

**Wesley Diener**

**Miller Art Scholar Minigrant Outcome Report**

**1/23/18**

On November 18 and 19, the Virginia Players produced two performances of Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*. The production featured many Miller Art Scholars; Jack Gereski portrayed the leading man, Jamie, Maelisa Singer designed the costumes, and I directed the production. The performances were a resounding success. We enjoyed full audiences in the Department of Drama's Helms Theatre. The audiences included friends, family, and many esteemed faculty members.

This project was the most challenging endeavor of my undergraduate career but also the most rewarding. While I had directing experience from the New Works Festival and my summer internship, this was my first attempt at directing a full musical. There are many added challenges to directing a musical rather than straight play, such as music rehearsals, musical timing, greater physical demands on the actors, and overall less realism. I was so pleased to discover that I am perfectly equipped to tackle these directorial challenges. My training as an opera and musical theatre performer equipped me with the skills to understand both the musical and dramatic needs of the show. I am grateful to my actors, designers, and mentors for encouraging and allowing me to take numerous risks with my direction. I conceived a minimal yet ephemeral set design, featuring four units that moved to both represent changing landscapes but also the dynamic between the two characters. Working against performance practice, I also made the bold decision to stage the two characters together onstage throughout the work. This effectively trapped Jamie onstage for the entire second half of the musical. I am so proud of all the creative

and administrative work that went into this fantastic production, and I am grateful for the opportunity to produce and direct meaningful, intimate theatre.

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