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Critical Essay II - CA176

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The Road to Reward

I have finally figured out why my high school drama teacher and my college choir director were so successful. At their core, these two leaders signed an invisible contract with each ensemble member, promising to engage every one of them and bring their creative abilities to fruition. These two unique perspectives in leadership offer me a chance to consider how I could emulate those qualities in this semester's performance of *The Road to Ruin* by Richard Dresser. Although many ensemble members this semester may not, ultimately, go on to fulfill leadership roles, the empowering lessons that the entire ensemble acquires along the way are indelible and should be considered for further study.

When Piers Ibbotson says, "Creativity flourishes at the edges of things" (Ibbotson 3), what he partly means is that a leadership role, unlike the *clinical-esque* nature of science, is, in fact, art (Ibbotson 3); by saying that leaders or directors are artists, what he really means is that a good leader will try to create a space of risk-taking— one in which everyone is a participant in a safe but edge-dancing estampie. By entering transitive state of risk-taking through acting (Ibbotson 96), it will propel Andrew, Loretta, and Bobby as we rehearse "The Road to Ruin" and will also spark some of my own creative ideas as the director, thus, hopefully, forming a creative dialogue within the group, rather than an adversarial divide (84).

Though there is much to learn through the lessons of taking risks, it is also fair to say that the safety net of these adventures can be found in setting creative constraints. By offering an ensemble some specific rules— “make me a tape player this big” (Ibbotson 21)— I can contribute to a framework that will allow our ensemble a better opportunity to take these risks, rather than haphazardly stumble about with no clear sense of direction. Instead of making incredible demands upon each cast member, would it not be better to allow them more wiggle room in which to create the character’s space (25)? Consequentially, by removing myself from the equation to some degree, it empowers the cast members and teaches me how to frame these creative constraints and avoid the risk of unstructured competition amongst the ensemble (70).

When my former directors set some clear but minimal expectations and allowed the ensemble to take risks, what they were really doing was creating an opportunity where anything was possible. If a cast member suggested an idea, both of these directors were elated and excited at the ideas the ensemble created. By “saying yes” to every idea, these successful directors and ensembles empowered individuality instead of stifling it, “alternating between the rhetorical process of making offers and the co-creational process of accepting and inhabiting the offers that are made...” (67). Although I may have some ideas in mind with respect to our ten-minute play, the real magic begins during rehearsal. The first instance of “saying yes” occurred during casting last week, where Loretta was cast as the wife and Bobby as Jimbo: Bobby presented the idea that he and Loretta switch roles. As a leader, there seems to be a constant struggle with what you want and what actually is in front of you. Frankly, the “thing” in front of you is usually much more dynamic than the preconceived individual idea; in the instance where Bobby and Loretta

asked to switch roles— as a director, I had a million concerns regarding whether Bobby’s portrayal would come across as transphobic or homophobic, but I did say yes.

When Piers Ibbotson says, “eccentric is off center” (129), what he means is that, by looking at the lessons of my former directors and their successes, the necessary space where risk-sharing occurs is in the safety of some guidance from the director, and all ensemble members need to be able to enter into this dynamic sphere and consider every idea in order to feel empowered enough to offer the group extra momentum to achieve a shared vision that will be remembered by all.