

NOAM SHAPIRO PORTFOLIO



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SWEENEY TODD

Music & Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by Hugh Wheeler

Produced by the Yale Dramatic Association, Fall 2019

Photographs by Charlie Glebermam

Reimagined for the twenty-first century, this production explored the unjust mass incarceration of people of color, the unending cycles of violence, and corrupt capitalism in our society.

LONDON CAFFS

Set in present-day London, the production was inspired by "caffs," the kitschy British equivalent of American diners. Often founded by immigrants, many of these caffs serve as de-facto community centers in low-income neighborhoods. This design allowed for flexible staging, as six tables and twelve chairs were repositioned to create Sweeney's barbershop, Lovett's restaurant, Judge Turpin's chambers, and Fogg's asylum.

Each time Sweeney disposed of a victim, the ensemble, regulars at the caff who often lurked at upstage tables, splattered blood from ketchup bottles across the back wall of the set. By the end of the show, large red gashes covered the walls and pools of blood collected on the floor.





Anthony attempts to attract Johanna's attention in "Green Finch and Linnet Bird"



Lovett conspires with Sweeney as the ensemble demands more pies during "God That's Good"



Blood splatters as Sweeney murders the Judge during "Pretty Women" while Johanna watches

Writing in 1985, British dramatist Bernard Kops described cafts as “places for special relationships, places to pass the time, to assuage all sorts of thirsts, hunger.”

Hunger is central to our Sweeney Todd, from Judge Turpin’s uncontrollable sexual appetite and Mrs. Lovett’s ravenous customers, to Tobias’ insatiable “aching void” and Todd’s vengeful service to a “dark and hungry god.” By highlighting the systemic injustices and cycles of violence at the heart of this musical, our production asks what happens when we continue to give in to our darkest, basest hungers and allow acts of cruelty to spiral out of control.

Sweeney Todd depicts a world in which everything bends towards destruction. But the musical is also a fable—the ‘Ballad’ insists on this. It’s a story that has been told countless times and with different variations across generations. Thinking about the show as the repetition of a tragic ritual opens up a space for hope: The tale can be told differently. We can tame our appetite. Perhaps the next time we feel the pull of the violence and hunger that we’ve ritualized as a society we will simply say no.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE (EXCERPT)





ON THIS SIDE OF THE WORLD

Music & Lyrics by Paulo K Tiról

Created with Noam Shapiro

Produced by Three Hares Theater, Spring 2019

Photographs by Michael Kushner

In Paulo K Tiról's new musical, six actors give voice to Filipino immigrants navigating old lives and new beginnings, as a one-way ticket sends them on a journey eight thousand miles from home.

BALIKBAYAN BOXES

Featuring twenty-two different characters and as many locations, "On This Side of the World" demanded a lean and engaging design.

Our set was inspired by "Balikbayan Boxes," care packages that Filipino-Americans send to their relatives overseas. These boxes were practical, serving as scenery, as well as storage for costumes and props. Boxes were stacked to form a kitchen counter, arranged into airline rows, and positioned into church pews. Scenes took place within distinct areas of the stage that resembled labyrinthine customs lines. This choice alluded to the various restrictions placed upon immigrants and the windy path towards naturalization.

The costume color palette drew from the red, white, yellow, and blue of the Filipino flag, providing visual unity across the six actors' many roles.





Six soon-to-be immigrants take off from Manila during the opening number, "One Way Ticket"



Two chatty church ladies trade gossip and lament American culture in "Ay Amerika"



A young Filipino-American and his grandmother cook in tight corners during "In This Kitchen"

PRESS



THEATRE IS EASY – BEST BET

On This Side of the World may play best with immigrant audiences, but the themes of separation, love, and perseverance are relatable even to those who have never set foot outside of their home country. Guided by the skillful direction of Noam Shapiro, the song cycle underscores how each experience is wholly unique, so that each song begins to feel like a love letter to an individual American dream. Audiences won't be able to stop cheering (when they're not weeping) for this ambitious underdog of a show.

ONSTAGE BLOG – CRITICS' PICK

In an era where the topic of immigration is loaded with bias and political ideology, On This Side of the World stays grounded in the humanity of its stories and the poignancy of its messages. Noam Shapiro beautifully helms a six-person company of Asian Americans who all run the emotional gamut required by these stories while handling some deceptively difficult music seemingly with ease. On This Side of the World is at once delightfully simple and unspeakably complex in what it accomplishes and aspires to.



THE RESITIBLE RISE OF ARTURO UI

By Bertolt Brecht

In a new translation by Jennifer Wise

Produced by Lyra Theater, Fall 2016

Photographs by Leigh Honigman

Reimagined as the fever dream of a campaign staffer on the eve of the 2016 election, this production utilized red nose clowning to warn against the rise of tyranny and political violence in the United States.



In a crowded campaign office, a low-level staffer discovers a red clown nose. Putting on the nose unleashes his id, transforming him into Arturo Ui, a brash gangster and opportunistic outsider who dreams of breaking into politics. As the staffer immerses himself in this world, his co-workers gradually take on the other roles in Brecht's parable. Tables and chairs are repositioned to create boardrooms, town halls, and warehouses. Staplers become guns and balloons burst as gunfire. Costumes emerge from filing cabinets and office supplies transform into props. As Ui takes over a political party and hypnotizes the public, the staffer seizes control of his office and overwhelms his colleagues, blurring the line between reality & fantasy.



MAKESHIFT CAMPAIGN OFFICE



Taking on and off the red nose shifted the actor's performance between Ui and a campaign staffer



Throughout the play, each Brechtian scene title appeared alongside a maxim from Donald Trump's "The Art of the Deal," such as "Protect the upside and the downside takes care of itself"



By the end of the production, the nose remained firmly in place as Ui transformed into a 21st century demagogue

PRESS

THEATRE IS EASY - BEST BET

Lyra Theater's superbly relevant production of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* through the lens of the Trump Campaign is a cautionary warning against the evil clown. The company has inherited the play's legacy, showing its relevance and making the piece an important theatrical examination of morality. Director Noam Shapiro makes excellent choices to illuminate the complex story. The eight-person ensemble portrays over forty characters with astonishing clarity, resulting in a wildly entertaining production that does the Brecht classic proud. It is superbly original and immediate, and exactly the right way to tackle the societal issues we all face today.

NY THEATRE WIRE - STAFF PICK

I love it when new theatre companies invite sprawling, rarely produced texts into their season. I like it even more when they do it brilliantly, with dead-on spoofs, like Lyra. This production is off off-Broadway at its best. Director Noam Shapiro set up a nice flow between the tables at either end of the traverse stage and in the center for group dynamics. He worked within a small budget yet remained true to Brecht's vision, allowing the cast room to create.



THE LITTLE PRINCE

Music & Lyrics by Rachel Portman
With a Libretto by Nicholas Wright
Winner, Opera America Robert L.B. Tobin
Director-Designer Showcase, Spring 2019
Renderings by Santiago Orjuela Laverde and Haydee Zelideth



The Snake

The Fox

The Prince

The Rose

The Pilot

As a group of migrants waits at the U.S. border, a father calms his children by recasting their dangerous journey as the intergalactic travels of the Little Prince in a world without borders. A modern migration fable presented as a paper project.



THE LITTLE PRINCE'S BOX

Created by a team of international artists from Mexico, Colombia, Iran, and Russia, this project grew out of anger over the government's family separation policy. The project sought to call attention to today's "Little Princes," migrant children caught within our broken immigration system.



The action takes place within a large white waiting room with three portholes, reminiscent of the sheep box that the Pilot draws for the Little Prince and calling to mind immigrant detention centers. As the Prince recounts his journey, the box recedes upstage, revealing a vast desert. The story is then told through flashback, as the Prince encounters smugglers, officers, aid workers, and wild animals on his way to the US-Mexico border. At the end of the production, the Prince and Pilot find themselves back in the box, awaiting their release. For a brief moment, the walls dissolve, revealing a world without borders.



At the start of the production, projections are used to visualize the Pilot's tale and the Prince's imagination



As the Prince recounts his journey through flashback, he and the Pilot step downstage, which becomes the desert



By the end, the pilot and the prince are separated.
The Pilot waits for the Prince. And waits.

Nearly 40 applicant teams of directors and designers each created a production concept for an opera chosen from a curated repertoire list. Submissions included visions for staging, scenery, props, and costumes. The four projects chosen were selected not only because they demonstrated the requisite creativity and skill, but because they displayed true collaboration, collective passion, and a successful contemporary take on a period piece.

Inspired by Opera America's call for increased civic practice, The Little Prince team envisioned their project as a piece of participatory opera in the model of the Public Theater's Public Works program. If realized, this bilingual production would feature a cast made up of both professional singers and local community members, including immigrants and resettled refugees. Shapiro argues that the innovative concept stays true to the opera's source material. "Antoine de Saint-Exupéry himself was in exile and became a refugee," he says. "Embedded within his story is the experience of being lost in a world you do not recognize. It's about people who are searching for a safer home."

PRESS RELEASE (EXCEPT)





THE LARAMIE PROJECT

By Moises Kaufman & the Tectonic Theater Project
Produced by the Johns Hopkins Barnstormers, Fall 2018
Photographs by Nick Xitco

Produced on the 20th anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death, this multi-media production featured a diverse cast of twelve actors who examined how far we've come since 1998 and how far we have yet to go.

LARAMIE, A COLLEGE TOWN

In the fall of 2018, I was invited to direct *The Laramie Project* on Johns Hopkins's campus. I was aware that all of the college students I was working with had been born after Matthew Shepard's death. Many didn't know his name. Most took gay marriage for granted. My challenge was to bring this play to life for these actors and this community.

Researching images from the aftermath of Matthew's death, I was struck by the candlelight vigils that took place on college campuses across the country. These images, along with the realization that Matthew was the actors' age, became our key to the production. My collaborators and I staged the play on a raised three-quarter thrust that resembled the campus centers where these vigils were held and called to mind Johns Hopkins's own campus square. Actors sat around the stage, with costume changes and transitions occurring in full view of the audience. This intimate approach allowed the audience members to focus on the characters' words and join the actors in witnessing this story.





Video footage and photography from Laramie in 1998 was projected onto the deck and an upstage scrim



The play was staged like one long choreographed dance; the actors moved in and out of darkness, passing off the spotlight



Key moments, such as court testimonies and press briefings, were filmed live in order to capture close-ups of the actors' expressions

DIRECTOR'S NOTE (EXCERPT)



Beyond its emotional impact, one of the greatest accomplishments of The Laramie Project is its ability to hold up multiple viewpoints at once and allow us to arrive at our own conclusions. The play creates space for dialogue by inviting us to spend some time listening to other people and witnessing how they transform in the aftermath of a tragedy.

Just as intolerance and hate are taught—at home, in neighborhoods, and at political rallies—acceptance and love begin at the individual level. Change starts with asking ourselves, “What language do I use? What jokes do I tell? What judgments do I pass?” When confronted with hate, there’s often a desire to distance ourselves. But we cannot. I invite you to spend some time listening to the people of Laramie, WY. Some might sound foreign, others familiar. Some of them might even sound like you. To quote one Laramie resident, “We are like this. We ARE like this. WE are LIKE this.” But we don’t have to be. We have the capacity to erase hate. This change begins with the ways we remember and the stories we tell.