

Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

Name: J. Daniel Herring

Department: Theatre & Dance

College: Arts & Humanities

Leave taken: ☒ Sabbatical ☐ Difference in Pay ☐ Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period: ☒ Fall 2021

☐ Spring

☐ Academic Year

☐ Other

Your report will be sent to your Dean for your PAF and to the Library Archives.

J. Daniel Herring
Department of Theatre and Dance
Fall 2021 Sabbatical Report

Section 1: Reporting on the Success of the Leave

My objective of immersing myself in the theatre worlds of New York and London was achieved. I was able to attend productions which ranged in type from traditional to experimental to musical theatre. I was able to observe many directing styles which was one of the top objectives of my sabbatical.

Because of COVID-19, I was not able to attend as many workshops or lectures as originally planned; therefore, I increased the number of productions I attended from 24 to 36. I also added museum visits that directly related to some of the plays I was attending such as seeing SIX and visiting the Tower of London as well as seeing COME FROM AWAY and visiting the 9/11 Memorial Museum. I also interviewed an actress appearing in a world premiere musical and I spent time with a playwright of Theatre for Young Audiences.

Section 2: Benefits to Me as a Faculty Member

Here is a sample of just a few of the plays and the impacts these productions will have on my future creative activities as well as providing a greater command of directorial styles and design concepts involved in creating live theatre.

- 1) MOULIN ROUGE: The importance of choreography that isn't just dance steps, but tells a story while furthering the action of the play.
- 2) PASS OVER: Black Lives Matter plays need a place on our stages and perhaps make us uncomfortable because racism is honestly being confronted and not just talked about.
- 3) THOUGHTS OF A COLORED MAN: The set design of a street/highway billboard with the platform for changing the billboard as the acting area and flood lights allowed for projections to shift the action of the play to a variety of locations.
- 4) CAROLINE, OR CHANGE: Unique characterizations of inanimate objects such as a radio, a washing machine and a bus provided for creative costuming, but also creative movement/physical acting choices for the actors.
- 5) THE VISITOR: New play development can take years. I spoke with a company member and this one took seven years because of producer issues, actors choosing to step away from the project as well as harassment within the cast.
- 6) THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE: A play I would someday like to direct. Memory is in truth a mixture of memory and imagination. This play examines the idea that what we remember may not be completely the truth and that our imaginations have filled in the gaps in our memory. Both fantastical design elements and realistic design elements are utilized to create this blended look at memory.

- 7) THE SHARK IS BROKEN: A behind the scenes look at actor relationships. For me a huge takeaway was, "What is art and why do we make art? Who gets to judge it -- the audience, the critics or the box office?"
- 8) WHITE NOISE: Is it possible that slave and master roles are so systemic that we could fall into those roles easier than we think we would? The setting of shooting range created intense anxiety and tension for the audience since gun violence is so prevalent in our world. A scenic design can absolutely create an emotional response.
- 9) LIFE OF PIE: Puppetry techniques in this production were breathtaking. The tiger was manipulated by three puppeteers. One controlled the tiger's head another controlled the heart and yet another controlled the hind quarters.
- 10) CABARET: Having directed this play at Fresno State it was great to get to see another interpretation. This was concerned an immersive theatre experience. When you walked in to the theatre there were cabaret performers, drinks and food to be had prior to the show. There were multiple entrances so each audience member had a unique immersive experience.

Section 3: Benefits to the University

I feel the university will benefit from having a theatre professor who can provide first-hand experiences regarding the theatre cultures of New York and London. The information and experiences I gained have given me a fresh look at a variety of directing styles and production concepts that I can share with our students. As well, there is no doubt that this immersive experience will influence future directing projects I will utilize in my teaching and certainly influence my creative activities in the area of play direction at Fresno State. In fact, there are three productions that I hope to someday direct at Fresno State (GIRL FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY, THE OCEAN AT THE END OF THE LANE and JULIET).

Section 4: Original Proposal

The date on the attached original proposal is Fall 2020, but because of the Pandemic I was given permission to postpone my sabbatical and move it to the Fall of 2021.

Section 5: Seminar

The seminar will take place on Tuesday, May 10 from 2:00pm to 3:15pm.