

Max Tankersley  
Fourth Year Award Application

## ***A Midsummer Night's Dream* Mainstage Production Proposal Narrative**

### **Looking Back, then Forward**

Under my Third Year Award, I got the chance to refine my directing skills in a wide variety of ways, and in my Fourth Year, I hope to apply those skills to a bigger project than any I've pursued before as I take the next step in my theatre-making work. In the past year, my Third Year Award allowed me to secure the sound equipment I needed to record an original audio drama, use digital and physical resources to watch, read and listen to other directors, and take my first trip to New York to take in live theatre and get inspired by the work of professional directors. I had the chance to direct three small projects this Spring; a staged reading of UVA Drama MFA candidate Auntais Faulkner's original play, *Steps*, Karen Zipor's original *Born Under a Single Light* in the UVA Drama Department's New Works Festival, and an original audio drama through Shakespeare on the Lawn, *Bardic Inspiration*. Having those Arts Award resources to support those three back-to-back projects was crucial, and I'm looking forward to pursuing a larger, full-length production in my fourth year.

### **Show Concept**

My passion for Shakespearean directing has led me to begin developing a concept for a full-length production *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I've been inspired by the aesthetics of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Funkadelic's *Maggot Brain*, and Childish Gambino's *Awaken, My Love!* I'm invested in the play's themes of escape from the establishment and status quo by young people, which is a motif I'm drawing inspiration from *Parable* for, as the novel uses climate change as a driving force for its protagonists' journey into the unknown. While taking Theatre and Social Change in the UVA Drama Department, I was introduced to adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*, which helped me develop much of my directing practices oriented around decentralizing the capitalist structures of traditional rehearsal rooms by prioritizing the humanity and emotional experience of actors and designers in order to take emphasis away from theatrical traditions that emphasize producing capital. *Emergent Strategy* was also where I first saw parallels between Butler and Funkadelic's work as artistic pieces with similar messages of liberation from oppressive capitalist environments. Childish Gambino's *Awaken, My Love!* is a concept album that attempts to revive many of the musical elements of Funkadelic's music more than forty years later.

The resulting production concept I'm proposing is set in the near future in a post-industrial city left impoverished by the impacts of climate change, before shifting to the

undeveloped forest setting. I think creating a production driven by the musical aesthetics of Funkadelic and Childish Gambino's work, putting those previous and current generations in contrast with each other alongside *Midsummer's* cast of characters seeking to escape their parents' world like those in *Parable of the Sower* will result in a show that gives a new-forward thinking aesthetic approach to this classical text.

One of my biggest priorities in executing this concept is using these source materials from black creators in a way that focuses on the universal themes I am drawing from those works without engaging in cultural appropriation or insensitivity. As a white person I lack the lived experience of the Black Americans whose work I'm drawing inspiration from in this show concept, and the last thing I want to do is appropriate or erase that experience within the production. I think the common threads I have drawn between *Parable of the Sower*, *Emergent Strategy*, *Awaken, My Love!*, and *Maggot Brain* connect to a universal theme of seeking liberation from the status quo of the previous generation that those sources will amplify in the performance of *Midsummer*. I also don't want this production to ignore the identities of those artists, and I hope that this production will allow actors and designers of color to connect their lived experiences to those source materials in a way that they find liberating and unforced. I want these goals to be an actionable, ongoing dynamic of the production rather than simply a paragraph written in preproduction, which is why I will be working closely with Shakespeare on the Lawn's incoming Diversity and Inclusion chairs and conducting extensive outreach in the Assistant Staff and casting processes to ensure a diverse Creative Team comes together, in order to foster a community of accountability around my direction and the work of all other artists involved.

## **Logistics**

Making the move to directing a full-length show with this level of preproduction and concept planning is the natural next step in my development as a director of Shakespearean theatre, and I hope to make my Fourth Year Award a crucial supporting resource in taking that next step. One of my primary needs for this project will be securing proper theatrical space to stage this work in. I plan to propose the production through Shakespeare on the Lawn, which historically has only had access to the Student Activities Building and the Lawn Gardens for its mainstage productions. Neither space affords the technical capabilities that this full-length production demands. I'm hoping to take this piece into a proscenium or thrust stage space with at least basic sound and lighting technical capability, which are severely limited in the SAB and prohibited in the gardens.

I'm working with my faculty advisor, Dave Dalton, to devise a variety of options for how the funds in this proposal could be spent to secure that kind of space. I'm looking primarily at the Helms Theater in the UVA Drama Department, the funds for which would be spent on some

combination of rental fees and covering the costs of professionals required by the department's space use policies. We hope to hear from the department in the near future about the possibility of using that space, but I am developing multiple fallback options if the Helms is unavailable. We are looking into reserving space from local theaters LiveArts and DMR Adventures, but the Drama Department remains my primary option due to my own familiarity with the space and its increased accessibility for student performers. I have developed contingency plans for the scenario in which my show proposal to Shakespeare on the Lawn is not accepted, in which case I will explore applying to Virginia Players' Lab Series, setting up an independent study with my faculty mentor, or re-proposing to Shakespeare on the Lawn for their Spring 2023 mainstage.

### **Culmination**

This project would culminate in a written report and presentation that would allow me to reflect on the challenges and skill development involved in directing my first full-length production at the University and share how that process has continued to shape my development as a director and theatre artist. I anticipate that a project of this magnitude will push me in ways that none of my previous projects have before, and the opportunity to have that experience supported by resources from Miller Arts would make a substantial impact on my ability to execute this next step in my work as an Arts Scholar.

## Production Timeline

- May 1st, 2022: Shakespeare on the Lawn Show Proposals
- Summer 2022: assemble assistant staff, finalize theater space in collaboration with Professor Dalton and the UVA Drama Department (or elsewhere, see contingencies above)
- Late August 2022: hold auditions & cast *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- September-October 2022: *Midsummer* Rehearsals
- November 2022: Performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (date pending outcome of ongoing space use inquiry)

## Budget

### Category 1: Performance Space

Theater Rental	Flexible allocation of funds that will be designated to the rental fee for the space this production ends up in	\$1500
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### Category 2: Production Tech

Lighting Rental	Dependent on the space used, estimate based on previous Shakespeare on the Lawn budget proposals	\$1000
Sound Equipment Rental	Dependent on the space used, estimate based on previous Shakespeare on the Lawn budget proposals	\$200
Set Needs	My advisor and I have talked through my desire for a very minimal set in order to create a production focused on text work, but these contingency funds will allow for set flexibility particularly as I figure out which space I will be working in.	\$100
Costumes	For use supplementing Shakespeare on the Lawn's existing store of costumes	\$100
Contingency	Funds set aside for the usual unexpected needs that pop up during the development of a mainstage production	\$100

### Budget Income:

Income Item: MAS Third Year Award \$3,000

**Total: \$3,000**

## Participation in the Arts

### Course Work

DRAM 2020: Acting I (Fall 2019)  
DRAM 3651: Directing I (Spring 2020)  
ENGL 3271: Shakespeare's Histories & Comedies (Fall 2020)  
DRAM 3090: Theatre and Social Change (Spring 2021)  
DRAM 2620/2630: Sound Design and Lab (Spring 2021)  
DRAM 4593: Special Topics in Performance: Directing in New Works (Spring 2021)  
DRAM 2050: Performance and/as Theory (Fall 2021)  
DRAM 4651: Directing II (Fall 2021)  
ENGL 3001: History of Lit in English I (included additional study of Shakespeare, Fall 2021)  
DRAM 3070: African-American Theatre (Spring 2022)  
DRAM 4593: Special Topics in Performance: Directing in New Works (Spring 2021)

### Directing

*Romeo and Juliet*, Educational Theatre Company, 2018  
*Comedy of Errors*, Educational Theatre Company 2019  
*Julius Caesar*, Educational Theatre Company 2021  
[FUNeral, UVA Drama New Works Festival](#), 2021  
*Steps*, Staged Reading, Common House, 2022  
*Born Under a Single Light*, UVA Drama New Works Festival, 2022  
*Bardic Inspiration*, Audio Drama, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2022

### Acting

*As You Like It*, Oliver & Sir Oliver Martext, Dir. Bob Lynch, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2019  
*Virginia Players' Play in a Day*, Austin, Dir. Emma Camp, Virginia Players, 2019  
*Fall Reading Series*, Antipholus of Syracuse, Sir Toby Belch, & Bullcalf, Dir. Lydia Smith, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2019  
*Love's Labour's Lost*, Dumain & Forester, Dir. Mia Shaker, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2021

### Leadership

Social Chair, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2020  
Publicity Officer, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2020-2021  
President, Shakespeare on the Lawn, 2021-2022  
Artistic Director, Virginia Players, 2021  
Administrative Assistant, Educational Theatre Company, 2021-2022

### Arts Scholars Involvement

CASS 1010: College Art Scholars Seminar (Fall 2021)  
CASS 1011: College Art Scholars Discussion (Spring 2021)