

ANDREA ANDRESAKIS  
DIRECTOR / CHOREOGRAPHER, SDC  
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**ABOUT MY PROCESS and PHILOSOPHY**

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**My Approach**

My main objective in any production is to make the story engaging, meaningful and clear. All of the decisions regarding the blocking, costumes, set, lights, sound, etc. must support the story. I have been told that my interpretations of plays are innovative, but I never stray from the authors' intentions; I always turn to the original text to guide my choices. My style is very inclusive. During the entire process, I encourage everyone, including the actors, to share their ideas. The more the cast and creative team feel that their contributions are valued, the more fully they invest in the production. As the director I am responsible for deciding which of these diverse ideas to use. I focus on keeping everyone on the same page at all times and keeping the show on track.

**Rehearsals**

During rehearsals we continuously ask questions, mining the circumstances of the piece to bring depth and nuance to the material. In a safe environment, free from negativity or judgment, I encourage my actors to take risks and find compelling choices. I motivate them to continually demand more from themselves. Having had solid singing, acting and dance training myself, I understand the performers' processes and am able to communicate effectively with them. I encourage careful script analysis resulting in authentic and honest performances. It is crucial that each performer is 'real'. I have achieved positive results by assigning acting homework such as writing an autobiography as well as asking the questions: 'who, why, what, when and how'. I urge all of the actors to be specific about their habits, relationships and what happened prior to the scene. Details add depth and color to the characters and the production as a whole.

**Physicality**

I am interested in behavior and how people communicate through body language. I use improvisation and imagery to help the actors portray characters different from themselves. Utilizing my extensive dance background, I work with the actors on developing the physicality of their characters. When working with performers at varying levels of experience and dance training, I begin by getting to know their talents as quickly as possible. I create the choreography and staging accordingly, and focus on highlighting each performer's strengths. From my experience with the National Dance Institute, I can offer a vocabulary of easily mastered, strong and effective movements for use in group numbers.

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## **Working with Playwrights**

Several playwrights have expressed their gratitude to me for including them in the process. Having written and created original work myself (*Plays From the Heart* at the Black Spectrum Theatre, NYC and *Showgirls in Shinjuku* for Fielday, NYC) I appreciate and understand a writer's process. Honoring their vision, I see my role as a facilitator of the physical incarnation of their story. Welcoming their collaboration, I am able to communicate in a thoughtful and respectful manner.

## **Original Work**

I am deeply interested in new plays. The dozens of original works which I have directed range from kitchen sink dramas to movement based pieces and have been produced Off-Broadway, regionally and at festivals across the country. *Chestina Vanessa Poulson*, a new play by Melanie Greenhouse, was cobbled together from autobiographical poems on being raised by an African American housekeeper. Told from Chessie's perspective, while incorporating gospel music and a Greek chorus, the African American actors wore masks when playing members of Ms. Greenhouse's Jewish family. *Chestina Vanessa Poulson* received nominations for Best Play and Best Director by Broadway World.

In a new piece, we learn about the play while putting it on its feet. Often, during the rehearsal process, actors make happy mistakes, putting a different spin on a line. In these instances, I offer these alternative options to the playwright and wait for their approval before incorporating any changes. Overall, I act as the catalyst, finding the most vivid play with contributions from everyone in the room.

## **Classics**

Over the last few years my career path has lead to directing classics. Last spring, through the SDC Guest Artist Initiative, I directed *Arms and the Man* at the Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. Shaw's language is so rich and his comic commentary so biting—it was a pure pleasure to direct.

## **Comedy**

Humor is important; it enables the audience to ride the emotional roller coaster of a horror. They can feel confident that after a low, they will be lifted with laughter. The challenge is to keep the drama and the comedy balanced and not to play for laughs but find the humor through the believability of the situation.

## **Dramady**

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Recently I directed the world premiere of *My Purple Wig*, by the Canadian playwright Jessica Anderson for Heiress Productions Off-Broadway. The play illuminates a family's journey through their mother's battle with cancer and her chemotherapy. The challenge was balancing the comedy and tragedy to hit just the right tone.

## **Look Ma No Hands**

I am perpetually hungry to learn and experiment with new approaches. Recently, a fellow director introduced me to a technique developed by Shakespeare and Co. wherein the actors are fed their lines, as opposed to holding their scripts. I tried this out during my production of *Arms and the Man* and had great results; the actors were able to work with props and find their physicality right from the start. In "the business" since the age of nine, everything that I know, I have learned from observing other directors at work—as a performer, assistant director, associate director and SDC Observer.

## **Multi Media**

I am no stranger to film and television. I have acted and danced on film and TV and have absorbed the logistics of the process from the inside. I grew up at ABC TV where my father worked for 30 years with the likes of Geraldo Rivera and Gil Noble. As the supervising film editor, he has won Emmy Awards for several documentaries. He trained my eye from an early age; I couldn't watch a television show or movie without hearing his critique. I am fortunate to have inherited his sense of timing and aesthetics and have been developing my personal style and point of view in photography and film throughout my life.

For PBS, I directed and choreographed a segment for the show *ArtBeat* with a live jazz combo. As part of "Fielday", I developed an original backstage musical *Showgirls in Shinjuku* (about my experience performing in Japan) which was filmed with three camera angles in several locations. The motivation for capturing much of my original choreography has been *DanceBreak*, for which I was a semi-finalist. In addition to creating sizzle reels of my choreography, I directed and choreographed a three camera shoot of several dance pieces at The Chernuchin Theatre: *Angel*, to the Jimi Hendrix song of the same name, is about a young heroin addict; *One, Two, Three (What Are We Fighting For?)* is an anti-war piece. In all of these projects, I worked closely with the camera operators and editor throughout the process, including camera blocking and the final cut. Recently, I have learned to edit on Adobe Pro. Many of my directing and choreography clips are available through links on my website.

The musical which I directed and choreographed, *Vampires in Da' House*, was written by the hip hop filmmaker Rodney 'Z-Man' Thornton. Similar to Michael Jackson's *This is It* version of *Thriller*, vampires appeared on film and on stage simultaneously. Sheldon Epps, the Artistic

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Director of The Pasadena Playhouse chose one of my slides of Brazil to be used as scenery for his production of *The Night is a Child*.

## **Teaching**

As a guest artist at a university, I enjoy interfacing with the faculty and students during all phases of the production process. Described as approachable and patient, I make myself available to students and enjoy discussing their professional and artistic ambitions. I have had great experiences mentoring acting and design students. For *Evita* at JHU, the student set designer's engineering background rendered her pragmatic and efficient. The sound designer, a student from Peabody, found ingenious solutions to problems involving the equipment and architecture. In pre-production, I have had success conducting design meetings via conference calls and Skype. I believe that strong and positive leadership involves cultivating healthy relationships and clear communication. This is what I set out to do with producers, designers, staff and crew from the very start.

Having had the great fortune of being mentored by some extraordinary directors and teachers, it is rewarding to have the opportunity to pass on my knowledge and experience. I enjoy submersing myself in any new environment and would welcome the opportunity to participate in outreach programs. In the past, I have found both these types of teaching experiences to be extremely rewarding.

## **Why We Do It**

**While we laugh and cry as a community**, we also struggle with contemporary issues. It is through the shared experience of theatre that artists have the power to influence a community and encourage it to examine and evaluate their beliefs and actions. Theatre is about ritual and community and story-telling (among other things), all things that are worth investing in. Theatre allows for cultural conversations within and between entire societies and communities to occur - which is pretty powerful.