

Miller Arts Scholars Arts Awards Application, 2016-17

Michael Giovinco, February 25, 2016

Project Title

The Circus and Devised Performance

Project Overview

My proposed project is to craft and perform a devised, movement-based circus show with the advice of Associate Professor Marianne Kubik after taking classes this summer at the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts. I specifically trust Professor Kubik's guidance because of her extensive knowledge in movement direction and devised performance. Over the course of the next school year, I will rehearse and stage this show with the help of the Moonlight Circus Group in Charlottesville. Funds from this grant would go towards supporting classes, purchasing equipment for practice and performance, and towards supplies for making costume and set pieces. This project is important to me because it deals with my personal history and journey in the cirque arts. I will present this to the academic community as an invitation to understand and appreciate cirque as a fine art. I hope to instill in my audience some of the wonder and inspiration that the archaic circus form provides, as well as show them what the modern circus revolution can become.

The show I would like to devise is a tale about a hobo clown named Brabble, who recently has met the love of his life. He attempts to bring this girl back to meet his family and to see his home. The conflict arises in that he has neither a family nor a home to show her and he must create it all as he goes, else risk losing her. I chose this concept after gaining inspiration from Emmett Kelly, a famed hobo clown of the circus. This tale reflects the crossroads of archaic and modern circuses and shows us what they can teach each other.

I will approach this show as a director and writer and thus will work collaboratively with designers and technicians to stage the piece. I plan to create the set for the show through an independent study course in Circus Technology with Drama Lecturer Steven Warner. Because of this, I plan my show's performance for March 2017 so that I may have time to work with the set that has been built during the fall semester. MFA Candidate in Lighting Design Steven Spera will create the lighting design for my show as an independent study project. I will spend a large portion of the summer designing and building the costumes for the show with the guidance of my dad, who has built the majority of what we use in my family's clown business, and with advice from Associate Professor Marcy Linton.

Background

For almost six years, I have performed with my family as a professional stilt walker, for two years before that I operated larger-than-life puppets on the boardwalks of New Jersey, and for the past twenty years of my life I have had the opportunity to be inspired by circus artists. Many circus artists have said that their art is archaic and perhaps dying, so I came to the University of Virginia looking for

another route of life. In my time at this University, however, I have learned that the circus is growing in a beautiful way and in this unexpected place, my circus roots have replanted.

In a morning during my first semester at UVA, I unexpectedly discussed Joice Heth with Professor LaVahn Hoh. It seemed ironic to me that this strange, wonderful man and I were discussing P. T. Barnum's famed attraction, known as "The Oldest Woman on Earth." After all, at the time I thought of the circus as an old art form. Shortly after that discussion, I learned that I had been speaking to one of the top circus historians in the country. A year later I came to know Mr. Warner, who once worked for Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas, and with whom I began conspiring a Circus Technology class. I also found a home in a newly formed circus club at UVA with lessons taught by members of the Moonlight Circus group in Charlottesville. How could the circus be dying if the small town of Charlottesville offered so much in this craft?

So, while the circus has been thriving worldwide, another art form has caught my eye since I have come to UVA: movement. I have unknowingly studied this subject since my days of operating puppets and donning stilts. In learning to operate a piece of equipment like a puppet or a stilt, I began to learn much about the body's natural movement. As I teach people to stilt walk, I often stop them to discuss how the human foot and leg might tackle a hill or a flight of stairs. Teaching encouraged me to focus on the way a person's body must exist in an environment. Now that I am studying the aerialist aspect of cirque, I am gaining more tools with which to explore more forms of movement.

Outcome

All of my research will culminate in a March performance. In presenting the outcome of this performance, I will articulate the process of creating a live circus production. Throughout the rehearsal and creative process, I will document this devised circus piece through pictures, video, and noted meetings. I will present this documentation along with costumes and aspects of the set at the Miller Arts Scholars Award Outcome Presentation Ceremony.

Research Sites

The summer part of my grant will take place at the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts, where I plan to take lessons. This is close enough to commute from my house and I hope to work with this organization in other forms this summer as an entertainer. Costumes will mostly be built out of my family's garage in New Jersey with some work possibly flowing into the school year. I will either arrange for that work to be done in my apartment or in the Department of Drama's Costume shop if given permission from Shop Supervisor Dorothy Smith. Rehearsal and development of my show will happen in tandem with the Moonlight Circus Group's practices. They have been granted time and space at a few gymnasiums in Charlottesville. The building of the set will occur in the Department of Drama's Scene Shop under the guidance of Mr. Warner. In terms of performance space, I am hoping to obtain space from the Department of Drama in one of their theaters and have budgeted for this. This will largely depend on the season's selection, but in an ideal world, I would like

to perform in the ring setting of the Caplin. If not granted space, I will seek elsewhere to perform in the UVA and Charlottesville area.

Commitments

This sounds like a very large-scale project, but I am confident in my own ability to tackle it thanks to the large foundation of support that I already have. The courses that will accompany my project will allow me the time to accomplish the bulk of the work.

I have sectioned this summer off to focus on cirque through Philadelphia School of Circus Art classes and through my own jobs and work. Because rehearsals will run in strong conjunction with lessons in the school year, I am confident in my ability to create the content of this show and to test it with the live audiences for which the Moonlight Circus performs. Furthermore I will allocate time in my academic schedule to work with Mr. Warner and others on the project's design elements.

It is a lot of work, it is perhaps the largest scale project that I have taken on at the helm so far, but because of that I will relax my current commitments in order to make this a major priority.

Budget

Item	Price	Quantity	Total Price
Summer tuition to Philadelphia School of Circus Art	\$800	1	\$800
Gas to classes	\$0.54/mile	960 miles	\$518.40
Full Silk Set	\$300	1	\$300
Double-tab Lyra*	\$450	1	\$450
24" Unicycle	\$140	1	\$140
Costume Materials	\$250	1	\$250
Set Materials	\$250	1	\$250
Caplin Rental**	\$700	1-Day	\$700
Lighting Rental/Gel	\$150	1	\$150
House Manager	\$8.50/hr.	3 hrs.	\$25.50
10% Contingency	\$359.39	1	\$359.39
		Total	\$3,953.23

*May build Lyra with Steve Warner, if so the extra money would go into set.

** Would also perform in the Helms at the rate of \$500 if unavailable.

Any amount of money that I am not granted will be paid out of pocket for necessary materials and I will downsize certain design aspects if need be since this is a piece that focuses on movement. I will make the "Out of Pocket" money from performance over the summer as an entertainer.

Project Time Line

- **Summer 2016**
 - Attend classes at the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts
 - Develop clown characters for the script and production.
 - Design and build important costume pieces.
 - Develop the rough draft of the script that will be edited in the rehearsal process.
 - Purchase any equipment needed to rehearse routines
 - Record process and take pictures and video.

- **Fall 2016**
 - Develop script in consultation with Professor Kubik.
 - Develop physical routines for each scene.
 - As each routine forms, evolve the scene in the script with performers.
 - Rehearse with actors and circus artists.
 - Try out these routines publicly to receive audience feedback.
 - Design and build set with Mr. Warner.
 - Have meetings with lighting designer Steve Spera.
 - Record process and take pictures and video

- **Spring 2017**
 - Continue rehearsing.
 - Finalize script and order of show.
 - Heavy Advertisement.
 - Move into space.
 - Mount Show in March.
 - Review feedback and assess results.
 - Record process and take pictures and video

- **April 2017**
 - Compile pictures and videos of the process.
 - Create a physical and digital copy of process and outcome report to use in presentation and online on the Arts Scholars website.
 - Present award outcome presentations alongside other Arts Scholars.