The rhythm of communication can make or break a show; he was striving for perfection. However, I was always confused about how to take these notes. I was perplexed by and challenged with understanding what was expected of me. Both Xavier and I were getting this same note continuously, and I was determined to investigate; yet, I never knew where to begin. This was not my first time getting this famous note from a director, but it was the first time I had gotten it so many times. Maybe I received it numerous times because it was a two-person show. There was no one else for me and my partner to depend on. All we had was each other and the rhythm that we created in order to communicate to each other and the audience. The rhythm was detrimental to the show. We had no gimmicks to hide behind. After some research on the subject, I realized I was not alone. I am able to clearly identify with Eilon Morris and his discussion about rhythm and what the directors want. Eilon Morris:

For seldom am I completely sure that I (or they) know precisely what they are referring to. Are they talking about the speed or the phrasing of my movement or voice? Am I being asked to make my work more structured and accentuated or more fluid, varied and dynamic? Or are they referring to any number of other



specific technical metaphorical or metaphysical meanings of rhythm, related to music, poetry, dance, nature, etc? (4)

Similarly, I journaled about some of these same questions. I found myself becoming lost, inquisitive, and at times, unfortunately even a bit defensive when I felt like I had finally "arrived." The process of finding the pacing, musicality, and rhythm was cyclical. I started with the question of rhythm, attempted to explore it, tried to understand it by finding the "correct" timing, end up with a stagnant performance because nothing is fresh, then received a note about rhythm. The cycle started again.

At one point in the process I admitted to not understanding what was expected of me regarding the pacing and rhythm. By this time, we were only a few weeks from the opening, and I still did not understand an essential part of the process. This was one of my lengthiest journal entries of the process. It was an amalgamation of all the questions and thoughts I have had over the years about director expectations of the actor's direction to carry out the note. Based on the notion that there is no *one* way, it is imperative for each director to name in the space what exactly *they* mean when *they* give a rhythm note. And to make sure that the actors have the same interpretation of rhythm used in this instance. In the same vein, it is equally important for me to name the method in which I used to interpret rhythm in my process of Camae.

I started with the investigation of the term as used by my director. Because I was working with a fairly new director, I deemed it important to get him to name exactly what he wanted out of us as the performers. When I started with questions I was trying to get him to unpack the idea of pacing and rhythm as he understood them in his directorial concept. I would ask questions like: when are the moments good with pacing as opposed to when it is not at its optimal level? How do you wish to see the rhythm of this scene evolve? Is rhythm and pacing always just associated with speed? Why do you say pacing or rhythm instead of go faster? These are some of the many questions that I asked in order to get to the bottom of this director's note. Once he began to explain it, I began to work even harder to understand and landed on music.

In the process, I journaled about an epiphany I had earlier in rehearsal that day. I wrote, "My director speaks music, why not meet him where our minds speak the same language." (Hood) I know what music has done for me and the role it plays in my life and I am being directed by a man who teaches and engages in hip hop theatre, and starts every class and grades every paper with music. Jones can thoroughly analyze black music down to a syllable being the act of resistance. "Some of the dopest songs that we have discussed in the span of time knowing each other have had beat drops in them. Most beat drops have a huge pay off

because of the pauses preceding it. The producers craft the pauses. This is what Johnny is asking of me! He is asking me to craft the pauses and the ones that aren't needed to take them out for the pause to be effective." (Hood)

Silences influence and affects rhythm just as much as sound.

### Script Analysis

In my second year, one of my professors told me. "Do not wait until the official process has started. Journal from the very beginning, that includes the initial read. Just jot down your first thoughts, whatever comes to mind." I am glad that I listened in the beginning, I was discouraged when I did not have a lot to write about. The only big thing that stood out to me was the language of the spoken word at the end of the play. This is the presentational form written for Camae to reveal the future to Dr. King. I thought this part stood out because it was so drastically different rhythmically from anything else that was introduced in the play. The visual rhythm is also different on the physical page that made me take note. The text for the spoken word is written as follows:

The Prince of Peace. Shot.  
His blood stains the concrete outside Room 306  
A worker wipes away the blood but not before  
Jesse baptized his hands on the balcony  
*The baton passes on*  
Memphis burning  
D.C. burning  
Cities burning  
Vietnam burning  
Coffins coming home

Another Kennedy killed  
*The baton passes on ... (Hall 40)*

Comparatively, I could tell that the rhythm was different. I could not wait to get to this part of the play to investigate why.

Although originally I realized the difference in grammar between Camae and Dr. King, it wasn't until text analysis and exploration, that I took note that it also played a major role in rhythm.

Camae tends to use Ebonics and shorten her words thus lending to a quicker rhythm juxtaposed with Dr. King who is seen as intellectual and uses the whole value of his words. This defines their speaking patterns as individuals, but also makes a clear transition for when they start to take on each other's language.

As I began to dissect the script, a consistent clipped speech happened on words ending in "ing." More specifically the "g" of "ing" is done away with for Camae. The way in which the words are written on the page already lends itself to a black southern dialect. This is important when it comes to capturing the Black Memphis Southern sound and Black vernacular. There are studies that argue that it was more heavily used in the southern regions. It is interesting to note however that both characters are equipped to speak in both ways. They effectively communicate with each other so there has to be a level of

understanding. As the play goes on they tend to adopt the other way of speaking at times. An example of this would be again, when Camae impersonates Dr. King. She uses vocabulary terms that are out of her norm (in the realm of the show) and more poetic, and descriptive when it came to communicating ideas in the way that Dr. King would. She uses words like "Paponderance"(Preponderance) for a change in her verbiage. Although, it is still written in her dialect, thus the misspelling, the word as it operates in the show is correct. Also, the poetic devices used are evident, such as the heightened language Camae implements. Referring to the white race as "brother" she states, "We touch our brother with the softest of hands, we greet our brother with the widest of smiles, we give our brother food when he is hungry. But it is hard to do this when he beats his fist upon our flesh"(Hall 17). Phrases like "softest hands" or "widest smiles" are heightened in a way that is particular to the Dr. King character. She also limits how many words have clipped endings in the monologue as a whole. However, after Camae's big monologue, Dr. King is in agreement, he shouts "Amen, F\*\*\* 'em!" (Hall 18). In this moment, Dr. King adopts two of Camae's habits, her use of profanity and the clipping of language. This is not to say that Dr. King says every word using every syllable, but the word "them" is not one of the textual habits created prior to this point in the play for him.

## KEEPING IT FRESH

After exploring the rhythm and "finding the groove" the next challenge became about keeping the run fresh. Part of the actor's job is to make it seem like this is their first time ever experiencing that specific moment. In that regard, rhythm is the hardest concept to grasp because it could influence a stiff, non-natural, turn-taking exchange if the actor is not aware. In this case, it is important to take tempo-rhythm, a term coined by Stanislavski, into consideration. Although there are many logistical interpretations of tempo-rhythm the themes and foundation remains the same.

Used on its own, tempo is most commonly associated (in Stanislavski's work) with terms such as speed, pace, and rate. These words deal with quantitative aspect of time, measurable in numbers and units... definitions of rhythm on the other hand, include terms such as pattern individual action, intensity, stress etc...the feeling of rhythm is not only the primitive ability to subordinate physical movement to a rhythmic count. The actor must subordinate his whole being, his whole organism to a given rhythm- the movement of his body of his mind and his feelings. The task of the school consists in training pupil in this sensitivity to rhythm and not in teaching him to move more rhythmically. (Morris 54)

Because rhythm can be so rigid and set so that if the actor is not careful, they can fall into a habitual way of responding, there is no longer a need to actively listening. The audience paid to see the actor experience the journey for the first time with the full range of emotions, to mark, or half way commit to this journey,

habitual response, is to cheat them. The goal is to always "live truthfully" in the realm of the play, the actor cannot do that if they are "phoning in the role" and spouting the text.

Because music activates this process in a more innovative way, even if I had to go back to the originally justified way of saying the line, I had fun exploring new ways of saying lines while still prescribing to the same steady internal beat. I like to think of this in terms of church. Almost everyone in my church has a good sense of rhythm in that they can catch the steady beat of the song; however, there are others that have to jazz everything with a syncopated rhythm. They are always exploring the other fun possibilities. Once they understood the foundational rhythm, they had the power to explore other options knowing that they could always return to the original. This is the same for Camae, the more I understand the solid, foundational internal rhythm, the more I understood everything else in the syncopation of what has already been established.

#### MUSIC FOR THE INTERNAL RHYTHM

Mel Gordon, in reference to Stanislavski's work, describes rhythm as being "primarily an internal phenomenon with the major differences between rhythm and tempo being that the latter derives from the outside environment" (Morris 55).

Using this tempo-rhythm guidance, I think it helps me to better articulate how I used music as it relates to script and the internalization of the character. Based on the script alone, I inferred that Camae was quick and light in speech. Although, she is not always grammatically correct, most times she was very concise; for instance, there are times where Camae does not complete the sentences grammatically, but she is still effectively communicating. Examples include lines like "What you miss the most she make?" or "What one thing we all got in common?" (Hall 18). Between the elimination of words and the consistent contractions she uses, it lends itself to be able to communicate quicker.

In my interpretation of the language, I had three reasons proving why my foundational song had to be quick. Camae clips the "g" of "ing" making the word come out faster rather than exerting extra energy to create that guttural sound of the "g." She was always on her toes with her responses and she was concise. Within the play, Camae rarely, if ever says any "g" from ing, words. Examples include but are not limited to: "gettin', lightnin', or cuttin'." She has a rebel spirit and makes a conscious effort not to conform to the way society says she should speak. By not prescribing to the societal rules, Camae exudes a sense of freedom. This free spirit tends to



permeate the internal rhythm and influences the way of navigating the space.

Based on the text, Camae makes the audience very aware that she could conform, however, she chooses not to. In the script, Dr.King is attempting to give a compliment, but ends up offending Camae by inferring the shock that she was able to articulate herself in the way that she did. Dr.King says "Not too many maids spouting off well-formed diatribe like that" (Hall 19). Camae does not even need a beat to process this idea of a "well-formed diatribe"; she is quick to process how he just offended her. In the midst of this, she "schools" Dr. King letting him know that she is no less just because she did not attain a higher education" Camae says" I don't need no Ph.d. to give you some knowledge, understand" (Hall 19). With moments like this scattered throughout the play and Camae never missing a beat, I concluded that she was quick. From then on, with my journey to find the "right song," I knew it had to be quick because it had to be a reflection of her.

Then, based on how she introduced familial sexual harassment or the delivery of her most radical speech being on the bed it seems that she can bring a sense of lightness to heavy situations. The song would have to do that too. The 1960's were heavy times so for blacks to create a sense of lightness would be a good reflection of the textual support. Once I understood that she was direct, quick,

light in her engagements then I realized the song had to do the same.

## CONCLUSION

My main idea here is to offer a new way of activation, this methodology an introduction for some and a reminder for others. I started in the introduction with the discussion of the decline of the American actor information. I am part of this "new generation" and performances have nothing to do with the lack of talent or being ruined by television. However, it has everything to do with being able to activate the body. I challenge both, directors and actors alike, to consider the music. Find creative ways to revive a piece that you have overdone, to activate a piece in the initial engagement, and continue exploration as you work from page-to-stage. This has been a rewarding process, but there is still so much more to explore.

After I closed my thesis show, I determined that this was going to be a good way of approaching character for me. This exploration further activates my normal ways of approaching character. This was important in order for me to discover new and exciting results. This was a great experience for me! The more I infused music in my process, the more connected I felt with my body. Throughout this thesis, the importance of self-learning has been crucial. I

hope that many more people can explore music throughout the entire character process, I offer my readers this tool. However, if music is not your thing, even after all of the scientific studies and theories, I urge you to find that activation. Those whole, nuanced characters are just beyond the next level of your imagination activation. Actors, do not be selfish, let those characters live.

I feel as though I allowed Camae to live, *The Mountaintop* was a great piece to explore because of the physical dimension of character. Camae is such a physical character that I could not afford to have any mental block hinder impulses for physical choices. The physicality has to support personality. Physical characters in my opinion use the body outside of the daily uses, these characters exert more energy. For instance, in the aforementioned sections, such as the speech on the bed, the spoken word piece at the end, or the pillow fight. These are all instances that challenge the normal physical navigation of space. However, how does this translate to other physical or even not-so physical characters?

#### BEYOND *THE MOUNTAINTOP*

At the end of the production process, I thought about a way in which I could explore this way of working with other people. I needed this exploration to extend beyond myself

and *The Mountaintop*. I needed to know that this way of working on character extended beyond me.

In order to confirm character development by way of music, I offered my methodology to other people around my department to explore when their original ways of working was not enough. I worked with my students to get into their bodies more as it related to full body listening and full body responding. I used it with my one-show cast, in order to help my cast of one to differentiate characters as he was to switch characters within the show. Lastly, an exploration of rhythm and music for the the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) Irene Ryan competition with my nominee, I, as her partner in order to stay engaged in the material.

With my students their experience with the theatre and comfortability ranges drastically across the board. As a result, some students were very awkward and uncomfortable in the space especially when it came to full body exercise. I wanted them to be able to use their entire body and feel comfortable doing it because it can exude confidence in whichever field they decide to go into. There is a certain physical element that people pick up on when it comes to communicating that extend beyond the verbal communication. Their exploration was approached from a more general lens. This exploration was not to create specific choices for a

character as much as it was to get actors comfortable in their bodies and naturally responsive to external stimuli. Their assignment was to select five simple tasks to complete while listening to a pair of drastically sounding songs. If they responded genuinely they did instinctually create some remnants of character choices.

Because this is an acting class through communication there is already an expectation that we should always create space. Creating the space ranges from the use of the physical space, how much space is used, topography and how actors engage with the things around. Through these presentations even my shyest, most awkward students were responsive to the exercise because they had something to activate them. I think because they had the agency of the song choice, when it came to responding to a random song they were already sensitized and ready to receive.

One of the most noticeable changes was with my student whom I will refer to as subject 1. Throughout the semester subject one never made a commitment to do anything with his full body. It was extremely difficult to get subject one to do full body warm-ups and to really "play to win" in the warm-up games. For instance, in my class, I introduced them to a game of "Go." "Go" is as a vocal, energy, and physical warm-up. The idea is that by the time we complete a good round of "Go," all three of those areas of warm-up would have been covered. However, the stipulation is that there

is a level of commitment that must go into this in order to do the body justice. Subject one never did, they went through the motions but nothing was ever full out. Subject one used what I call "penguin arms." Penguin arms are when your arms never actually span from the body more than elbow height automatically reducing the amount of energy one puts into the exercise. However, I was pleased to notice that the one time there was a drastic shift in how subject one navigated the space was with this musical exploration.

The next level of the project was that they had to add text to these presentations; these were limited to preselected poems. These poems had nothing to do with the actions or songs themselves, they were random. Yet, the rhythm of the text shifted based on the music. The music was the stimulant. Although this is not for specific character work, the idea of responding to music physically and even vocally is evident.

#### *BLACK AND BLUE BOYS BROKEN MEN*

In the fall, I directed a show *Black 'n Blue Boys/Broken Men (BBBM)*. *BBBM*, by Dael Orlandersmith, depicts the stories of five adult male figures. Orlandersmith investigates how the residual memories of sexual, mental, physical, and/ or emotional abuse left on these men affect the way they navigate the world. This was a one man show where subject number two embodies a myriad of characters.

The challenge about this show is that after he created so many characters, some of the physicality started to bleed into the next character. This is where the songs came into the process. After subject number two understood the script and objectives it was important to do some physical work to allow each character to live. The characters were strong, but could have been more distinct. In the actual show subject two had two characters from the show to share. However, as dictated by the playwright, there were multiple people within the telling of each story to portray. Case and point, the main character of the opening section is Mike, but along the way we meet his drunkard mom, his disrespectful step-dad, his inquisitive student, his caring brother, and Rufus, a random friend of this step dad's. For these characters it was easiest to see the transition from Mike to mom because of the feminine quality of movement. Yet for the men, after practicing the piece for so long the physicality started to get blurred. I told him that each person has their own internal rhythm. This internal rhythm is through breathing patterns, heart beats, speaking patterns, and different ways of processing information. All of this needs to be considered when you have to jump from one character to another. Whether these specific songs had time to soak in to really resonate for each character or not, what it did do was require the actor to engage with these character on a deeper level. There was not enough



time to find a movement for each song and character, but we did find the quality of movement for the main character Mike. Even if the rest of the characters had some of the subject's default self, the main character was crafted enough, so that it broke up the ways the actor used his personal habits. This process challenged him to use self in different ways.

For Mike, subject number two selected "The Colored Section" by Donnie. I instructed subject number two to explore the songs selected for each character. We did this for each song, then I had him to explore each walk. The walk shifted slightly for the character Mike. The shoulders became a little tenser as opposed to being droopy. The first thing that came to mind seeing him engage with the text after the song was "matter-of-fact." Sometimes physically it seemed as though he stiffened.

#### KCACTF PARTNERS

Rhythm is a beautiful thing until the language becomes monotonous and stale. Once a piece has reached its peak, it is hard to continue to find fun or spontaneity. For the Irene Ryan competition, the nominee is to prepare a solo piece and two scenes. From the day my partner and I were cleared to compete, I and subject number three rehearsed intensely. Usually this process involved two- a-days in which we would rehearse in the mornings and at night. We

rehearsed so hard that we eventually fell into the rhythm of these characters. We knew every beat to hit, and how to hit it as a justified choice. But after doing them so many times they lost their fun. Towards the end of the process, we incorporated music in order to layer the foundational rhythms while incorporating new choices. This is the direct connection for a syncopated rhythm. We were not completely off the original rhythms, we just found new slightly different tempos to play with.

#### LOSING THE RHYTHM OF THE BEAT

The year of "The Thesis" has been one of the most challenging, yet rewarding years of my whole existence. This feeling is not in spite of my thesis, but because of my thesis. The university's faculty said that the thesis is to display the themes learned during matriculation at the university. We are ultimately focused on marrying theory and practice but in the midst, I have learned so much more. I learned more about myself than I anticipated before attending the program. I can do more than I ever thought possible. However, once again, through all of these moments, I managed to pull through, music underscored it. Now, music is not a replacement of my spirituality and it itself is not my God. This is the meditation that saturates my heart to hear God better. This is how music has aided in my spirituality.

However, in this process I am talking about music and its many uses. Yet, I still forgot to actually do what I introduced, intended. Under too much pressure I shut down and just think that I need to "get it done" I cut my phone off, I put my music away, and I close my door to not be disturbed. I needed at least the music. Even with some of the distractions, it offers to keep me alert and positive. Somewhere along the process, I lost the music for me to finish this document I started. It took all the areas of my life to allude to demolition before I found my beat again. As I write the last section, "And You Don't Stop" fills the room. This is a melodic spiritual song confirming that God has been there guiding and directing me through everything. There is nothing too hard and no cap to the blessings He can give to me. Everyone may not be religious, but I guarantee that everyone has their song.

I am not suggesting to you, readers, that music is the reason I made it through, but I am saying that it has been there every step of the way, and the times it was missing, I was not operating to my optimal level. Whether music is the thing itself that causes all of these physical actions or acts as the activator for the brain, it is worth it. It is said that the "mind is a terrible thing to waste," but I think it is something worth mentioning that on the reverse that it is a powerful thing if activated correctly. I urge you to find your activator, find your song!

## REFERENCES

- Adrian, Barbara. *"Effort Life of Voice and Movement."* Actor Training the Laban Way:An Integrated Approach to Voice, Speech, and Movement, Allworth Press, 2008, pp. 115-121.
- Auer, Peter, et al. *Language in Time: Language in Time: The Rhythm and Tempo of Spoken Interaction / the Rhythm and Tempo of Spoken Interaction.* Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Berry, Cicely. *The Actor and the Text.* Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1987. print p.69
- Blanche, Cynthia, and Antonia Beattie. *The Power of Music : Harness the Creative Energy of Music to Heal the Body, Soothe the Mind, and Feed the Soul.* Raincoast Books, 2000.
- Cooper, Brittney. *Eloquent Rage : A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower.* PICADOR, 2019.
- Fionna, Melanie. "4 A.M." *The MF Life.* Eric Goudy II, Earl Hood & Rico Love. 2012
- Franklin,Aretha. "Precious Lord."Amazing Grace." Songs of Faith. Rev. Thomas Dorsey .1956
- Glass, Barbara S. *African American Dance : An Illustrated History.* McFarland, 2007.
- Hall, Katori, and Faedra Chatard Carpenter. *The Mountaintop.* [New edition] ed., Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015.
- James, Etta. "Trust in Me". At Last!. Leonard Chess & Phil Chess. 1960.
- KStylis."Booty Hopscotch" Trampoline-EP. 2014
- Kurlansky, Mark. *Ready for a Brand New Beat : How "Dancing in the Street" Became the Anthem for a Changing America.* Riverhead Books, 2013.
- Mannes, Elena, et al., directors. *The Music Instinct : Science & Song.* PBS, 2009.

Morris, Eilon. *Rhythm in Acting and Performance: Embodied Approaches and Understandings*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017.

Polatin, Betsy. *The Actor's Secret : Techniques for Transforming Habitual Patterns and Improving Performance*. North Atlantic Books, 2013.

Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia : Tales of Music and the Brain*. 1st ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.

Stanislavsky, Konstantin. *Creating a Role*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

"twerking." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2013. Web. 8 March 2019

Vandellas, Martha. "Dancing in the Streets" Dance Party. Marvin Gaye, William "Mickey" Stevenson and Ivy Jo Hunter. July 31, 1964

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple: The Musical*. "Push Da Button". 10th anniversary ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.

Wilson, Gabriella (H.E.R.). "Focus." 2018

Wonder, Stevie. "Fingertips Part 1 & 2." The Jazz Soul of Little Stevie. Regal Theater, Chicago; June 1, 1962. Cassette.

## CURRICULUM VITA

### Name:

LaShondra Hood

### Address:

1824 5th Way NW  
Center Point, AL 35215

### D.O.B.

Birmingham, AL - August 25, 1994

### Education and Training

Master of Fine Arts, Theatre Arts

expected May 2019

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

- Graduate Certificate of African American Theatre
- Thesis: "The Actor's Rhythm, Internal Beat"
- African American Theatre Program Member

Bachelor of Arts, Theatre Arts

May 2016

Alabama State University, Montgomery, AL

- Magna Cum Laude graduate
- Alpha Psi Omega National Theatre Honor Society-
  - Member of the Chi Chi Cast

### Teaching Experience

August 2018- Present

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY- Instructor

- Acting for Non- Majors
- Entry level acting course for non- theatre majors
- Introduction as Communication through Acting
- An introductory level course applying acting principles to any career path for effective communication

August 2016 - Present

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY - Graduate Teaching Assistant

### Classes taught

- TA 207 Enjoyment of Theatre
- Introductory level course for all majors to learn the foundation of theatre

Related Theatre Experience

August 2018- Present

University of Louisville - Director of Graduate Studies Assistant

- Recruitment
- Organize recruitment information and other forms
- Communicated with prospective students through written and oral communication

August 2016- Present

University of Louisville - Theatre Box Office Assistant

- Coordinate multiple jobs simultaneously
- Strategizing marketing for the African American Theatre Program to craft a target audience
- Able to operate under pressure
- Attention to proper phone etiquette

October 2018-December 2019

Louisville Central Community Center- Customer / Acting Assistant

- Took measurements and organized paperwork
- Designed the chorus and organized the rental for lead performer
- Ensured the safety of the children by performing a risk assessment prior to their arrival
- Coached/mentored children for their roles in the shows (ages 8-21)

June 2017-August 2017

Louisville Central Community Center- Stage Manager/ Acting Assistant

- Organized student's paperwork
- Communicated with parents through written and verbal communication
- Ensured the safety of the children by performing a risk assessment prior to their arrival
- Coached/mentored children for their roles in the shows (ages 8-21)

June 2014 - July 2015

ArtPlay, Birmingham - Summer Acting Counselor

- Organized and lead small and large group activities such as warm up, cool down, acting exercises, and games
- Coached/ mentored children for their roles in the shows (6-18)
- Ensured the safety of the children

- Provided leadership to campers in all areas and acted as a role model in all areas of camp activities

Creative research (acting)

Theatre

Fences	Rose	Faith Works Studios
Baltimore	Leigh	National Black Theatre Festival

Trudy, ..Travel to Outer Space & Have a Pretty Terrible Time There	Trudy	Williamstown Theatre (Studio)
BlacknBlue Boys/Broken Men	Dr.Harper/ Social Worker	College of Charleston K.C.A.C.T.F

Educational Theatre

The Mountaintop	Camae	University of Louisville
Fabulation...	Ensemble	University of Louisville
Eurydice	Little Stone	University of Louisville
Our Country's Good	Captain Phillip	University of Louisville
Baltimore	Leigh	University of Louisville
Flyin' West	Miss Leah	Alabama State University
Richard III	Messenger	Alabama State University
Crowns	Ensemble	Alabama State University
It Takes Two Baby	Ensemble	Virginia-Samford Theater

Theatre For Young Audiences

American Tales (Workshop)	Ensemble	StageOne Family Theatre
Trickster Tales	Yanrinbo	U of L Repertory Theatre
Magic Tree	Ola/Taiwo	U of L Repertory Theatre



Hairspray Jr.	Ensemble	Alys-Stephens Center
------------------	----------	-------------------------

#### Directing

Annie Jr.	Grand Lyric Theatre	ex. July 2019
Black n' Blue Boys/Broken Men	University of Louisville	November, 2018
The New Margo	Alabama State University	April, 2016

#### Honors and Awards

- S.I.G.S Student Spotlight nominee (Spring 2019)
- Southeastern Theatre Conference - Denise Halbach  
Scholarship Recipient 2018
- David Hershberg Travel Scholarship - 2018
- The Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival
  - 2019 Irene Ryan Partner- National Winners
  - 2019 Kingsley Colton Award for Outstanding  
Partner- National level
  - 2019 Jane Alexander Scholarship Award for Acting
  - 2019 Irene Ryan Partner - Winners of Region IV
  - 2016 Irene Ryan Finalist

#### Service

MLK Day Coordinator	U of L African American Theatre Program	January, 2019
------------------------	---	------------------