IDENTITY UNKNOWN: A STUDY AND PERFORMANCE OF INTERACTIVE ROCK OPERA

A Thesis
Presented to
The Honors Tutorial College
Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Honors Tutorial College with the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theater

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June 2012
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, theater has faced increasing competition from a new generation of entertainment media. Television, film and even Youtube, have challenged theater's relevancy, yet to this day theater remains not only a relevant but a growing art form. One key aspect of theater that encourages this is its use of liveness in performance. According to Philip Auslander in his book *Liveness: Performance in Mediatized Culture*, liveness traditionally refers to the “kind of performance in which the performers and the audience are both physically and temporally co-present to one another” (60). In this way, theater is a prime example of liveness. This definition, however, as Auslander expands, is historical more than definite. Ideas of “live” performance have expanded in recent years to include recorded or broadcast performances. With these changes, modern ideas of liveness are more focused on the interaction between the performer, or performed recording, and group of people (Auslander 60-61). Theater, in its version of liveness, possesses a very direct form of this interaction because of the co-presence of performers and audience members. This strong and direct relationship between the audience and performer allows for theater’s continued prevalence as an art form.

In much of conventional theater, the relationship between the audience member and performer is roughly that of giver and receiver. The playwright, actor, director and designers are the givers of the production. They present their ideas,
viewpoints and story to the audience over the course of the production. The audience receives these views through witnessing the production and taking from it whatever feelings or arguments they observed. They have, as Susan Kattiwinkel describes in *Audience Participation*, “little impact on the process of performance except in standard, structured response” (ix). This structured response is limited in most conventional theater to applause and talk-back sessions that take place after the production has reached its end. This standard practice has its benefits. However, theater that is limited to this structure fails to take full advantage of the potential in the audience-performer relationship and needs to be challenged. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas’ theories regarding “the Other,” I argue that an audience-performer relationship that uses active audience participation creates a production where the liveness of theater can be used to promote dialogue in new ways.

This thesis examines performer interaction in modern theater and will be divided into two main sections. The first portion, chapters one and two, is a historical and theoretical examination exploring the role of audience participation in modern theater. For the purposes of this paper, I define the modern theatrical period as beginning with the middle works of playwright Henrik Ibsen and the arrival of realism to the postmodern theater of present day. Chapter one provides my working definitions for the various forms of audience participation as well as a description of the “ethic relationship,” as pioneered by Emmanuel Levinas, that will be prevalent in this thesis. Chapter two consists of a historical examination of the relationship between the performer and audience in four areas of modern theater (realism and naturalism,
vaudeville and musical theater, early mid twentieth century experimental theater and postmodern theater) and the resulting consequences of each relationship.

The second portion of this paper, chapters three through four, is an exploration and reflection of the practical portion of my creative thesis, an audience participation based rock opera titled *Identity Unknown*. Chapter three takes a specific look at the rock opera as a medium and explores: why I chose this medium to work with, how it has been defined, and the way rock opera has addressed the audience-performer relationship. Chapter four will focus on my own rock opera production: my goals for the production, the choices I made to achieve those goals and the successes and failures of this experiment as both an exploration of the audience-performer relationship and a music theater production.
CHAPTER ONE:

Audience Participation and The ‘Ethic Relationship’

A Brief Description of Passive and Active Audience Participation

Audience participation is a constant presence in live theater. Whether they are listening politely, shouting, sleeping, or walking out, audience members are always participating in theater through their presence or removal of presence. The question is not then whether the audience is participating, but rather how are they participating. Two useful categories to examine audience participation are passive and active participation. Passive audience participation is most common in conventional theater. It includes the quiet receiving of text and action as well as the thought process that follows as an audience member considers the plot. The audience lets the events play out without directly interfering or modifying the events or experiences in any way. In contrast, in active participation, as described by Susan C. Haedicke in her article “The Challenge of Participation: Audiences at Living Theatre Stage Company,” the audience does more than merely observe the story, they live out and influence the events that they witness on stage. Active participation involves a performance by the audience and in that performance they become part of the creation process (76). This form of participation may include cheering or booing the events onstage, talking back to performers or even becoming characters within the events of the production. Both forms of participation have their benefits within the theatrical frame, however for the
purposes of this paper, I will be examining primarily the later. It is my belief that this form is underutilized in modern theater, but holds great potential in challenging the traditional relationship between the audience and performer.

**Emmanuel Levinas: The ‘Ethic Relationship’ and the Other**

Emmanuel Levinas (1903-1995) is most well-known for his work on the ethical relationship between the self and the Other. The Other, Levinas argues, exists prior to the self and an encounter with this Other allows one to define their present self (Abrams 1-2). Levinas’ theory was not created with theatrical performance in mind. However, Joshua Abrams makes the argument in his article “Ethics of the Witness: The Participatory Dances of Cie Felix Ruckert,” that the audience participation in the dances of Ruckert performs this ethical relationship. I believe that Abram’s connection between Levinas’s ethical relationship and the dances of Ruckert can be extended to many theatrical performances as well. This connection is at its strongest when theater uses active audience participation to create an encounter between the performer and audience member.

To understand Levinas idea of the Other, it is useful to understand the formation of identity theory of the Same, perpetuated by 1960s theorists such as Martin Heidegger, that Levinas’s theory works against. The theory of the Same roughly states that a person’s identity is formed through contact with people whom they see as similar to themselves. With this in mind, one must view “all realities as
unfolding or surrounding elements of one basic and central instance called ‘the
Same’” (Peperzak 19).

The philosophical theory behind the Other is also rooted in the belief that a
person’s identity is formed through outside contact. However, unlike in the theory
behind the Same, contact with the Other causes a change in which a person becomes
aware of their differences, rather than similarities, with the people with whom they
come in contact. Not all encounters result in an ethical relationship with the Other.
One can never understand or “know” the Other but still must respond to them from
their own base of prior knowledge (Abrams 1). According to Adriaan Peperzak, in his
description of Levinas’s theories, “another comes to the fore as Other if and only if his
or her ‘appearance’ breaks, pierces destroys the horizon of my egocentric monism, that
is, when the other’s invasion of my world destroys the empire in which all phenomena
are...condemned to function as moments of my universe” (Peperzak 19-20). There
must be an awareness of the differences in the encounter and once that awareness is
present, the observer will be changed.

Joshua Abrams makes the argument in “Ethics of the Witness: The
Participatory Dances of Cie Felix Ruckert” that Levinas’s ethic relationship can be
used as a method of critique for the arts, and goes on to use his theories to examine the
dance performances created by Cie Felix Ruckert. Ruckert’s work in both Hautnah
and Ring, Abrams argues, involve the audience and performer in the ethical
relationship as the audience member is called into existence through their encounter
with the performer (Abrams 1-2). In Hautnah, a series of one-on-one modern dance
presentations were performed with the price of each dance negotiated by the performer and audience member before they began. According to Abrams, this early interaction set the stage for the rest of the performance where he, as an audience member, was intimately aware of his and the performer’s difference and how it influenced their relationship and what was being presented before him (5-6). In *Ring*, the audience members were either seated in chairs that formed a ring around the space or could stand outside the space observing. Those in the chairs were approached by the dancers who whispered whatever struck them about the audience member into their ear before moving onto a new member. Eventually the dancers began to move the audience members and pull them into their dance. The audience members first had the differences in their identity noted to them, and were then pulled into the relationship with that awareness. Again, the ethic relationship was invoked to cause a change in the audience member through an encounter with the performed Other (Abrams 10-11).

Considering Abrams article, I would argue that theories of the ethic relationship can also be used to examine the audience-performer relationship of several theatrical performances. Conventional theatrical presentations, where the audience and performer are kept separate, would not be served through this examination. By keeping the audience passive and in a spectator position, a mutual direct relationship and Levinas-style encounter between the audience member and performer, is impossible. There may be an emotional or rational connection between the audience member and character but, the character’s connection to the audience is limited. In performances that invoke active audience participation, however, an ethic
relationship can established with the performer as the Other: the key is that there must be an encounter formed through that participation for the ethic relationship to take place. This relationship has the potential to change the audience through their encounter with the characters onstage and the negotiation of that relationship in ways that conventional theater is incapable of.
CHAPTER TWO:

Historical Survey of Audience Participation in Modern Theater

Realism and Naturalism

In the late nineteenth century, the role of theater audiences changed with the arrival of realism and naturalism to form the performer-audience relationship most widely accepted in mainstream drama today. This relationship is roughly as follows: performers present their work and the audience sits politely, quietly, and often unacknowledged until the curtain call, witnessing and experiencing the events onstage from their seats. Before this period, most theater audiences were usually acknowledged by the performers during the production and vocal responses to the play were not uncommon. Beginning in the seventeenth century many private theaters, with higher paying audiences, instituted rules for audience conduct, but it wasn’t until realism and naturalism that theater productions themselves began to demand this audience restraint to be successful (Bennett 3).

Naturalism and realism emerged as a reaction to the often presentational nature of theater of that time. Scientific thought was at the forefront, and investigation, analysis and reflection of the world was the dominant mode of perception, at least among the upper class. Many theater theoreticians, such as August Strindberg,
believed that theater could no longer function in its current form with these changes of thought in the world. Theater must instead be based on the ideas of investigating, analyzing and, most importantly, accurately reflecting the world (Strindberg 115). It was out of this frustration that that style of realism and the following naturalist movement were formed.

Realism first began appearing as a method of design that was made popular by producer and actress Lucia Vestris and writer James Planché at the Olympia Theatre in 1830s. Vestris, in particular, strove to create staging that was realistic to the period and is most well known for her popularization of the box set of three walls and an audience ‘fourth wall’ (Planché 8). In contrast to the over-the-top staging of melodramas, realism staging sought to mirror life on the stage. According to Donald Roy in his introduction to Planché’s Plays, “Drawing-rooms were fitted up like drawing-rooms...two chairs no longer indicated that two persons were to be seated...a claret-colored coat, salmon-colored trousers, with a broad black stripe...no longer marked the ‘light comedy gentleman’” (7). Although Planché’s work provided Vestris her opportunity for design, realism in playwriting would emerge most prominently within the plays of Thomas Robertson (who also served as director in furthering realism in staging) and the middle work of Henrik Ibsen. These productions focused on the social problems and issues of the early nineteenth century, but were most notable for their elimination of stock characters and use of language more colloquial than what had previously been seen on the stage.
While it addressed the current social issues, and did so in a way that was more realistic than anything previous, realism was a movement of theatrical style more than ideas. Naturalism, which emerged through the work of theorists such as Emile Zola and August Strindberg, used the realism style to argue for the creation of human identity based on heredity and environment. Stock characters were replaced by more naturalistic characters, such as Strindberg’s Miss Julie, who, he argued, is shaped from her “many possible motivations...the passionate character of her mother [heredity], the upbringing misguidedly inflicted on her by her father [environment]; her own character...the festive atmosphere of Midsummer Night” (116). The naturalist did not seek to present a character whose identity was formed through a single event, but through a multitude of sources based in their heredity and environment. The goal was to provide, as Jean Jullien put it, “a slice of life onstage with art” that would show, through the style of realism, social issues in a new light (qtd. in Turney, “Notes on Naturalism in the Theatre”).

While both Realism and Naturalism had their differences, both movements had similar new demands of observation and restraint for their audience members. The first major change was that the audience, as well as the theater structure itself, could no longer be acknowledged save for curtain call. Rather than witnessing a performance, the audience must seem to be viewing moments from private lives. The soliloquy-style monologue, previously performed to the audience, was either eliminated or made to seem more realistic. For example, as August Strindberg describes, it is realistic that “a speaker should walk up and down alone in his room reading his speech aloud, that an
actor should rehearse his part aloud, a servant girl talk to her cat, a mother prattle to her child” (116). Lighting also was modified to allow for the actors to focus more on each other than the audience. Because of the angle of the footlights of past theaters, whenever an actor wished to express their emotions to their audience, to “act with their eyes,” they would have to look to the audience, a habit known as “greeting ones friends” (Strindberg 117-118). Innovations in stage lighting during the late nineteenth century gave way to limelights and electrical lights that could be controlled and positioned from above, rather than below, the staging area. More contrast was also available in the lighting, and along with removing the need to look out at the audience to express emotion of characters, designers were better able to portray the time and seasons realistically (Innes 10-11).

Over time the audience began to behave differently to create a polite distance between themselves and the theatrical events. In his critique of this new form, Bertolt Brecht said, “[the audience] has an illusion of sitting in front of a keyhole...it ought not to applaud till it starts queuing for its hats and coats” (qtd. in Bennett 23). Audiences were encouraged to be quiet, polite, applaud only at the conclusion of the piece and avoid leaving the theater until intermission or the end. This practice of theater etiquette had extended to become the norm in many contemporary theaters. In the “Ten Commandments for Audience Behavior” originally part of the Stagebill programs distributed by the Lincoln Center, audience members are given these guidelines: “Thou shall not talk, thou shalt not hum sing or tap fingers or feet, thou shalt not rustle thy program, thou shalt not crack thy gum in thy neighbor’s ears...thou
shall not sigh with boredom” among others. These rules have become a sign of respect for the performers and their work, as they create a barrier between the performer and audience that is necessary for some forms of work to take place.

The audience in realistic and naturalistic performances took part in passive participation modes, but the structures that enforce this lack of power were done to minimize the fantastical illusions and presentational nature of theater of the past. These regulations created a staged space that realist and naturalist theorists felt was truer to life, and in this way realism and naturalism provided an opportunity for the exploration of social issues in a way that hadn’t previously been done in the theater. Strindberg believed that by presenting his naturalistic characters on stage, his plays could bring light onto issues that previously were manipulated by their presentation with stock characters and a clear moral ending (115-116). However, even though their characters were more developed, they still were influenced by the biases of their authors, directors and actors. Strindberg described his more developed female character of Miss Julie, for instance, as “a half-woman....that pushes herself to the front, nowadays selling herself for power, honors, decorations.....[these half-women] are a poor species, for they do not last, but unfortunately propagate their like by the wretchedness they cause” (116). In Miss Julie, Strindberg’s belief was that a woman who deviated from traditional gender roles could never be a full woman and was doomed to a life of pain. The audience has their own prejudices as well, but their passivity allows them to look at a subject in a new light. Their passive participation served as a helpful tool for the theater of the time, but even that theater had its flaws.
**Vaudeville and Musical Theater**

Vaudeville emerged around the same time as realism and naturalism and it stood, in many ways, in opposition to the cultured and restrained audiences of those theaters. Vaudeville drew its inspiration and material from the concert saloon, dime museum, variety show and British music hall to create a production that combined comedy, song, dance and other acts to entertain its audiences (McNamara 391).

Beginning in the 1880s theater managers such as Benjamin Keith, Edward Albee and Frederick Procter began to move variety out of the saloon and into its new home in vaudeville theaters to create chains of entertainment that would appeal to the masses (Butsch 108). In much of early vaudeville, the performance was built upon the interaction between the audience and performer. There was no fourth wall; the performers often relied on direct address and the resulting liveliness of the audience. This method of performance and theater was often contrasted to the controlled nature of the audiences of the “legitimate theater” of realistic drama. Musicians encouraged the audience to sing along, and magicians would call audience members up onto the stage. Vaudevillian performer Nora Bayes described the relationship between the audience and herself as “an intimate chat with one or two close friends” (as qtd. in Butsch 115-117). However, as much as vaudeville relied on audience participation and reaction, it relied even more on control of the audience. Managers and performers would often plant their confederates within the audience, ensuring audience opinion went a certain way. These confederates could also create the illusion of a heckler or other form of transgressing audience member in the theater while the performers
would secretly remain in control and keep their performance relatively undisturbed (Butsch 115).

Vaudeville was often looked down upon by legitimate theater because of its popular nature, its rowdy audiences, and the often poor and uneducated backgrounds of its performers (Mcnamara 392). In an attempt to legitimize vaudeville and make it more accessible for women, families and the upper class, the material in the acts was edited as time passed. For instance: crude language was removed, the number of prostitutes in attendance was greatly reduced by requiring women to have a male escort to attend, and the combativeness of the early audiences was discouraged (Kibler 7). The establishment of house rules, now common in many theaters, soon became the norm in vaudeville. In their playhouses, Edward Albee and Benjamin Keith banned “smoking, spitting, whistling, stamping feet, crunching peanuts and wearing hats” (Butsch 111). Some vaudeville managers went so far as to ban almost all forms of active audience participation entirely. According to Richard Butsch, they thought that “it offended the more refined patrons in the orchestra, who might be more accustomed to drama theater” (115-116). Despite these changes, active audience participation never really left vaudeville, and vaudeville never reached the levels of “refinement” advertised and hoped for by managers. Rowdy audience members existed alongside refined patrons in the audience creating an environment described, as M. Alison Kibler puts it as “ladies and nuts” (Kibler 24).

Vaudeville fell into decline with the arrival of sound films and the economic downturn of the Great Depression, but its legacy continued in new art forms that
would follow (McNamara 393). Most notable among these was the musical theater genre of Broadway. Broadway-style musical theater drew on many sources: opera, operetta, burlesque, ballet and minstrel shows, but its relationship to the audience drew heavily from its late vaudeville predecessor. The house rules of vaudeville became institutionalized in musical theater and audience reaction was limited to applause after musical numbers (Kislan 2-3). While the audience was arguably becoming more passive, as in vaudeville, the performers still relied on the audience’s applause as part of their structure of response during the performance. Musical theater remains to this day a presentational art form that in most cases is aware of its audience, though it limits their response. Major songs are often delivered straight to the audience and stunts are performed with the express purpose of winning their applause (Kislan 2-6). Arguably even musicals based in the tradition of theatrical realism still include some form of presentation, with actors delivering songs directly to the audience.

While vaudeville and musical theater are much more presentational art forms than realism, there remains a large distance between the audience and performer. The specified roles that each plays often limits the amount of active participation that the audience has. The primary goal of vaudeville, and I would argue what remains one of the major goals of modern day musical theater, is to present a night of fun and entertainment to the audience. Vaudeville filled itself with comedy routines, magicians and music acts that aimed to please (Butsch 15). Although there has been a rise in more dramatic musicals, such as Rent, Les Miserables and Next to Normal, the primary function of musicals remains to reach their audience through fun and
entertainment. Two of arguably the darkest musicals to grace Broadway, Sweeney Todd and Cabaret, achieve their darkness through comedy. The presentational nature that serves musical theater and vaudeville performance needs the audience response and active participation, but it limits the participation to make sure the production can move forward in the way it was planned. Later vaudeville acts were set in a distinct order for precise moments of time, and the stories of most musical theater productions were not created to be disturbed by more direct audience response than applause.

Audiences of Brecht and Artaud

In the mid twentieth century, groups such as the Living Theatre and Bread and Puppet Theater Company began to question the passive nature of audiences that had arisen with realism and the house rules of vaudeville. To understand the changes in the audience-performer relationship that arose at this time, it is useful to understand, first, the theories of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. In the early twentieth century, Artaud and Brecht created two very different ideas on the future audience’s role and experience in the theater. The aim of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty was to create strong, visceral feelings in the audience that would access their unconscious instincts. Brecht, on the other hand, wanted to distance the audience from the events occurring onstage so that they could judge the circumstances that led to the event and how that would apply to their own lives. In the mid-twentieth century the Living Theatre and the Bread and Puppet Theater used these techniques to create a more politically conscious audience. While the Living Theatre Company relied more on the ideas of Artaud and
the Bread and Puppet Theater on those of Brecht, both theaters arguably used ideas from both to make their productions more effective.

When describing his Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud compared the relationship of the audience to the performer to that of the snake and the snake charmer. The snake does not move because of the music, but because of the vibrations it feels through the ground that forces it to move. Artaud felt theater should move the audience this way and change, rather than pacify, them (81). Similar to Artaud, the Living Theatre described their mission as creating theater that would “hit people in their bellies as well as in their minds” (Callaghan 24). The goal of their 1964 production of *The Connection* was to “affect the audience so deeply that it had a cleansing effect” that would change their audience. This production became one of the earlier attempts by the Living Theatre to use the confrontation between the audience and the performer to create this effect as the “drug addicts” of the piece moved into the audience to ask for money and help (Roberts 90). Later productions would include much more direct and active audience involvement. For example, in *Anarchia* (1993), it was up to the audience to decide whether the characters would be killed by an anarchist’s bomb. If the audience chose, the characters would die. As Judith Malina stated, “I think there is something horribly wrong in ignoring one or two hundred people and asking them to quietly listen to us, the actors...what I’m talking about is creating for the audience a true role in which choices must be made that will reveal to them their own decision making process” (Callaghan 24-25; 30). The Living Theatre Company sought to create a role for the audience where they would become part of the action.
Artaud also believed that the visceral nature of theater is created through emphasis on spectacle. In particular, Artaud focused on the ability of sound, music and lights to cut through a scene into the audience, giving the piece an almost nightmarish quality (Artaud 81). In the Living Theatre’s production of *The Brig* (1963), a production based on a Marine disciplinary manual, the company used the lighting and sound of the production to put the audience through the discomfort and harshness of the action of the play. Blinding lights, harsh noises and a set design that used jail bars, were used to question who was free and who was not. The audience became part of the action, subjected to some of the same horrors and thus, the Living Theatre hoped, was changed by the production (Roberts 91).

In contrast, Brecht wanted his audience think critically about the theater they were witnessing while they were witnessing it. The aim of his Epic Theatre was to “turn the spectator into an observer, but arouse his capacity for action, force him to make decisions...face something” and make “the human being the object of inquiry” (Brecht 37). Brecht coined the term *Verfremdungseffekt*, also known as the V-effekt, which he defined as the distance between the audience and events onstage that allowed for critical thinking to occur. As for characters, the subject onstage must be recognizable, but also seem unfamiliar (Mumford 61). For this to occur, the events that take place cannot be drawn from the same base as realism. “No more ‘casual,’ ‘lifelike,’ ‘unforced’ grouping,” Brecht argued, “the opposite of natural disorder is aimed at: natural order...portrayed as emphatically and significantly as any well-known historical episodes, though without sentimentalizing them” (Brecht 58). In her article,
“Negation Strategies: The Bread and Puppet Theater and Performance Practice,” Beth Cleary argues that the type of puppetry Bread and Puppet use, where often both the larger-than-life puppet and performer are visible, fully embodies the V-effekt of Brecht. The puppets and their stylized actions cause alienation in the viewer, “the individual does not ‘see’ himself or his story enacted by the human actor,” however “he sees in the material human-puppet connection, and the seeming infinite variety of that connection, a kind of self which works to unmake meaning of the material-sensuous world in this historical moment” (Cleary 9). Brecht would often show the apparatuses that made each of the lighting, set and sound elements work. By showing how the spectacle of the theater was formed the “mystery of theater” would be removed (Mumford 66). During my time at Ohio University, I had the chance to participate in workshops with two touring productions of the Bread and Puppet Company, 13 Dirt Floor Cathedral Dances (2009) and 7 Election Campaign Dances (2008). In both productions, the construction of the bigger puppets would take place onstage in view of the audience and all movement from scene to scene was visible as well.

To remove suspense and the emotional investment that often emerged with theater, particularly realism, Brecht would often tell the audience, before each scene took place, what they should expect to see happen. In the 7 Election Campaign Dances production I took part in, each dance and what was to take place was announced before the start of the movement. In Bread and Puppet Theater’s 1981 production of Woyzeck, key lines from scenes were painted on signs over the stage to
signal to the audience what lay in store, and an offstage voice and street band were used to comment on the production as it took place (Roberts 94). The suspense of the scene was removed and the audience was left free to judge and contemplate the events set in front of them.

With Artaud’s focus on audience involvement and Brecht’s on their isolation, it seems unlikely that these two theories could ever work together. The two have however, in my opinion, the potential to complement each other through their opposition. In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook makes the argument that for modern theater to be effective, it cannot rely on the techniques of one theorist. While Brecht’s strength is the words and images he creates, Artaud uses a “language of actions, language of sound, a language of word-as-part-of movement, of word-as-lie, word-as parody, of word as rubbish, word as contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry” (Brook 49). According to Brook, both forms of language are necessary to create effective pieces (85). Artaud’s theater forces the audience to awaken from their position as witnesses and become viscerally involved in the events that occur onstage. When combined with Brechtian techniques, the audience is then challenged to sit back and critically examine what it is that made them react so strongly in the previous section. In the Living Theatre’s *Antigone* (1967), the company used Brecht’s text as a base as well as Brechtian techniques, such as the elimination of the set and props for mime, to form an attack on the war in Vietnam. The Living Theatre used Artaudian techniques, however, with the performances of the live actors to make the audience feel “how atrocious it is to kill each other” in the hopes that “then perhaps they’ll put an end to
it” (Roberts 92). In the work of Bread and Puppet Theater, the stylization of the puppets was often very Brechtian in design and movement, but also drew from Artaud. The violence of the characters as they threw themselves to the ground in “National Dances of Lubberland” was detached, but encapsulated the visceral feeling of Artaud. During his *University of Majd* fiddle sermon, a part spoken word, part musical piece, Peter Schumann used discordant music to establish discomfort in the audience that was then accompanied by a Brechtian explanation of the crimes taking place in Palestine. The result was a piece of theater that forced the audience to experience the production, but also evaluate the ideas presented.

While they may be different in theory, both Brechtian and Artaudian theater strive to make the audience see their world in a new perspective and be changed by their encounter with the theater. Returning to Levinas’s theories, I would argue that both theorists proposed different encounters with the previously defined Other. Artaud’s encounter was immediate, visceral and uncompromising, forcing the audience to confront the performer. Brecht’s Other uses direct address, which when combined with active audience participation in some productions, creates an encounter that is more detached, but arguably encourages greater contemplation in the staged moment of that relationship. When used together and used well, I would argue these theorists present an encounter where the audience member is viscerally confronted then forced to consider the consequences of the encounter.
Audience Participation in the Postmodern Age

While much of modern theater continues to rely predominantly on passive audience participation, active audience participation is becoming better known and accepted. Performers working with active audience participation have continued to develop new techniques to address changing audiences. David Callaghan argues in his article “Still Signaling through the Flames: The Living Theatre’s Use of Audience Participation in the 1990s,” that audiences have become indifferent to moments of active audience participation as it has become more commonplace (28-32). I would argue that active audience participation in theater is still far from commonplace, but it has managed to permeate the greater social consciousness in theatrical viewing and thus can be met with apathy rather than action if executed poorly and at times even if executed well. Although the theories currently being used are as varied as the audiences they address, there have emerged three main techniques that many present-day theaters are using with their audiences. These are the development of the “spect-actor” of Augusto Boal, new uses of direct address, and site-specific performances.

The spect-actor is a concept created by Brazilian director Augusto Boal as part of his Theatre of the Oppressed. In the most basic sense, a spect-actor is a member of the audience who “intervenes directly in the dramatic action and act” (Boal 126). The idea of the spect-actor is grown out of the Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt where, through distancing in the performance, attention is drawn to the actors playing the character as well as the character themselves. This process generally allows the dramatist or actor to comment on the action and characters of the play. Boal, however,
wanted to take this conversation one step further and allow the audience to actively comment on the character presented before them. In Boal’s words, “the members of the audience must become the Character: possess him, take his place -- not obey him, but guide him, show him the path they think right” (xx). The spect-actor accomplishes this by raising awareness of their own body’s expressivity, understanding the language of the theater and then accepting their responsibility in the forum-theater environment (Boal 126).

Boal transformed his audience from spectators to spect-actors in a series of four steps. In the first, he raised their awareness of their own bodies. Often Boal would try to understand the background of the audience he was working with and then design exercises that would “make each person aware of his own body, of his bodily possibilities, and of deformations suffered because of the type of work he performs” (Boal 127). One example of the exercises he used is the slow motion race. In the show motion race, each participant competes with the aim of losing, without ever stopping moving. This exercise activates the musculature in charge of balance and sustained movement, as the participant is not allowed to stay still (Boal 128). The second step is to get the audience more expressive with their bodies and voice. Exercises in the section have included mimicking animals, and embodying different characters and then using these forms of expression to interact with others in ways they may not be used to (Boal 130-131). In the third step, Boal introduces the audience as characters into theater scenes. Methods he uses include: simultaneous dramaturgy, where at the climax of a scene the performers turn to the audience for a solution and
improvise based on their suggestions, image theater, where an audience member may at any point rise and modify the image of scene more to their liking, and forum theater, where a participant would share a story and their solution could be challenged and re-embodied by a different participant (Boal 132-140). The fourth and final step was to create a Discourse Theater, a theater that is taken out into the public. One of Boal’s preferred methods of Discourse Theater was “invisible theater,” where two actors would rehearse a scene concerning a political topic on the streets or in a restaurant where others may be likely to intervene in the disturbance. His goal was to use the structures of theater in these performances to expose and modify the structures of society (140-145). Power, Boal argues, lies in who is speaking. In most of theater, it is the dramatist and actor who speak, who tell their truth and who hold all the power (Boal xx). The spectator is thus regulated to a status less than human, deprived of all action until the spect-actor takes that power back to become an active participant in events (Boal 155). The result is a theatrical form that empowers the audience, rather than pacifies them, and creates a much more democratic space.

A more conventional technique used to create a more democratic space in theatrical productions is direct address and response. Direct address is found in most conventional theater today as a means of acknowledging the audience, at times going so far as to turn the audience into the comrade or confessor of a character. Direct address involves the audience in the action of the play, but still usually falls short of allowing the audience to actively respond back. When audience members are given the
opportunity to voice their opinions, a more direct audience-performer encounter is formed.

Many methods of active audience participation include some form of direct address and use it as a catalyst for larger inclusion. In this section, however, I will focus on the methods of direct address that are self-contained and include the audience as active participants in the conversation. These are theatrical moments that, in a very Brechtian style, interrupt the main action of the play and demand a response. At the end of Jorinde Drose’s *Hamlet: Die Schockspiel Stratagie* (2008) that took place in the Centraltheater in Leipzig, Germany, the characters go into the audience to ask them questions about the show. The audience is commanded to do more than think about these questions but to respond in the moment as performers thrust microphones into their faces. They are forced to act. In a much more entertainment-oriented version of this technique presented on Broadway, Rupert Holmes’ *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1985) used direct address and the audience response as a voting system to determine who the murderer and the lovers of the night’s production were, as all characters were presented with their own motivations.

This form of direct address allows the audience to have some control over the results of the performance. In Drose’s *Hamlet*, the comments of the audience at the end of the performance determined the final message. In *Drood* the audience determined the character’s true intentions, even if they did not control the final message of the piece (that was determined by a final song that was sung regardless of the ending). This form of direct address can be manipulative and make the audience
believe that they have more power than they in truth possess. In *Hamlet*, the audience was much more likely to agree with the characters as their demanding and intimidating nature was highly influential. In *Drood* the way the characters are presented in the first half of the play greatly influences how the audience votes. This does not mean that the audience cannot make different decisions. Their power is more than mere illusion. Similar to the early vaudeville audiences, however, they just may be coached in a specific direction.

Over the past few years, site specific performances have had a great rise in popularity in theater. One of the things that has motivated this rise is the desire by some directors to find spaces that allow the audience to participate in the theatrical productions in new ways. While many of these performances maintain the conventional seated, passive audience and staged active performer, there is a growing trend among companies creating site-specific work to use the advantages and challenges of each space to give different elements of the theatrical production over to the audience. In their New York production of *Sleep No More*, the London-based Punchdrunk Theatre Company took the story and script of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and placed it within a six floored warehouse space transformed into the fictional “McKitterick Hotel.” Escorted into the playing space, audience members are given hotel key cards and encouraged to explore the hotel where, spread out among the space, roughly thirty actors create the story of *Macbeth*. Depending on where they choose to explore, the audience members may run across characters trapped in their minds, characters dashing across the space or an audience member may be drawn into
a one-on-one meeting with a performer that reveals new things about the production (Swanson, “The Insatiable Appetite for ‘Sleep No More’”). The audience member in *Sleep No More*, and indeed many of Punchdrunk’s other productions, controls their perception of the events that take place in theatrical presentation. Where they explore and how they choose to interact with the performers they come across changes the production so that it is different each time.

Each of these three techniques bridge the gap between the audience and performer and allow for the audience to actively participate in the production. The events onstage are created in part by the work done by the actors, designers and directors beforehand, but the audience has the potential to change them or their message, and in some cases is also changed through direct encounters with the performers. These encounters link back to Levinas’s Other, and its theatrical ramifications. The encounter with the Other of character, and sometimes actor, with the audience produces an event that has the opportunity to change both parties. The theatrical act is then the meeting of these characters, actors and audience that produces something that no one of these groups could produce alone.
Chapter Three

Rock Opera and the Audience-Performer Relationship

For the creative portion of my thesis I chose to explore the relationship of the audience and performer in an experimental rock opera of my own design. The result was *Identity Unknown: A Rock Opera*. The show, formed from music taken from local-area bands Earwig, First Street Heat, and She Bears, was presented in two shows at the Union Bar in Athens, Ohio on the 29th of February 2012. This portion of my thesis looks first at what previous work has been done with audience participation within rock operas and the resulting audience-performer relationship. The following chapter examines my own production and the ways in which the audience played a role in the development of the many facets and characters, along with a review of the show’s success in its goals.

What drew me to rock opera more than any other theatrical medium was the larger-than-life nature of the characters that appear, and the way that the music of the rock opera is used to explore them. Although the plot is important in rock opera, and is the main aspect that separates it from its sibling, the concept album, rock opera tends
focus of the production: Tommy witnesses his mother kill his father and thus becomes deaf, blind and dumb and yet develops an amazing skill with pinball. When his psychological hold is finally broken, he is lauded as a prophet and then disowned by his followers. This plot is rather absurd, and arguably the main character, Tommy, is a passive protagonist as the plot happens to him rather than him enacting the plot. What made Tommy a success was not this story but the way each of the characters, such as Tommy, Mother, the Acid Queen, and the themes they represent were explored and performed through rock music. The plot therefore is a means to an end. Combined with the strong performer-audience relationship that is often in live rock music performances, this loose thematic structure was very appealing to me in my exploration of audience participation.

One of the first questions concerning rock opera as a theatrical and musical form is how to define it. Rock opera has been around for less than half a century, beginning with Tommy in 1969, and currently lacks a clear definition. The lines between rock opera, concept album, rock musical, opera rock, and jukebox musical are blurry at best and while The Who’s Tommy and Queensryche’s Operation Mindcrime (1988) can be definitively defined as rock operas, the categorization of other productions is less clear. Jesus Christ Superstar (1971) has been classified as both a rock opera and rock musical. The Kink’s Preservation Act I (1973) and Act II (1974) straddle the line between rock opera and concept album. The Broadway production of American Idiot (2010) can easily be described as a rock opera, a staged
concept album or a jukebox musical. Arguably my own piece, *Identity Unknown*, straddles the divide between rock opera and jukebox musical.

For the sake of my thesis, I am drawing upon the definition of rock opera put forth by the Los Angeles Rock Opera Company. On their website, larockopera.com, they define rock opera as, “a work of rock music that presents a dramatic story told over multiple songs in the manner of opera.” Unlike rock musicals, rock opera is told almost entirely through song and while in musicals “the songs are always in service of the plot of the story,” in rock opera “the plot could be vague, and (intentionally) open to interpretation.” Rock operas, according to the LA Rock Opera Company, do not need to be staged, but can exist solely as audio musical works. When they are performed, rock operas tend to move away from the theater and find their home in concert venues, clubs and other alternative performance spaces.

As rock opera can take many forms, in this chapter I will be examining the performer-audience relationship and the subsequent effect on performative identity in the four main ways that rock opera is presented: as an album, in a concert environment, in a theatrical environment, and in film presentation. I use the rock opera *Tommy*, the first and arguably most well known rock opera, as the basis for much of my examination, though other examples are included throughout. For more examples in the fourth section on film presentation, I include the rock musical *Rock Horror Show* and the debatable rock musical/rock opera/opera rock piece *Repo: the Genetic Opera* as part of my exploration along with *Tommy*. 
The Album

The rock opera is more of an outgrowth of the concept album than the Broadway musical. Like the concept album, the rock opera focuses on exploring themes of life through music. However, unlike the concept album, the rock opera contains some semblance of plot and therefore only makes sense when heard in the proper order (Walsh 13). Like the concept album, and unlike the Broadway musical, the rock opera album often precedes any staged performances of the work, concert or theatrical. Also unlike the Broadway album, in most cases the characters of a rock opera are performed by the composers, members of the band or both (Eliker 301). Tommy was released first as an album before The Who began performing the piece in concert and it then was an additional two years after it began appearing in concert form before the first theatrical production in 1971 at the Seattle Opera. In the album, all four members of The Who perform almost all the songs, with no one singer portraying any one character (Eliker 305). In a similar way, the Kink’s Preservation Act I and II did not have a theatrical version until the Boston Rock Opera production in 1998, though the albums were released in 1973 (Act I) and 1974 (Act II). For each song the character performing the piece was marked on the album, but as with Tommy, all the band members sang all the songs regardless of character.

As it lacks the live element of theater, the album lacks much of the potential for audience-performer interaction that the theater contains. The performance is prerecorded, sometimes in a live concert but usually in a studio environment, and the performer has no real opportunity for direct interaction with their audience. As this is
the case, I would argue that Levinas’ theories on the ethical relationship and my subsequent comparison of that relationship to the performer-audience dynamic does not apply to this form of rock opera. That being said, the audience member, when listening to an album, is participating in the event of listening. In the most basic sense, they have control over how they listen to the piece. Although order is recommended in the album, the audience may listen out-of-order, over an hour or a year, skip some songs completely, pause, rewind, adjust volume and may walk, run, clean or sit still while listening.

Furthermore, the images of the piece are left completely up to the audience’s own mind and imagination. As Richard Meltzer described in *The Aesthetics of Rock*, “required [when listening to a recording of a guitarist] is a mental picture of the guy facing you and occasionally moving around; in conjunction with this you visually change the situation and sit behind him or turn the stage around, or you put yourself right in his shoes” (229). This is even more the case in rock opera, where not only the concert but the world and characters of the story take place solely in the audience’s mind. In these cases, the audience takes a direct role in the formation of the images of the production in the recording that transcends the performances by the band alone. While they acknowledge the performer’s role and status as musician, they also create a character beyond the gender or identity of the performer in their mind. Hearing a recording of The Who performing “Acid Queen” allows the audience much more freedom in picturing the character than when she is performed by Bette Midler, as she was in the Seattle Opera performance in 1971, or Tina Turner, as she was in the film in
1975. While there is a limited performer-audience relationship in the rock opera album, the audience still has a level of input in determining how they will experience the album and in the creation of the identities of the characters they hear.

**Concert Performances**

In most cases, when rock operas are first staged, they are performed by the composers and musicians in a concert environment. Like with the album, one singer does not necessarily portray any one character. This contrasts to musical theater performances, who from their first staging incorporate a separate cast with assigned roles for each character (Elicker 300-301; 305; 310). The Who took *Tommy* on the road almost immediately after the album’s release, touring for two years and performing in locations from Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club in London, where the tour saw its premiere, to the Metropolitan Opera in New York. For the most part, concert performances of rock operas take place in rock concert locations, such as bars, clubs, and amphitheaters but occasionally a production can cross over to more theatrical venues before it manifests itself theatrically such as *Tommy* did.

In concert performances, the relationship between the audience and performer is determined in part by the location of the performance. Witnessing Athens band Mindfish’s performance of their brief rock opera *Measles, Mumps and Rebellion* at the cramped Union Bar, provides an entirely different experience as an audience member than does a stadium concert performance of *Tommy* by The Who. In the Mindfish performance I witnessed in early 2011, the band’s lead singer, Dean Tartaglia, played
off the audience’s energy between songs and, at the conclusion of the show, invited the audience to join him onstage for the final number. While some of the audience came and went over the course of the performance, talking and getting drinks, they also had the opportunity to interact with the performer in the callback moments and in dancing throughout the performance. The relationship between the audience member and performer, in this sense, depended on the individual.

In live stadium performances, the audience and performer relationship is very different from that of smaller bar or club spaces. Most of the seats in these venues have audience members who are “present at a live performance, but [who] hardly participate in it as such since [their] main experience of the performance is to read it off a video monitor” (Auslander 24). While some members of the audience are able to get close to the stage and have a brief interaction with the performer, the performer is primarily focused on the larger audience. During the Jonas Brothers performance at Darien Lake Amphitheater the band at one point ran up to clap hands with their fans, but their focus in their eyes was always up towards the larger audience. That being said, there still is a strong audience-performer relationship at play. The use of giant video screens and speaker systems allow for the intimacy and proximity of the performer to the audience member in a small space to reach out to a larger arena (Auslander 35). Chanting by the audience is often acknowledged and occasionally led by the performer. The performer not only acknowledges but uses the audience to fuel their performance. I would not say, however, that the “ethical relationship” of Levinas
is in play because while it can take place it only rarely in these situations occurs where a direct encounter takes place between the performer and audience member.

**Theater Performances**

The theatrical performance of rock operas has recently become increasingly prevalent. Organizations as the Los Angeles Rock Opera Company, the Baltimore Rock Opera Society and the Boston Rock Opera focus on staging rock operas specifically. Rock operas such as *Tommy* (1993), *American Idiot* (2010) (combined with *21st Century Meltdown* in its theatrical form), *Preservation* (1998), *Aqualung* (2010) and *Possession: The Legend of El Rojo* (2006), have all found new audiences and success in their translation to the theatrical stage. In its theatrical setting, theatrical sets, lighting, casting and often musical scoring is introduced. Dialogue is occasionally added to make the plot clearer, though it is often used minimally. For his interpretation of *American Idiot*, Michael Mayer added some brief spoken monologues by the main character to the audience, but for the most part kept the piece purely Greenday’s music (Healy, “Finding the Musical Hidden in the Punk Album”). In my own production of *Identity Unknown* brief dialogued scenes were added to connect the songs of Earwig, First Street Heat and She Bears.

It is also at this time that if the parts of the opera were not written for specific performers tied to specific characters, those parts are rewritten. For their production of *American Idiot*, Greenday rearranged many of their songs so that they could be sung by the characters and not the band. To create a more coherent plot for the 1993
Broadway production of *Tommy*, Peter Townsend wrote “I Believe my Own Eyes,” added the previously discarded song “Welcome” to the production and rearranged some of the pieces so that the voices of the characters rather than the musicians, were the main focus (Morris, “The Who’s Tommy, We Can Hear You!”).

As far as the audience-performer relationship, most theatrical performances of rock operas operate in much of the same way as Broadway musical theater productions. When I attended the Broadway production of *American Idiot* in 2010, I found this very much the case. The audience was allowed to laugh with the production, applaud the musical numbers, and direct address was used to acknowledge the audience. However, we were encouraged to remain seated, and to keep all reactions to the performance limited to the applause and laughter mentioned above.

This is not always the case in the theatrical presentation of rock opera, and indeed, seems only the norm in larger commercial ventures. In 2010, the Baltimore Rock Opera Society (also known as BROS), took to the streets as part of *Artscape 2010 Festival*. Their rock opera/rock performance *Brothership* took place on a portable stage which moved among festival goers, interacting with them throughout the weekend. The 2000 Broadway revival of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, relied heavily on the active audience participation that made the film famous. When Frank ‘N’ Furter sang of being “breathless with antici--,” the audience shouted back the classic response “Say it!” and Tom Hewitt, the actor playing Frank ‘N’ Furter, turned to the audience and shouted “Go ahead, bait me!” before finishing the line (“The Rocky Horror Show,” Burr). In these theatrical performances, the performer has a
script and story that they will tell the audience, but the audience is still active in commenting upon and defining the world and characters. The performer is not opposed to this, but acknowledges it, and while the responses are typically limited to what was made popular by fans of the cult film, the audience still has a role they play and are active participants rather than passive observers in the events of the production.

**Film Performances**

Rarely, and usually only if the opera does well on the theatrical stage, a rock opera will be translated to the film medium. This was the case with the film version of *Tommy* (1975) directed by Ken Russell and starring Roger Daltry, Ann-Margaret, Elton John and Tina Turner as well as that of Pink Floyd’s *The Wall* (1982) directed by Alan Parker and starring Bob Geldof and Christine Hargreaves. For the sake of this thesis, I will not be looking at filmed versions of concerts or theatrical performances in this section, but focusing on films that re-imagined the rock opera for the screen. When witnessing a film version of *Tommy* alone in the library, the performer to audience relationship is minimal, compared to the theatrical version. I, as an audience member, have control over how I plan to view the film, which, if I choose to skip around, can influence how I view certain characters. However, I have no interaction with the performance beyond that.

While this may seem to be the standard for film, many screenings of rock opera style productions have integrated the audience into the production. *The Rocky Horror*
Picture Show is the most well known of these productions. During my sophomore year I attended a screening/performance of the film in the Union Bar at Ohio University. Upon my entrance to the space, I was greeted by members of the local student theater company dressed in the “rocky” style and, as it was my first time at the show, I had a V for Virgin placed upon my head. Immediately I became involved in the atmosphere of the production. As the film began, actors onstage began to act the melodramatic script and the classic songs as it played on the screen. They would often interact with audience members, allowing the film to tell the story while they involved the audience. One example of direct audience involvement was during the “Time Warp” number, where the audience danced along with the performers to the famous song. Another aspect of audience involvement came with a planted heckler who led the crowd in insulting the character’s and their actions in the film during the production. In this way, though the characters on the film never acknowledged the audience, the audience was still actively participating and defining their relationship. Janet the Heroine, became Janet the Slut. Brad became not the hero but the Asshole.

In a milder example, one can also look at the promotional screenings and tour that was done for the film Repo the Genetic Opera in 2008. During this tour, different members of the cast would be present at the screenings to answer questions and perform signature lines, such as the Graverobber’s “Graaaaavvvesees” for the audience at the designated moments in the film, if requested. Eventually the tour ended but the production company began encouraging Shadow Casts for screening that would operate in a similar way to those of the Rocky Horror Picture Show.
While film can encourage a strong audience connection to the character and performer, there is rarely any interaction that takes place between the two. In some cases the audience is acknowledged, such as in *Tommy* with the famous “See me....feel me” line, or in *Repo’s* Graverobber’s “21st Century Cure,” but the audience rarely has any ability to respond. The exception can be found in larger cult screenings where arguably the collective audience can change a character through their interaction. In these cases, even when the performer is not present, there is some form of audience and performer interaction.
Chapter Four:

*Identity Unknown: A Rock Opera*

*Identity Unknown: The Rock Opera* is set in a post-apocalyptic world where the structure of society had crumbled. In the desolation and uncertainty of this world, the Narrator of the opera has created a theater where tonight, through the power of storytelling and music, a great prophet will come forth to reveal to all the meaning and way of life. To complete this goal, the Narrator creates a group of Revolutionaries who, along with the audience, are given the task of earning the three artifacts needed to summon the prophet. The Narrator also creates a pair of Villains to oppose the Revolutionaries, because only through struggle can the prophet be brought forth. The Villains, however, soon start doing their job a little too well, and begin to challenge not only the Revolutionaries but the Narrator herself and will go to any lengths necessary to stop the Prophet from appearing. Created using a series of audience participation events interwoven throughout the story, *Identity Unknown* begins as a rock opera and descends into a war between the Narrator and Villains that is ultimately decided by the audience. My goal for *Identity Unknown* was to create a production where the audience was an active character within the narrative of the play. In order for this to occur I needed: a space that was conducive to audience participation, characters that would serve as distinctive Others to the audience, a story and music that would encourage audience exploration as well as plot, and an advertising
campaign that would get the word out as well as promote the participatory nature of
the production. In the following pages I explore my choices in each of these areas and
review how effective my work was in each section. In my work on this thesis, I served
as director, librettist and producer. What I hope to show in this portion of the paper is a
glimpse into the work, ideas and theories that I put into these three roles over the
process of creating *Identity Unknown: The Rock Opera*.

**The Space**

To be successful, *Identity Unknown* required a space that was conducive to
loud rock music, possessed a staged area for the band and performers, and had an
environment that would encourage active audience participation. A typical theater
space, such as the black box Hahne at Kantner Hall, would address the first two
concerns of the project. However, the setup of a traditional theater space would not
allow for the type and breadth of audience participation I hoped to have take place. In
the Hahne, there is a clearly separated staged and seating area. While this could be
altered so that the seats surrounded the stage, or were removed entirely, the space still
carries with it the traditional expectations of its theatrical environment. The audience
expects to be observers of the action onstage, not participants. While there may not be
physical space between the audience and performer, there is a mental separation that
inhibits rather than encourages the type of the audience participation I was hoping to
achieve.
After exploring several places outside of the school of theater, the space I ended up choosing was the upper floor of the Union Bar, also known as simply the Union. As one of the more prominent bar/music venues on campus, the Union could handle the audience capacity and music requirements of the show. Most importantly, though, the Union was advantageous to audience participation in both its atmosphere and its arrangement of space.

One of the first things I looked at, when examining where to hold the production, was the atmosphere of the space. In contrast to Jackie O’s or Casa Neuva, two other local music/bar venues on campus that have a somewhat lighter atmosphere, the upstairs area of the Union has an aura of dark grunge and rock and roll. The upstairs of the Union contains no windows, is dominated by black, save for the checked tiling and red seats, and seems cut off from the world. It was the perfect setting for a post-apocalyptic rock opera. Furthermore, audiences coming to the Union expect a rock show, and all the bands I used for the opera had performed at this location at some point in their musical life.

The Union is also a space where audience participation is not a foreign idea. The Union is the home to the Lost Flamingo Company’s production of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, several burlesque and drag performances where interaction with the audience is a necessity, and rock concerts that feed off of the audience’s yelling and dancing energy for their performances. This prior use of the Union meant that walk-ins would be more open to the possibilities of the performance rather than being thrown off guard by the show’s premise. A final useful attribute of the bar was that is
was licensed to serve alcohol along with other refreshments. This created a more communal environment as audience members talked and drank together and encouraged a more relaxed atmosphere. While for some forms of audience participation too much of this could be a hindrance, *Identity Unknown* worked to use this aspect of the environment to its advantage.

The space of *Identity Unknown* can roughly be divided into three sections, moving from the front to the back of the space: the stage, the standing area and the seating area.

The stage area (area A) was the primary home of the musicians and performers, the standing area (area B) for the more active audience members and the seating area (area C) for those audience members who enjoyed the performance but perhaps preferred more passive participation as they enjoyed their drinks. While each area served a different function there was fluidity between spaces. The stage was only a
foot and a half above the ground and allowed for easy movement on and off the stage by performers and audience members when required. Between areas B and C, there was no barrier and while many members chose to remain in one area or the other for the performance, others chose to move freely between the two areas.

The Stage Area

The stage area was the main performing area of the site, housing the musicians and most of the events of the production. Rising about a foot and a half off the ground, the setup is closest to that of a traditional proscenium stage save for a roughly 5’x5’ section that extends into the audience. This section became the primary performance area for the characters when they were speaking or singing directly to the audience. For example, this was the point where the Revolutionaries would lead their audience participation events to earn their artifacts. This allowed for them to be amidst the audience but still seen by the greater crowd. The larger portion of the stage was the main home of the musicians as well as most of the group songs, back-up performances and the Narrator.
During the rehearsal process of *Identity Unknown*, it was determined that the stage was the domain of the Narrator. As the audience enters the space the Narrator is already positioned on the extension. This is the location where she controls the production; and as the events begin to embrace more of the space, her control fades. At the beginning of the production it is from this position that she marks each audience member, making them characters in the story with the question “Are you a dreamer, lover or person of faith?” It is from this point that she creates the Revolutionaries and Villains. It is from this point that they abandon her. While most of the other characters, particularly the Villains, often move between the stage and audience, the Narrator never leaves the stage until the very end when she at last surrenders control to the audience. In contrast, the Villains start moving through the audience immediately with the knowledge that it is through the audience that they can dismantle the Narrator’s production.

The stage area was setup to be the domain of the performance, and in the second ending, when the prophet appears, this area is used to emphasize the performative nature of the audience as well. The lines between the stage and audience are broken down and the audience is pulled onto the stage for the final song. Although they have been active for the entire show, it is at this moment, when they take over the stage and show completely.

**The Standing Area**

Pressed right against the stage, the standing area leaves the performers no room to escape their fans and gives the audience an open space to perform their
responses in any way that they see fit. In the two performances of *Identity Unknown*, these responses included: yelling, cheering, jeering, answering questions, dancing, and casting their artifacts as voting ballots to decide the end of the production. This was the area where most of the active participation of the production took place. The standing room was a second stage. My goal was to not ignore the events happening on this stage, but use them to influence the production as it happened. Performers were encouraged to talk back to audience members and use their opinions as part of the show. This started right at the beginning, as the audience walked in. During this portion of *Identity Unknown*, each audience member was sent up to the Narrator, who was standing on the lip of the stage, to be marked as characters in the production. After this ceremony, they were encouraged to go to the house left side of the space where a giant papered graffiti wall was set up for audience members and performers to collectively write their thoughts on the production. As pictured below, these comments included, but were not limited to: encouragement of performers, thoughts on life, the prophet and the three artifacts: dreams, love and faith.

Photo By: Anna Grossman
As the production officially began, it is from this second stage that the majority of the active participation events took place, from the very first monologue of the production where Narrator asked what the audience wished the Prophet to bring them to the final decision where the Prophet’s very existence was determined by the audience. As often as they were onstage, the Revolutionaries and Villains were also offstage working amidst the audience on this second stage and joining them in performing their response to the show. For example, the Villains, mid-way through, took on the role of hecklers and tried to get other audience members to join them as they argued with characters onstage. The standing section gave the audience a place where they could directly influence and interact with the events and characters onstage, promoting a dialogue between the audience and performers that was *Identity Unknown* more than any of the events onstage alone.

**The Seating Area:**

The seating area provided a safe space for those audience members who did not want to be as directly involved with the performers, but still wished to get a drink and enjoy the show. This group tended not to be involved in as many of the active
audience participation events, but instead chose to stick with forms of participation that they were comfortable with. Although some did not use active participation until the moment of voting, others chose their own form of active participation that wasn’t fully planned in the initial stages of the show, but was beneficial nonetheless. Set up with chairs around tables, several audience members chose this space to talk and hold conversation with each other during the performance. In this section, the audience chose, through their attention, what kind of production they would see that night. For those who wished, they could maintain the traditional audience observer role, witnessing and evaluating the dialogue and music in front of them as they saw fit. Others could watch parts of the show that they enjoyed, and talk amongst themselves either about the production or off-topic conversations if they found the production boring. While in conventional theater, such conversations would be considered rude, in Identity Unknown, they were an integral part of how this portion of the audience participated in the production. They used their attention to inform how they would see and process the production and in that way they maintained control over their experience.

Finding the space for Identity Unknown was just one of the many jobs I had as self-producer of Identity Unknown. Other jobs under this title included finding money for and dealing with the financial needs of the production (many thanks to the College of Fine Arts Dean’s Award for their support), organizing the crew, printing programs and creating the advertising campaign discussed later in this thesis. As I review the work I did as producer of the this production, one of the things I wished I had done
was not take on quite so much during the production. I believe that had I taken on less, the production would have run more smoothly.

On a technical side, choosing a nontraditional theater space did have its challenges. Getting rehearsal time in the space was difficult for this production due to the scheduling requirements of the space, and my own busy schedule. Having worked primarily in a theater space before this project, I underestimated the time I needed to put into working out the differences in the bar and theater space. Scheduling time available for tech weekends and rehearsal time in the space, particularly with technicians, alters drastically when moving to a new space. Due to the restraints on our time in the space, we had only an hour to do a sound check and much of the technical aspects were thrown up and put together at the last minute. While things did come together for the second show, there were some technical difficulties in the first that I feel could have been avoided if I had put more time into the organization of the technical aspects of the space. The sound was the chief among them, as the setup and controls were set for the bands to be emphasized over individual singers or speaking actors. This didn’t work for a more theatrical rock opera and the sound setup was adjusted throughout the first show and for the second. While in a way the roughness of the show fit the energy of the production, I know it could have been smoother if I had taken on less.

That being said, while I would have changed the way I worked in the space, I wouldn’t have chosen another space in Athens to do the production. The space worked extraordinarily well with the message and idea of the show. The atmosphere of the bar
provided a perfect setting for *Identity Unknown*, and the audience we received ended up being a great mix of theater students, bar regulars and rock fans who were curious about how the space was used. There is a certain wildness to doing a theater production in a bar, but there is also a sense of community there that I believe really helped the production. The bar provided a setting that allowed, especially in the eleven o’clock performance, the performers and audience to give it all and just go with the weird theater/rock/improvisation monster that was *Identity Unknown*.

**The Others: The Players of *Identity Unknown***

If in life the Other is a prior existing being that is different from ourselves, in theater, the Other has the potential to manifest itself in the performed character. An encounter with the Other, can take place in theater, but for that to happen there needs to be direct contact with the audience. In the creation of *Identity Unknown*, myself and the cast worked to create characters who were both familiar and alien to the audience and who could confront the audience members to use the power of Levinas’s Other in their interactions with the audience. One of the characters who I felt exemplified this well was the Lover. This is a character type found across the art forms, and one that is quite familiar to the audience. What we did with the Lover in *Identity Unknown* was exaggerate the characteristics of this archetype until the result was something violent and foreign to the audience. At the end of her major solo, the Lover confronts the audience, standing among them and looking each one around her in the eye.
demanding to know what love is. My hope was with this encounter, Levinas’s theories could be exemplified.

It was with these ideas that the cast and I worked on the show. Most of the casting for *Identity Unknown* took place a little past halfway through fall quarter, the two exceptions being Quenna Stewart and Emily Lerer, who were added into the production in the winter. Rehearsals began in winter quarter. Coming into the production, the libretto was divided lyrically among the characters, but much of the book work (the non-sung portion of the script) was done based on ideas and improvisations done in rehearsal. The rehearsal period began with a week long table work session, where I met with the group as a whole and as individuals to discuss the characters and themes of the play. This process began with a listen-through of the music of the production, and my explanation of the plot and my goals for the production along with any initial questions the performers had. In individual meetings, we discussed each character’s specific points of view, their relationship with the audience and other characters and their individual journeys through the production. The next two weeks were devoted to improvisational exercises where the arguments and relationships of the production were explored in more detail as I wrote the book portion of the libretto. From there we blocked the show (mapping out the actors’ movements), worked the scenes and the show began to fall into place in preparation for the performance with the audience.

The following four sections include a reflection on each of the three staged character groups in the production: the Narrator, the Villains, and the Revolutionaries,
as well the Prophet who appears only in the second ending but is talked about a great deal in all manifestations of the play. Each section will examine the function the character played within the framework of *Identity Unknown* along with a description of some of the choices that were made by the cast and I on how the characters interacted with the audience. Each character was built around a specific archetype worked into a framework where they would have to surrender control of themselves and their story to the audience. They would have to not only acknowledge the audience, but confront them, and in their confrontation the play would become a collective creation of both.

**The Narrator:**

**Stats:**

Performed by: *Natalie Flango*

Archetype: *The Master of Ceremonies, The Narrator*

Band Associated With: *The First Street Heat*

Principal Songs: *Welcome to A-Town, Used to Be, Someone to Follow*

Costuming Colors: *Multi-Color*

Costume Piece of Choice: *Top Hat*

Pro or Anti Prophet: *Pro-Prophet*

Primary Form of Audience Participation: *Direct*

*Photo By: Anna Grossman*  

*address and question-Answer*

The journey of the Narrator in *Identity Unknown* is perhaps the most dynamic of the scripted characters of the production. The Narrator begins the play in complete
control of her production. She is the master of ceremonies, controller of her staged domain and provides the Revolutionaries and the Audience with their mission and the setup of the production. In the early stages of the show, she is content to watch and conduct events from the sidelines. As things get more out of control not only the Villains, but the Revolutionaries and Audience begin to turn on her. She enters the fray with “Used to Be” and becomes engaged in a battle with the Villains for control of the play. This control is never returned to her, although the Villains never fully receive it either. Her journey concludes with having to face the fear and possibilities of that loss.

Sophomore Natalie Flango came into her audition with a strong presentational form and even stronger voice for the music that fit the Narrator perfectly. In the early talks of the production, one of the main things that we explored was what exactly was the Narrator’s motivation for bringing forth the Prophet and what it meant to her personally. It was decided early on that the Narrator cannot have any malicious intent nor can she be knowingly manipulating her audience. In the same vein, while she may have noble values, she is not infallible. To the Narrator the Prophet is hope, not necessarily a definite answer to the time of struggle, but a bringer of clarity into the world. The Narrator is not naive enough to think that an absolute utopia can be created, but perhaps people can find a way to coexist in a harmonious way under this Prophet. With the post-apocalyptic setting, we discussed how isolation may have played on the Narrator as well as how these issues and stakes become higher in that environment. To the Narrator the Prophet is hope in a better world that, even if only for this one night, has the chance to manifest itself in full. Whether the Prophet does
appear is up to the audience, and the Villains have their own reasoning against it, but the belief in the goodness of the Prophet remains the core of the Narrator’s character.

So, why a theatrical presentation? Why not some other method of summoning the Prophet? The answer sums up one of the lighter aspect of the Narrator’s personality. She chooses the stage to bring the Prophet forth with style. The Narrator, for all of her philosophies and struggles, is an entertainer and theater lets her bring the Prophet to the stage with as much pizzaz as she can muster. She also believes that this audience can help her best achieve her goal. It is for this reason she sticks with audience participation events that allow her to interact with the audience, but still direct their energy in the way she plans. Her primary forms of audience participation are direct address and question and answer sections where she may get an answer she doesn’t agree with, but overall her show is not compromised. Unlike the Revolutionaries who allow the audience to determine their character and the Villains who tried to become part of the audience to dismantle the show, the Narrator does not, until the very end, allow anyone else more control than they can wrestle from her.

Each of the characters got one item that defined their persona, and for the Narrator that item was her top hat. Of all the characters, she is also the only one who is not assigned a particular color, or color pairing, but who wears and is painted with multiple colors as the center of the staged events. She is the leader and guide. The Narrator creates the show to bring forth a Prophet she feels she knows and can control through a medium which she knows and can control. The journey she faces is the realization of how little of either of these things she can know or do.
The Villains:

Stats:

Performed by: Kaila Benford and Jessica Savitz

Archetype: The Villains

Band Associated With: The She Bears

Principal Songs: Black Mannequins, What Morning Brings

Costuming Colors: Black and White

Costume Piece of Choice: Armored Claw (Jessica), Long Red Nails (Kaila)

Pro or Anti Prophet: Anti-Prophet

Primary Form of Audience Participation: Heckling, Audience Space and one-on-one confrontation

The Villain characters were conceived as both a unified pairing, an evil twin set as it were, but also as separate characters who had complementary differences in traits. They are two sides of the same coin. We began our discussion of character ideas with exploring the archetype of villain and how it has been perceived in popular culture. During this discussion Kaila mentioned that she was drawn to what she viewed as more feminine villains: the evil queens, the seductresses and the thoughtful calculators. In contrast, Jess was drawn more towards what she described as the more masculine, wild and crazy villains such as the Joker from The Dark Knight. These ideas translated into much of their work as we brought the characters to their feet. As we worked with movement styles Kaila used her ideas to create a Villain of slow and
calculating precision, while Jess choose a movement style much more wild, ravenous and destructive. For their single costuming items, they both chose items that modified their hands in some way. Kaila chose long red nails while Jess preferred an armor-based silver claw piece. What interested me about the process I went through with Kaila and Jess was that although Kaila identified her villain as more feminine and Jess as more masculine, their interpretations of the Villains borrowed traits from both genders. For example, Kaila’s Villain had a much lower controlled voice, while Jess’s Villain’s voice was much higher. In the end the Villains were an androgynous pairing drawing from multiple sources, relishing their differences and subversions to the status quo.

The Narrator introduces the Villains into her story to serve as obstacles to the Revolutionaries and Audience on their quest. She trusts the nature of theater enough to know that evil will not conquer good, and that the Villains could serve as an important lesson on faith, love and dreams by showing the audience the wrong way to approach them. The trouble with the Narrator’s plan occurs when the Villains see their adversaries not as the Revolutionaries but the Narrator and the Prophet. In our conversations about the Villains transformation, one idea that came up was that although they rebel against the Narrator the most, the Villains are the most accepting of the role and archetype assigned to them. They perform villainy as opposing the hero’s objective, exactly as the Narrator intends them to. At first, they see the heroes as the Revolutionaries. During the song “What Morning Brings,” this view shifts quickly as they realize that the revolutionaries are mere pawns and the real hero they must
oppose is the Narrator. Although they’ve been in the audience for most of the
production thus far, the Villains now actively try to use the audience to disrupt the
show through heckling or rally type staged events. What the Narrator fails to see, and
the Villains realize, is that by serving as the opposition they can uncover the holes and
problems with the Narrator’s plan and bring it to its destruction.

The Revolutionaries

The Revolutionaries of Identity Unknown serve as the closest thing the
production has to audience avatars. Audience avatars are characters within the plot of
the play that are most closely related to the audience in knowledge and with whom the
audience is meant to sympathize. In the beginning of the production the
Revolutionaries are given their quest by the Narrator alongside of the audience. Like
the audience, they do not take immediate sides in the Narrator vs. Villain struggle, but
remain neutral for most of the production. Of all the characters, they stand up for the
voice of the audience as an autonomous being. While they both use the audience to
achieve their own ends, neither the Narrator or the Villains give the audience the
power that the Revolutionaries do. The Revolutionaries also champion the four main
audience participation events of the production: the three artifact events and the final
vote. Each of these events, with varying effectiveness, sought to involve the audience
in the creation of the performance event onstage. Concerning the conflict between the
Narrator and Villains, the Revolutionaries were pawns, but they did have the power to
allow the audience to have the final decision of the piece.
The challenge with the revolutionaries was finding how they operated both as individuals in the exploration of their artifacts but also as an ensemble. The eventual solution we found was that the trio of Revolutionaries operated as a single unit save for a single song and event that would focus on the individual Revolutionary and the audiences exploration of their theme. Upon having that exploration they become more attached to the audience and, as separate entities from the main Narrator and Villain debate, they realize that it is in the audience, not the characters, where the final decision lies. Like the Villains, the Revolutionaries had their differences, but they all operated as a single unit, taking their archetypes and pushing them to their extremes.
The Revolutionary of Dreams Stats:

Performed by: Quenna Stewart
Archetype: The Dreamer, The Comic Relief
Band Associated With: Earwig
Principal Songs: Glorious and Gloom
Costuming Colors: Blue
Costume Piece of Choice: Blue Silk Shirt
Pro or Anti Prophet: Neutral
Primary Form of Audience Participation: Group

Imaginings (Event of the Artifact of Dreams)

Photo by: Anna Grossman

If any of the six characters could be classified as comic relief it would have to be Quenna Stewart’s Dreamer. In the first version of the production, the Dreamer served as the romantic interest for the Lover whose struggle would extend amidst the whole play. This was dropped as it overcomplicated the play and prevented the Dreamer from exploring her own theme fully. The day we discussed the drop, Quenna came in with an idea that the Dreamer could be the lighter character of the three Revolutionaries, balancing out the emotional Lover and practical minded Faith. The archetype of the dreamer can be one who has their head in the clouds and sees the world in a vibrance that can verge on the manic. Our Dreamer became a star-struck fan who has the ultimate chance to make it on stage tonight by summoning the Prophet. Having earned her artifact early in the play, she was living her dream as a rock star and enjoying every second of it. She was a woman of the people, joking with the
drunks, and being the happy helper of the Narrator. The Dreamer truly believes that
the world is a wondrous place, and while this makes her seem a bit off and unfocused
at times, she is there to remind the Narrator and Villains why they are here.

The Dreamer is in charge of the first audience participation event of the night,
which earns the artifact of dreams. This event was meant as a warm-up event, as the
Villains had yet to come into play to mess things up. During this event, the Dreamer
led the audience through a mental walk-though of a dream that then turns into a
nightmare that they must then overcome. The event took place during the song
“Glorious and Gloom,” which set the scene as a struggle between the beauty of the
world and opportunity versus the crushing nightmare of self-doubt. At the end of the
event the audience overcomes that doubt and is ready to set forth on their quest.

The general idea of this particular event was strong, and fit the character well,
but I wish I had found a way for the audience to be more active participants in the
event. Of the four events, this is the only one where the audience didn’t have to say or
do anything, but were asked to use their focus rather than their voices or bodies to
engage themselves in the production. I think the dream sequence would have been
more effective if I had found a way to allow the audience to collaboratively create the
dream, nightmare and its defeat. I feel the audience wasn’t as engaged with this
particular event, and I think it would have been more effective if they could have been
shouting or reenacting their own ideas and dreams in the structure of the song along
with the performer.
The Revolutionary of Love Stats:

- Performed by: Emily Lerer
- Archetype: The Love Interest
- Band Associated With: Earwig
- Principal Songs: Star Cross’d, Lovesong Cockroach
- Costuming Colors: Red and Black
- Costume Piece of Choice: Red Corset
- Pro or Anti Prophet: Neutral
- Primary Form of Audience Participation: Audience
- Confrontation (Event of the Artifact of Love)

Photo by: Anna Grossman

In early stages of development the Lover was a pair of characters. As the story developed, the love pairing became the Lover and Dreamer and when the Revolutionaries’ characters were simplified, the Lover’s partner became the audience. While the Lover’s romantic partner shifted dramatically over the course of production, the key elements of her character remained constant. The Lover begins her journey as an idealist, celebrating the joy of love. This changes when her event is interrupted by the Villains. She is the first of the revolutionaries to fall under their influence, and her exploration of love then takes a much darker and violent turn. This too, however, leaves the Lover unsatisfied and she leaves the stage and show rejecting the Villains’ and Narrator’s power over her. She only returns with the other Revolutionaries onstage when it becomes clear that it is the audience who must have the power.
Of the many things we discussed while forming this character, gender and love became one of the largest issues. In the first draft of the Lover’s story, her partner was a man. This shifted in the second draft to a fellow woman and in the final version her partner was a spectating audience who wished to see her tackle love for them. In early talks about gender, I gave Emily free range on how she wanted to explore the Lover’s gender. Having had the opportunity to explore masculinity in Zach Kopziak’s thesis project the previous year, Emily said that she wished to explore a more feminine Lover for this work. While the Dreamer and Faith are women, the Lover became the only Revolutionary whose emphasized perceptions of the feminine gender through her costume and actions. She wore a red corset and had hearts and exaggerated feminine make-up as part of her ensemble. As her partner shifted to the audience, the objectification of love, particularly female love and sexuality, became a strong issue in our work. “Lovesong Cockroach” takes that objectification to a violent level as the Lover’s sexy moves are broken up by screaming at the audience and an anger that pervades the piece. Her audience participation event takes place at the conclusion of this piece where she simply asks the audience to define love for her as she has had enough. In the end the Lover is left empty and despite the Narrator’s cover-up, quite possibly does not win her artifact. Love is a risk, and its consequences can be bloody.

The Lover’s event was, of the three artifact events, the strongest in design. The only thing I wish was done differently was a clearer setup for the confrontation. Perhaps putting an audience member onstage and demanding they tell her what love is. The issue with this event is making sure the line between involving and attacking
the audience isn’t crossed. If an audience member is too forcefully attacked they will close off and most participation is lost. In that sense, perhaps choosing a select few volunteers and having them set, during her song, at the base of the stage would have been better. Overall, I was happy with this event, and only would have wished to better clarify the moment and the action the Lover takes in confronting the audience.

The Revolutionary of Faith Stats:

Performed by: Alisha Gamble

Archetype: The Leader, The Devout

Band Associated With: The First Street Heat

Principal Songs: Someone to Follow

Costuming Colors: Green

Costume Piece of Choice: Leather Jacket

Pro or Anti Prophet: Neutral

Primary Form of Audience Participation: Communal

Shot (Event of the Artifact of Faith)

Photo By: Anna Grossman

In our early conversations about the revolutionary of Faith, Alisha and I spent much time discussing the role faith--whether it be faith in a cause--religion or self, plays in creating leaders of new movements. In Identity Unknown, the event of the Artifact of Faith, found the revolutionaries facing the possibility that a Prophet may not arrive onstage. The Revolutionary of Faith was forced to decide whether she still had enough faith to face to finish the Narrator’s work. When speaking in our early
conversations, Alisha noted that her role as revolutionary was a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is very empowering to be given an absolute quest and purpose, but as things begin to fall apart the question arises of whether people are expecting too much from the Prophet and her as its harbinger. In order for the Prophet to be summoned, the revolutionaries need faith in the Narrator, the Prophet and themselves. At the point of the play where Faith has to complete her event, the Narrator has lost much of her influence, the Prophet may be a dark force and she’s left only with herself, a terrifying thought. She completes her event, but her relationship with the Narrator has changed and she puts her faith in the audience instead.

Drawing from religious ceremony and the atmosphere of the space, Faith’s event was a communal shot of water, that the audience could take or refuse. The goal of this event was to draw everyone together before the final vote could take place. This event worked, and based on audience response post-show, was probably the most well-received save for the final vote. That being said, I think having a more definitive action that could have been done with the shot besides refusal would have made a stronger choice. If their was someone or something the shots could be thrown at, perhaps, as a way to physically show their support or rejection of the Narrator in her final event. Based on audience response, Faith could choose whether to drink the shot or douse the Narrator, whose desperation to justify the event could turn to a baptism analogy that would be called out by the Villains. Another, basic thing, I would have changed was to find a more efficient way to hand out the shots and to make sure that there was enough for everyone. Due to the involvement of other actors onstage the
Villains ended up passing out the shots which wasn’t an ideal situation. Do to number of attendees and shots available shots also tended to run out before reaching the entirety of the audience. This is a practical concern, that if I were to do the production again, I would be sure to resolve.

The Prophet Stats:

Performed by: Audience, Director, Cast and Crew

Archetype: The Prophet

Band Associated With: n/a

Principal Songs: Star Cross’d, Where do I Belong

Quote: “I am the Prophet, all hail the Prophet”

The title of identity of Identity Unknown, refers to the identity of the show, the collective identity of the performers and audience and, most tangibly, the identity of the Prophet. Although the Prophet only appears in one of the endings of the show, their presence is felt throughout. The identity of the Prophet is, out of all the characters, shaped most by the dialogue between the performers and audience. Before the start of Identity Unknown the audience has the chance to write their initial thoughts of the Prophet along with those of the performers, on a large papered graffiti wall on the side of the space. When the Prophet is introduced in the opening monologue of the production, it is as a great guide who will bring the audience out of the darkness and bring forth whatever the audience screams out. This included, but was not limited to: peace, beer, hope, life and boobs (this was a bar). While the Narrator has the initial say in establishing the Prophet as a force for good, the audience ultimately determined
what kind of promises the Prophet really made as well as how seriously they wanted to take this Prophet.

The next major shift in the Prophet’s identity happened during the end of the song “What Morning Brings” when the Villains turn on the Narrator and Prophet. From that point on, the play devolves into an argument between the Narrator and Villains on whether the Prophet should even appear. The Villains emphasize the darker and more problematic nature of the Prophet while the Narrator sees its advantage. The Audience then decides which of these arguments wins as they use the artifact slips that they’ve collected over the course of the production to vote on whether the Prophet will appear. If the vote is for the Prophet to not appear, the Prophet is viewed as a hindrance and the audience determines that they can figure out their lives on their own. If the Prophet does appear, the answer gets a bit more complicated. When the Prophet is called forth, at first the Narrator cries out that she has been inspired and is the Prophet. Her claim is then echoed by the Villains, Revolutionaries, the band, the designers and myself the director. At this point, the scripted plan was to turn the attention to the audience but in a true sign of their involvement, the audience had already been screaming and taking possession of the Prophet within themselves by this point. The full cast then performed “Star Cross’d” and invited the audience onstage to join them and perform the song in whatever way they saw fit. The Prophet became a communal spirit of the production that was amplified across the whole group. Not a single entity but a creation of the collective body.
Identity Unknown had two performances and each audience ended up choosing a different ending. The way in which the Prophet worked within the framework of Identity Unknown in both endings I feel was successful. The audience response, particularly at the second show when the Prophet appeared, was phenomenal, and I believe that the show was successful in allowing the audience to make the final decision of the production. The only thing I would change is that I would ensure that all audience members got ballots to vote. The cast did the best they could, but some of the far areas of the space were not reached. That being said, the rough nature of the handout, which allowed for some who wanted to grab more, to grab more and those who wanted to refrain, to refrain, worked in the concept of the play. The audience could decide just how they wanted to vote and I felt the energy of both audiences reflected the choice they ultimately made.

The Music

For Identity Unknown, which at the time was Untitled Rock Opera Production, I wanted to use music from three Athens bands whose styles were different but whose music could work together in a show setting. My initial search included attending concerts at the many music venues of Athens, giving me the probably once-in-a-lifetime excuse of going to bars for schoolwork, and doing research online of local band music and lyrics to see who interested me. From the rock of the Union and Jackie O’s Bar scene to the experimental work of the Aquabear Legion at ArtsWest to the musicians at Browntown to the heavy metal music of the Morgue Athens, Ohio has an amazing and diverse musical community. My initial list contained ten bands that
ranged from acoustic groups to heavy metal to funk; but as my thesis subject became more apparent, three bands’ music stood out among the rest.

**Band Profile: Earwig**

Members: *Lizard McGee, Costa Houdroulis and George Houdroulis*

Genre: *Rock*

Group Associated with: *Revolutionaries*

Songs Used: *Glorious and Gloom, Star Cross’d and Lovesong Cockroach*

The first band selected was Earwig, a high energy alternative rock band, whose album *Gibson Under Mountain* contained several songs perfect for *Identity Unknown*, the first being “Glorious and Gloom.” I loved the contrast between its slower more melancholy bridge and the uptempo defiant energy of the chorus. With its lines “I can’t see a way around this glorious and gloom, maybe this is what makes you so beautiful,” “Glorious and Gloom” spoke to me theatrically as both a possible “I want” song (the song in musical theater where a protagonist reveals to the audience what their goals for the show are) as well as a character study piece.

When I spoke to Lizard, the guitarist of the group, about his process in creating the album, the main thing he emphasized was the focus on dreams and nightmares in *Gibson Under Mountain*. The songs fluctuate from fantastical to nightmarish and even the love songs of this album rest in a place between these two worlds. When I spoke to him about his music being used for the Lovers, and about
how I viewed their changing relationship he suggested the violent “Lovesong Cockroach” to serve as a more darker turn for their journey in contrast to “Glorious and Gloom” which was originally the establishing song of the Lovers relationship. As the nature of the Lovers changed, I kept Lizard’s comments on the dreamlike nature of the album in mind as I crafted the Dreamer and Lover. “Glorious and Gloom” although written as a love song, turned into an exploration between the nightmarish yet tantalizing world of the dream and the fear and promise of reality. “Lovesong Cockroach” became the violent nightmare of the Lover. With the addition of “Star Cross’d” the character exploration of the Lover and Dreamer began to fall into place.

Band Profile: She Bears

Members: Stephen Zefpha Pence, Alex Douglas, Caitlin McGlade, Ryan Franz and Alex Eiler

Genre: Alternative/Melodramatic Popular Song

Group Associated with: The Villains

Songs Used: Black Mannequins, What Morning Brings, Misery of Sainthood

Image From: Elm Records

The She Bears music is probably best classified as alternative indie rock, but that does little to describe the fluctuating melodies, driving drums and laid back lyrics and vocals that the band contains. The She Bears were the critical yet apathetic voice of the Villains in Identity Unknown. “Black Mannequins” was the first song selected for its critical introduction and dark fast chorus that would serve as the entrance of the Villains in the piece. Sitting down with several of the members of the band it was this
song I was most perplexed by and I asked them about it after pitching them the Villains of the show. The response I got was that “Black Mannequins” is not a song with a definite meaning but viscerally represents a many things. I carried this over to Identity Unknown. A definite meaning for the lyrics was not emphasized, rather the tactile nature of the lyrics and the music served as an almost Artaudian device for the Villains to inflict their wrath. “Black Mannequins” became a visceral attack on the audience. “What Morning Brings” evoked the fear of the “screaming in the night” amidst bleeding fingers and apathetic attitudes to provoke the revolutionaries. “Misery of Sainthood” was performed by both the Villains and the Narrator and the music prompted an almost regal setting against the cruelty of the vocals used as they critiqued “St. Jude.” She Bear’s music was the Villain’s weapon. It gave them their sharpness and power through which they could manipulate the events onstage.

Band Profile: The First Street Heat

Members: Zach Pontzer, Chris Mack, Dave Young, Joe Argiro, Jack Gould, Nick Weckman, Zach Pontzer, Ben Kain, Eden Lee and Eric Turner

Genre: Funk/ Hip Hop/ Pop

Group Associated with: The Narrator and Revolutionaries

Songs Used: Welcome to A-Town, Used to Be, Someone to Follow, Album Artwork by: Lena Goodnough and Sam Williams

Where do I Belong?

The First Street Heat was a student run band that drew from the genres of pop, funk, hip hop and soul to create their own unique flavor of music. In early drafts of the piece, the First Street Heat was the voice of the Revolutionaries but as the
Revolutionaries’ and Lover’s stories combined in the narrative, the music of First Street Heat became less associated with the Revolutionaries and more with the Narrator. One idea that made up the core of their most recent album was the search to find out a place is in the world. “Where do I Belong,” “Someone to Follow” and “Used to Be” all carry a sense of uncertainty about the world and a desire to explore it further. This, in many ways, is the goal of the Narrator in bringing forth the Prophet. The world is uncertain and our place within it at times can seem even more so. Part of the appeal of the Prophet is that they are a figure that can amend some of that uncertainty.

Reflection

Looking back on the song selection of Identity Unknown, I don’t think that I would have changed any of the pieces or bands that I worked with. I do wish I had been able to spend more time with each of the bands to have their opinions as the stories of their groups were formed. I did my best to remain true to the overall message and theme of each group’s album, but I would have liked to have put aside more time, particularly during the rehearsal process, to work with the bands and cast together as the plot changed and developed. Time was limited, however, on both sides, but it is definitely something I would put more time aside for if I were to do a future project in a similar vein.
The Story and Script

A rough outline of the story began to develop during the band selection process. I knew from the beginning that there would be a Narrator character whose story of Revolutionaries seeking the ultimate truth would be torn apart by a group of Villains. In the original story, the audience participation element as well as the Prophet was absent, and the focus was more on the journey of the Revolutionaries rather than the struggle of the Narrator and Villains. There were also two side stories amidst the revolutionaries: one of a pair the lovers and another of the leader of the revolutionaries finding and accepting their role in their quest. These plot lines were later cut for clarity as it became clear the real focus needed to be between the Narrator and Villains.

As my thesis grew closer I began to reassess what it was in particular that drew me to this project, and found myself reflecting, oddly enough, on Stephen Schwartz’s Pippin. This is a musical with whom I have a strong love/hate relationship. Pippin tells the story of a young man, the title character, who under the guidance of the Leading Player explores the various meanings of life (war, revolution, sex, love, etc.) in his quest to find out where he belongs. What I love about Pippin is the questionable moral nature of its narrator and its exploration, through music, of different ‘meanings of life.’ What I hate about the production is the ending where Pippin succeeds in finding the meaning of life in Catherine and her son. I feel like the audience is preached to and don’t have the chance to be part of the discussion at all. As I prepared for my thesis production I took the things I love about Pippin and worked them into my framework to make them my own. I also took my major problem with Pippin, the
audience’s lack of voice, and made it the center piece of my thesis and production. While in *Pippin* the final decision and message was given to the audience by the performers, in my production the final decision and message would be almost completely decided by the audience.

To achieve this, the final setup of the rock opera was as follows: In the beginning of the production the Narrator announces that the world has ended but that hope remains in a Prophet that will reveal the meaning of life as well as bring other things recommended by the audience. What I liked about the use of a prophet as the end goal was that it gave a representation to the “meaning of life” without it having to be a solid object or person. Prophet as a term is recognizable but it can also take many forms. In order for the prophet to appear the audience needed to work to earn three artifacts from events they completed with each of the Revolutionaries. The themes of those events were drawn from the music of Earwig and First Street Heat and three revolutionaries were decided upon: the Revolutionary of Dreams, The Revolutionary of Love and the Revolutionary of Faith. After the first artifact was earned, the Villains are introduced and they serve to challenge the Narrator, audience and idea of prophet in the story. At the very end of the piece the audience votes, and based on the results, the prophet does or does not appear.

Once the story and music had been decided, the next step was to create the script. One thing unique to this particular process, was that I didn’t come into to rehearsals with a finished script but rather the ten songs of the show, divided lyrically amongst the cast and an outline of what happened throughout the production. The
dialogue from the show, along with the details of the three participatory events of the production, was drawn and adapted from improvisations and exercises done in the rehearsal room. As this was a rock opera, I did not want tons of dialogue, and wanted the focus to be first on the songs as storytelling devices, with the dialogue built off of them only when needed. Although I had some experience working in this format before, with movement improvisation with Eric Brakey’s Orpheus at Ohio University (2010), working with the text-argumentative style of this piece in that format was new for me. One of the big challenges in this process was finding improvisational activities that worked to excite and encourage the cast. I used a combination of movement exercises, spoken work exercises and combo-exercises, with varying results. For this production the exercises that ended up being the most successful were ones that combined movements and spoken word, as the movement exercises didn’t quite fit the mood of the piece and the spoken word exercises alone often didn’t energize the actors enough. The more specificity I could give the actors in their prompt, the better they would do as well. One particularly good exercise was a mock-debate setup we had one day, where we divided the cast into half to argue for or against the Prophet. It started off slow, but the moment Jess Savitz broke out of her chair and started yelling and dancing, we had a match. Many of the arguments in the final scene of the show were taken from that specific activity.

That being said, in the future works I plan on coming in to rehearsal with at least a preliminary script beyond a detailed outline. This process served this production, but it would have been a less stressful process had the script been more
detailed initially and then been edited as the process continued. As I was experimenting with the activities to see what worked, I also spent much more time figuring out the play with the cast than was needed. It was great to have the workshop environment and talks with the cast, but I think this process could have worked in a more workshop environment, which this ultimately was not. While the script did come together, it was added stress and work when I already was doing a lot. That being said the conversations and development that was done in this process was useful and contributed a great amount to the final script.

It is also at this time that I would like to discuss one of the main jobs I had as Director/Producer/Librettist, and that was managing my team. One of the rougher discoveries I had over this period is that if I am not careful, I have the tendency to allow people to take advantage of me. I feel one of my strengths as a leader is that I am a great listener and I do my best to make sure that everyone gets the most out of the production and experience. As I learned during this production, not everyone can be pleased all the time and sometimes I have to say no. I also feel that I did not put enough time into checking up on my out-of-rehearsal design team, their needs and where they were in the process. The result was that certain groups were behind, and certain aspects of the show were not accomplished. I think this relates again to the common theme coming up across this review, I took on too much alone with this production. I assumed people were certain places with their work and that things, such as the set, would be done, and without that checkup time with specific deadlines worked out, these things didn’t happen. This was frustrating, but it was also a great
eye-opener for me. I believe that the fault lies just as much with me in these cases, as I was not a bigger presence in this process. Despite these challenges, however, the show did come together. A strength I found amidst this chaos is that as crazy as things get, I’m able to have a positive, “okay what can we do to fix this” attitude that helped tremendously during this production. This was one of the most challenging aspects of the production for me, but I feel I know how to be a much better leader for future projects that I work on because of this.

**The Advertising Campaign**

My goal for the advertising campaign of *Identity Unknown* was to get the word out about the production and prep the audience for the participatory nature of the show at hand. Although the show was advertised in the form of a written e-mail campaign as well as using Facebook events, the main source of advertisements were posters that were hung around Athens and Ohio University. The posters came in four different designs, though all featured the same information and tag line “Choose your side” that foreshadowed the audience’s ultimate decision. The first three designs featured individual pictures of the main groups of the show, the Narrator, the Revolutionaries and the Villains, along with their character groupings listed prominently. The fourth design featured all three groups, though they were kept separated, and urged the audience to think and choose what group they would eventually side with. The result were a set of advertisements that gave the audience a preliminary look at the
characters and encouraged thought on how they would potentially feel and participate in the performance.

I was quite happy with the design of the advertisements and they did their job exceedingly well. Both performances had ample audiences that included not only theater majors but bar patrons and Athens music fans. If I had more time, I would have liked to explore the possibilities of a more viral advertising campaign and the ways that may have begun the audience participation before even the day of the show. It is a field that many interactive theaters, such as the Mission Business in Toronto with its online to theater crossover ZED.TO, are exploring more. However given my time, I feel that the campaign I chose was effective for Identity Unknown.
Conclusion

Audience participation may seem at times like a theatrical choice, but it is an intrinsic part of the theatrical experience. The only question that remains, is how a production uses it. My goal for this thesis was to explore the many ways audience participation, both in its passive and active forms, is in play in modern theater and to then create a rock opera piece that highlights active audience participation in order to make the audience a character in the events of the play. I believe that in this goal, the production was a success. I can say with certainty that it will be a long while before I chose to do all three jobs of producer, director, and writer of a show of this scope again. While the creative process was rewarding, the stress levels that went into it were not and there were several things I feel I would have had a much better handle on, had I taken on less and had more time. Still, the audience response was amazing in the production. Despite the technical mishaps and things I would have improved upon, I believe that this show not only provided an example of how musical theater can use audience participation, but also an example of how that participation can be readily embraced by an audience.

My production is not alone in proving that fact. *Sleep No More*, the Punchdrunk Theatre’s audience-participatory *Macbeth*, moved from London to Boston to New York, where it was granted an extended run due to its popularity. *Fela* was nominated for a Tony award the year of its run on Broadway. Brechtian techniques found a rock-and-roll resurgence with *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson!*, which did so
well in its off-Broadway run that it was moved to Broadway, where, unfortunately, it
tanked. These productions all began as exceptions to the rule of traditional passive
audience participation, and yet are proving that there is an audience for something new
and different. Experimental Theater methods can be very popular with modern
audiences alongside more conventional ones. After all, our conventional theater of
today, was at one time experimental too. The battle is not won, and it is crucial that
productions continue to challenge the traditional molds of theater.

I do not believe that either active or passive participation is a superior or
inferior method. What I do believe is that if these methods are not explored and
challenged in new ways, theater will loose one of its most valued assets. Audience
participation is here to stay. The only question is, how will it be used next?
Works Cited


PHOTO DOCUMENTATION:

Group Advertisement for the Production (Designed by Anna Grossman)

Photo of Portion of the Graffiti Wall (Photo by Anna Grossman)
Revolutionary Advertisement (Designed by Anna Grossman)

The Dreamer played by Quenna Stewart (Photo by Cody Vandenberg)
The Lover played by Emily Lerer (Photo by Cody Vandenberg)
The Villains played by Jessica Savitz (Top) and Kaila Benford (Bottom) (Photos Clockwise by: Anna Grossman, Cody Vandenberg and Anna Grossman)
Choose Your Side: The Narra-tor

Identity Unknown: The Black Opera

February 29th
8 and 11 PM
Union Bar

The Narrator played by Natalie Flango (Photos Clockwise by: Anna Grossman, Cody Vandenberg and Cody Vandenberg)
Identity Unknown: A Rock Opera
Music By: Earwig, The First Street Heat and She Bears
Book By: Anna Grossman

Special Thanks: The Honors Tutorial College, College of Fine Arts Dean’s Undergraduate Creative Research Fund, Brian Evans, Dr. William Condee, David Haugen, Amanda Vecchiarelli, Hannah Leigh Van Brunt, Rachel Collins, Scott Winland and Blackout Booking
NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen the world has ended!

But Ladies and Gentlemen, this is just the beginning!

Tonight, we have serious business to attend to. Because tonight, in this theater we will be calling forth a prophet who will bring us out of the darkness and into the light. A prophet who will show us the meaning of life! Yes Ladies and Gentlemen! The prophet who is going to...what? you there! (Go to three people. ex: “Solace...that’s boring.”)

All of this and more is in tonight’s production of Identity Unknown: The Rock Opera!

(Music Begins)

Ladies and Gentlemen tonight’s act begins with a story. A story of three revolutionaries, who though they do not know it yet, are destined for greatness. Tonight, they will leave their ordinary lives and become something extraordinary. They will serve as our guides and our leaders on our quest.

Ladies and Gentlemen I present to you......the Revolutionary of Faith!

FAITH:
When I was growing up just a little kid
Well I was living in
and just believe’n in
The times are hard the streets are mean
I found the bad
The trials are sad
The pains are mad
but they can’t be read

NARRATOR:
The Lover!

LOVER:
I need to leave
get on a bus
find a train
I’ve had enough
with my job
I’m on the road
The Dreamer!

I’m just a lonely Dreamer in the city
Just a lonely Dreamer on the run
Just a lonely Dreamer with a pretty picture of my face under the sun

We’ve got to keep Athens funky
From the morning to the night you know
We’ve got to keep Athens funky

Welcome to A-Town
Where we are now lifting off the ground
It’s getting down to the sound

It’s a mecca of the human race
until we get to outer space

and make Athens do on the moon!

In order to summon the Prophet we are going to need three artifacts that must be won by each of you over the course of tonight. You will not be alone. The audience before you will be there to assist you on your journey and together you will earn and explore the meanings behind each of the Prophet’s artifacts:

The Artifact of Dreams

Dreams are electrifying.
The Artifact of Love

LOVER:
Love is terrifying

And the Artifact of Faith.

FAITH:
Faith is constant.

NARRATOR:
Ladies and gentlemen, as each revolutionary faces their task to earn their artifact, you will be given a chance to help them win their prize. Together we will gain the artifacts and before the night is out a Prophet will be formed and our new age will begin! Sing it with me!

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky

We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
We’ve got to keep Athens Funky
NARRATOR:
Welcome to A-Town it’s the best town
for the showdown
Everybody put your hands up in the air

ALL FOUR:
Welcome to A-Town it’s the best town
for the showdown
Let your funk fly
And take it to the sky
We’re all excited your invited
Take the ride on
this nasty funk machine
And it’s out of control...

We’ve got to keep Athens funky
From the morning to the night you know
We’ve got to keep Athens funky

We’ve got to keep Athens funky
From the morning to the night you know
We’ve got to keep Athens funky

NARRATOR:
Every great quest begins as a dream. An idea, a spark of thought.

DREAMER:
The issue is not dreaming but making those dreams into a reality.

NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen the Artifact of Dreams.

DREAMER:
Look at my eyes, I can’t stay awake
I see these things but they are not real
Hold me closer now, it’s where I want to be
All my senses are going fast
Is this the sign of a wasted life?
Well, it might be time to say goodnight
These days are kissing and bitchin’ spent and now there’s a sense that it’s closing in
Yeah it’s closing in
I’m giving up, I’m not ready yet
If there’s a sweetness inside I might never find what might be mine
DREAMER:
I feel everyone is poison
On the lips and under, just to get to you

LOVER and FAITH:
You think that everyone is poison
On the lips and under, just to get to you

DREAMER:
I can’t see a way around this Glorious and Gloom
Maybe this is what makes it so beautiful

NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen if you will please close your eyes.

DREAMER:
You’re standing in the center of a room. It’s big and white and you have this sensation. It’s like a tingling buzz. It starts at your fingertips and toes and you feel electric sparks dancing on your skin. The sensation moves up your arms and legs as the sparks grow stronger, not painful, though your can feel the currents run along your skin. As the sensation moves through your shoulders and hips you feel the power moving into your muscles, coursing through your veins. When it reaches your center it starts moving in an arc away from your body. Reaching out past yourself to the far wall of the room. The sparks power grow and in 3....2....1 like a bolt of lighting the room is illuminated and then as quickly as it came it goes. The sparks, the room the sensation.

It’s time to wake up. You’re falling through an ocean. In the few flickers of light you see you feel your body like its ten thousand pounds and its dragging you down as you suffocate beneath the surface. And you wonder what’s the point? Why even struggle?

DREAMER:
You make me want to sing, waking up screaming
Sad and so alone

DREAMER:
If you relax if you just give in the panic subsides but you’re still trapped the bars and for a split second you wonder if you will ever wake up.

NARRATOR:
But you do. You take a deep breath and your eyes fly open and you’re back.

DREAMER:
For a split second you process the world. It’s sometimes terrifying, sometimes beautiful, sometimes utterly confusing, but in that split second everything is new anything is possible
DREAMER:
I can't see a way around this Glorious and Gloom
Maybe this is what makes you so beautiful

LOVER and FAITH:
You make me want to sing waking up
Screaming, Sad and so alone.

ALL:
Now these days are kissing and bitchin’, Glorious & Gloom

NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen, by traveling together through the dream, we have taken the first step in achieving our goal! Ladies and gentlemen, the second artifact!

(She presents the artifact and audience members with the sign on their forehead receive their artifact, a printed dream catcher)
Now those of you feeling left out as the artifacts are being passed out, never fear, your time is still to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen! That was easy. Too easy. But never fear, things are about to get a bit more interesting.

Every great story needs a great villain. And to make it tonight interesting we shall have two. Birthed from destruction and chaos
(music begins)
they have but one goal in mind, and that is to destroy the prophet and us in their wake!

VILLAINS:
We’re not sure when it all first happened

VILLAIN 1:
These sensitive ones who came to wish me the best

VILLAIN 2:
Well I guess that it’s right, but I can’t still can’t get it
VILLAIN 2:
And we’ll dress Black Manniquins
All these fake women
To mimic

BOTH:
And they’ll trade sensible wear
for something that shows more skin

VILLAIN 1:
And Smoke thin cigarettes with each wheezing drag

VILLAIN 2:
With each wheezing breath become a little bit less of a catch

BOTH:
Do you ever think we’d live to regret all of this?
Do you ever think we’d be the kind to need dozens of mirrors?
Just so we’d have something to project our vanity on.

NARRATOR:
Let’s hear it for the Villains!

Now, ladies and gentlemen, let’s talk about love. Love, that beautiful, terrifying thing.
Love comes in many forms, and each carries its own complexities.

LOVER:
Love is a risk.

NARRATOR:
But one that must be confronted. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Artifact of Love

LOVER
On the day the earth stood still
There was a shot heard around the world
It was supposed to send a message to me

(Without warning, the music changes)

VILLAIN 2:
What was that?

BOTH:
Screaming in the night?
VILLAIN 1: What was that?

Screaming in the night?

Well your fingers bleed and it’s no surprise

that you don’t seem to think

that you can get this right

Begging for something to change

To make those nightmares go away

But if you just believe

I would be happy to say And when you figure out How to shed our doubt Finally swallow your pride

Love.

Bleghh!

VILLAIN 2: My feelings exactly. My dears, why on earth would you want to trouble yourself with such a diversion.

VILLAIN 1:

BOTH:

VILLAIN 2:
LOVER: Love is terrifying.

VILLAIN 2: Right....

LOVER: But it must be confronted.

DREAMER: To summon the Prophet

VILLAIN 2: A prophet?

VILLAIN 1: Pathetic.

VILLAIN 2: Now why would you want to a thing like that?

FAITH: To bring us out of the darkness and into the light

Pathetic.

VILLAIN 2: Dearie, if you think that Prophet’s going to do that for you, you’ve got to look at the bigger picture.

VILLAIN 1: But where was the hope

BOTH: you so desperately need

VILLAIN 1: Struggling to be free

BOTH: So you can finally breathe
VILLAIN 2:
When the weight of the world gets you down

BOTH:
You can seek comfort in the sound
Of the rooster crow
Of the morning light
Where maiden’s spoke
Where darkness hides

VILLAIN 1:
Ladies and Gentlemen....

VILLAIN 2:
……the world has ended.....

VILLAIN 1:
...but ladies and gentlemen....

VILLAIN 2:
….this is just the beginning.

VILLAIN 1:
Because tonight in this theatre....

VILLAIN 2
We are going to stop the revolutionaries from gaining their artifacts.

VILLAIN 1:
We are going to stop a prophet from appearing.

VILLAIN 2:
And we are going to stop you.

VILLAIN 1:
And your petty little show.

VILLAIN 2:
Because we don’t need your Prophet and what ever message you..

VILLAIN 1:
Ahem.
VILLAIN 2:

I mean it brings.

BOTH:

Wake up my eyes
I want to see
the beauty of the sunrise
Make me forget about the past
Make me not dread trials that future brings

Cause I want to know how far you will go
Without base human needs

VILLAIN 2:

Join with us tonight...

VILLAIN 1:

Ladies and Gentlemen

VILLAIN 2

We do not offer you a prophet, but a much more interesting ride.

NARRATOR:

Have you ever lived on a memory
Your mind will make you think some things its not
I fear loneliness deep inside of me
I can’t settle down I need more than I got

You brought each other down
When you should have helped each other out
I couldn’t keep it straight
I’m always looking all around

When you visit, nobody’s sure what wrong what’s too far
If you thought it mattered
It would have made it very hard

Lay me down every night.
Til the color comes back to the sky.

It seems the love we tied
made us think of the more we tried
you needed air to breath
not these painful memories
NARRATOR (CONT.):
I tried to make it work
Through the love had left our world
I didn’t mean to waste your time

Oh-

Yeah- Yeah-

Run away do whatever will help
You bear in silence your friend is some other boy
Keep my memory if it pains you
It’s only fair
The air we breath is a poison
Hang up the phone
For what you’ve been waiting for
Freedom shows you whose to lonely
Then it all becomes so clear

You made me see how I used, I used to be
I dove in the pool but never learned to swim
I told you I’d give it up
Never again do what
I’m focusing on all of these all of these pieces

It seems the love we tied
made us think of the more we tried
we needed air to breath
not these painful memories

I tried to make it work
Through the love had left our world
I didn’t mean to waste your

(LOVER approaches the stage and rejoins the
Narrator)
I didn’t mean to waste your

LOVER:

Love is terrifying.

NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen, the second artifact.
LOVER:
Now there’s something that I’d like to tell you, then maybe you’ll go away
I’m a sucker for dead meat and pheromones and anything you throw away
Yeah, nothing here goes to waste

I don’t want you tell me you love me
I just want you leave me alone
I don’t need you to tell me that you want me,
I really just want to fuck and go home

Now there’s something that I’ve got to tell you, then maybe you’ll go away
Eventually something feeds on the body,
the longer that you let it lay

Yeah, nothing here goes to waste
Breed. Hiss. Decay

I don’t want you tell me you love me,
I just want you leave me alone
I don’t need you to tell me that you want me,
I really just want to fuck and go home

NARRATOR:
Love is a risk but one that must be confronted.

LOVER:
(Goes to each audience member (lovers), makes eye contact and utters the phrase. If they respond she can respond with her own feelings of the encounter or stay silent and take it in. If not the moment is gone. Upon completion FAITH and DREAMER hand the audience member their artifact.)

Love is....

NARRATOR:
Love can be beautiful, love can be torture, love is wonderous and.....I don’t know.
(Pauses for a minute loosing train of thought, sudden shift, reclaiming the situation)
But by confronting it we have gained the second Artifact. Ladies and Gentlemen, The Artifact of love!!

LOVER:
I’m done.
NARRATOR: Yes, the second artifact is won! Congratulations!

LOVER: No, I’m done with this.

(She exits the bar)

NARRATOR: (To the Dreamer)

Find her, and bring her back.

DREAMER: Got it.

NARRATOR: Nothing to be concerned about, Ladies and Gentlemen, because we have now reached the third Artifact, the Artifact of Faith, which is a journey that often begins alone.

FAITH: Faith is hope, faith is trust that there is something better, brighter in the world and that you believe that something …..I don’t think I can do this.

NARRATOR: Come on!

FAITH: I’m not so sure I want to do this.

VILLAIN 1: That’s it! Give into your darkside.

VILLAIN 2: Why don’t you sing another little solo and we’ll come back with a more interesting thing for you.

FAITH: No, no. Just give me a moment...

VILLAIN 1: Fine, we’ll think of something else then.
FAITH:
The sun it made a shadow
When we had to say goodbye
I don’t know what we have now
I can’t believe the things we left behind

Help me someone
I heard nothing

FAITH and NARRATOR:
I need someone to follow

FAITH:
show me proof that you mean something

BOTH:
that your promises end hollow

NARRATOR
Don’t beg one day, boy get up off your knees
Do me right
Quit whining baby please

oooo

Don’t beg one day boy get up off your knees
Get up off your knees

oooo

Do me right
Quit whining baby please

(the LOVER and DREAMER re-enter the space. The Narrator spots them)

NARRATOR:
We all come from different backgrounds and beliefs, but we have all gathered here in the hopes that tonight something will happen. Perhaps a prophet will appear, perhaps the villains will destroy me, perhaps that pretty girl or cute guy you’ve been hitting on all night will realize you’re the one over a couple beers, whatever it is we are here tonight to make a little sense of the world and find a change.
VILLAIN 1:
Good lord, are you going to talk forever?

NARRATOR
I offer you now a drink of community. To remind of us of our shared goal and our faith in this production.

(The VILLAINS RUN TO THE STAGE AND DUMP KOOL-AID in the drinks)

VILLAIN 1:
Don’t drink the Kool-Aid!

VILLAIN 2:
I wouldn’t advise it.

NARRATOR:
Well the Vodka shots are now out of the question thanks to you two! Luckily I have some water that will make do. We will not be defeated so easily!

(She hands over a shot to FAITH, who contemplates it as the others move towards the stage.)

FAITH:
All things being equal
we could have stayed the same
not hoping for a sequel
Will I hang around forever
Cannot wait

Help me someone
I heard nothing

I need someone to follow

BOTH:

FAITH:
show me proof that you mean something

BOTH:
that your promises end hollow
NARRATOR:
Don’t beg one day, boy get up off your knees
Do me right
Quit whining baby please

oooo

Don’t beg one day boy get up off your knees

oooo

Do me right
Quit whining baby please

(The LOVER and DREAMER join FAITH on the stage and draw her back into the corner and start talking)

NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen, we are together and back on track again! There have been challenges, but with this third artifact we emerge victorious at last!

VILLAIN 1:
Hold up one second!

NARRATOR:
Our journey has reached its end and with these three artifacts....

VILLAIN 2:
She said hold up!

NARRATOR:
With these three artifacts we will now call forth a prophet who.....

BOTH:
QUIET!!!!

NARRATOR:
Yes?

VILLAIN 2:
You cheated.

NARRATOR:
I’m sorry, what?
VILLAIN 2:
You cheated. The second artifact....

VILLAIN 1:
... should have been ours. We turned the Lover to our side.

NARRATOR:
But the Lover still confronted the issue of love, therefore Artifact won.

VILLAIN 2:
What about Faith? You’re telling me everyone drank the kool-aid?

It was water.

VILLAIN 1:
Same difference.  
(If possible she finds an audience member that did not drink it)  
See? Not a victory.

NARRATOR:
But the Revolutionary of Faith....

VILLAIN 2:
This show, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a set-up. No matter what we did, we couldn’t win.

NARRATOR:
Of course. You’re the Villains. Villains can’t win.

VILLAIN 1:
That’s not fair.

NARRATOR:
This is my show, it doesn’t have to be fair.

FAITH:
But it’s not your show.

NARRATOR:
I’m sorry, what?
LOVER:
We’ve been thinking about it and it’s not just your show.
(She looks out at the audience)
It’s theirs.

NARRATOR:
I mean, of course in part.

DREAMER:
They are the ones who are most influenced if this prophet does appear.

NARRATOR:
They were promised a prophet, they’re going to get a prophet.

VILLAIN 1:
What if they don’t want your prophet?

LOVER:
Alright, this is how this is going to work. The audience will decide whether the prophet appears tonight.

FAITH:
Each of you has an artifact, that is your voting ballot.

DREAMER:
Those who wish for the prophet to appear tonight can put their artifacts here.

LOVER:
Those who don’t want the prophet to appear can place their artifacts here.

FAITH:
In the interest of making an informed decision each of you will have one last chance to sway our audience. Whichever side receives the most votes, their ending will occur. Agreed.

VILLAIN 1:
Everyone loves a good Villain. Agreed.

NARRATOR:
But the Villains never win. Agreed.

DREAMER:
We’ll begin with the Narrator. Your argument begins now.
NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen I don’t know you. I don’t know your personal baggage or where you come from. But I know that some of you have got to be tired. So tired of not knowing what the fuck we’re doing.

People need direction. People need someone to believe in. Something to believe in. We cannot be complacent, continue doing nothing, and continue living within ourselves.

(Natalie moves into the audience and begins talking to people)

VILLAINS:
saint jude,
what should we do.
you're withered and wrought.
from the things we do to you.

do you answer our prayers.
or do they fall on deaf ears.
because you've been dead for years.

VILLAIN 1:
Look I just got up on the stage! Did anyone tell me to get on the stage? No I just got up. Think on that!

I just knocked over that chair! Did I have some prophet telling me to knock over that chair? I don’t think so!
Nothing told me to that but my gut!

VILLAIN 2:
Hi, how are you doing? I’m meeting people.

Get up here

VILLAIN 1:

VILLAINS:
so they gathered around.
this broken man.
and called his name.
but all he said was.
NARRATOR AND VILLAINS:

prepare yourself.
for the great maneuver and sway.

prepare (prepare) every last one.
for the great maneuver and sway.

NARRATOR:

What the theatre gives us is the chance to address these larger issues to try to make sense of them.

VILLAIN 2:

So let’s look over at our options. Side number one. Prophet.....kind of boring over here trying to make sense of the world. Side #2, no prophet (Screams like a crazy person). That mess seems a lot more interesting. Which side do you want me to go to?

NARRATOR:

so let's burn that effigy.
because soon you'll be twenty-three.
but i couldn't stand to see you die.

oh, don't ask me why.

(They turn now to the audience members who the Revolutionaries have pulled aside who are casting their votes)

VILLAIN:

You sir? Why no prophet?

(Answer is given)

THAT IS AN AWESOME ANSWER!

NARRATOR:

You sir why vote for the prophet?

A very respectable response.

(This continues to another audience member, with Villain and Narrator responses getting more out of control)
NARRATOR:
Ladies and gentlemen. What I wanted was to try to make a little more sense out of this world. I wanted to bring a little more light onto this collective human condition. Is that so horrible?

FAITH:
Your words never came out right.
though you could always write them down just fine.
and you spoke to me without relief.

VILLAIN 2:
When you look at us, what do you see?

VILLAIN 1:
We are your Villains...

VILLAIN 2:
Your hypocrites....

VILLAIN 1:
Your monsters.....

VILLAIN 2:
We serve a very clear purpose...

VILLAIN 1:
we teach a lesson.

VILLAIN 2:
But what if the lesson turns out to be wrong?

VILLAIN 1:
What if this time we’re not the Villains? The prophet is the dark force, trying to make sense of something, which at its root, has no sense at all.

VILLAIN 2:
What if we are the heroes?

FAITH:
now the sounds spins around.
up in to the rafters.
and comes crashing down.
at our feet
ALTERNATE ENDING #1:

NARRATOR:
And now ladies and gentlemen, the moment you’ve all been waiting for. With these three artifacts, the artifact of dreams, of love and of faith, we now call forth a Prophet. A Prophet who will guide us and show us the way forward. Gods of the theatre show us the way, fill us with your spirits and bring forth your chosen one.

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot believe it, but it must be said. I feel the inspiration, ladies and gentlemen, the prophet is me! All Hail the Prophet! Yes, myself, and after all we’ve endured today I must say that my message is that we continue to fight onwards, not just as individuals but together, we must listen and work together to.....

VILLAIN 1:
(interrupting)
No, no no! Wait Wait!

VILLAIN 2:
I feel the inspiration, it’s not you, it’s us!

VILLAIN 1:
We are the heroes! I knew it!

VILLAIN 2:
We have encouraged a deeper exploration and challenged the status quo! We are the Prophets! All Hail the Prophets!

FAITH:
No I’m the Prophet, I know it now! I explored those issues, not you, All Hail the Proph....

LOVER:
I’m the Prophet! That’s what I was meant to do! I know it now! All Hail..

DREAMER:
It’s me! It’s me! All Hail.....

BAND MEMBER:
Well it’s our music so I’d say we’re the.....

DESIGNERS:
(the lights flicker)
See that? I’m the Prophet, All Hail....
JA VIER:
I’m spartacus! I mean the Prophet!

ANNA:
This was my thesis, so I would have to say that by definition, I am the Prophet. All Hail....

LOVER:
Wait a minute, I found the Prophet, It’s this gentlemen here!

ALL:
All Hail the Prophet!

FAITH:
This woman here is in fact the Prophet!

ALL:
All Hail the Prophet!

NARRATOR:
Ladies and Gentlemen the Prophet is creation and a part of us all here tonight.

ANNA:
The theatre gives us a space and community to examine life together in a way we cannot do it alone. By shaping this production and sharing the events of tonight, the prophet has become more than a single entity but a creation of a collective body who has met and tried to make a little sense of the world.

FAITH:
All Hail us, the Prophet!

ALL:
All Hail the Prophet!

FAITH:
Oh man, you said a lot
What a mouthful you said
I’m gonna play my cards right this time
Well I’m sorry, I suppose
FAITH (CONT.):
But no one needs to know
If I play my cards right this time

DREAMER:
On the day the earth stood still
There was a shot heard around the world
It was supposed to send a message to me
I saw spaceships on T.V.
I swear to God they were singing your name
In a voice I recognized

LOVER AND ANNA:
Please take me away, take me anywhere
‘Cause I don’t want to be here without you
Please take me away
I want to be with you
I want to be with you
I want to be with you
I want to be with you now

VILLAINS:
Oh man you said a lot
What a mouthful you said
And if you know I’m sorry now...well as long as you know that
I saw fairies in the headlights all along the ride home
Yeah there were fairies in the headlights

NARRATOR
On the day the earth stood still
There was a shot heard around the world
It was supposed to send a message to me

I saw spaceships on T.V
I swear to God they were singing your name
In a voice I recognized

ALL:
On the day the earth stood still
I saw mermaids in the water but how was I supposed to tell you all the things that they
told me/
They said that the prophets did declare and it’s written down somewhere
That our stars were cross’d up there since the day that you were born
I want to be with you
I want to be with you
I want to be with you now

**ALL (CONT.):**

**ALTERNATE ENDING #2:**

**VILLAIN 1:**
Ladies and Gentlemen! Tonight there will be no Prophet appearing!

**VILLAIN 2:**
Tonight it is up to us to find our way.

**NARRATOR:**
I see, and what’s next, where do we go from here?

**VILLAIN 2:**
Well this is a rock opera, right? Revolutionary of Faith, take us out!

**FAITH:**
Let’s get everybody dancin

**FAITH AND DREAMER:**
This world was built on second chances
We sing a song that you all know

**ALL REVOLUTIONARIES**
With us all right now in flow

**FAITH:**
da-da-da-oh-da

**NARRATOR:**
So that’s it then, that’s what you’ve decided?

**VILLAIN 1:**
We applaud the valiant efforts of our wonderful Narrator, but tonight we blaze our own paths.

**VILLAIN 2:**
Tonight, we weren’t held down by any prophecy. Tonight we are free.

**VILLAIN 1:**
Can’t you see the possibilities?
NARRATOR:
I’m a sick and I’m a tired of our bickerings
Life’s a living all broken baby torn from fixings

I’ve been worn down from too much use and abuse
Let’s leave better off on our own
da-da-ba-da-da-da

ALL:
Where do I belong

FAITH:
Scoot a little closer

ALL:
Somewhere I’m not wrong
Where do I belong
Somewhere I’m not wrong

VILLAIN 2:
Some say---
That I don’t know no other way

VILLAINS:
Cause you know I want to walk along with you
Leave our lives and start a new

DREAMER:
Sit watch aways
don’t look at our feet
in the broken light of day

Simply tell me how to feel
Lost to normal time
Consumed by love so real

NARRATOR:
So Ladies and Gentlemen, that was our show for this evening. True, a Prophet did not appear, but I think we’re going to be okay. Perhaps a little hungover in the morning but we’ll make it through in end.
VILLAIN 1:
That’s the spirit!

VILLAIN 2

Let’s wrap this up!

ALL:

Where do I belong
Scoot a little closer
Somewhere I’m not wrong

Where do I belong
Somewhere I’m not wrong

Yeah Yeah Yeah

Where do I belong
Scoot a little closer
Somewhere I’m not wrong

Where do I belong
Somewhere I’m not wrong

VILLAINS:

2-3-4!

*(Music Break Out)*