

Producing a Comedy Movie-Musical: *The Dancin' Business*

I am requesting \$3000 through the 4th-year Miller Arts Awards to fund the production of an original 30-minute comedy movie-musical entitled *The Dancin' Business*. Funding will support the purchase of equipment for filming the musical and recording sound as well as props, set elements, and costumes to bring the film to life.

Objectives, Methodology, and Building upon Previous Work

My objective is to combine my passion for comedic writing and performance with my passion for filmmaking into a cohesive and collaborative final project. Throughout my time at UVA, I have been working to bring elements of comedy into my studies and artwork, and I would like to continue this work through a larger and more ambitious project. As a comedic writer and performer for three years (and now President) of my sketch comedy group, I have an extensive understanding of how to write and produce comedy shows, the process of which follows procedures similar to theatrical production, with which I also have 3 years of experience as a Scenic Charge. Additionally, as a Filmmaking student, and as someone who has been making films for over 7 years, I have a deep understanding of each step of film production, from screenwriting and pre-production through editing and post-production.

Last year, as part of my sketch comedy group's end-of-the-semester show, I wrote a sketch entitled *Dancin' Business*, which was pitched and performed as if it were a scene from a larger musical. The scene takes place between the two title characters: Mr. Business and his adopted father, Mr. Dance, the founder and sole proprietor of Mr. Dance's "Dancin' Home for Boys," where Mr. Business was taken in as a child and raised. At what would be the climax of the full story, Mr. Business, in his coming-of-age moment, admits his long-held secret to Mr. Dance: he doesn't want to be a dancer, and all he's ever dreamed in life was to be... *a businessman*. They then go into the musical number "A Businessman," which ends the sketch. This 5-minute live sketch went on to be one of our most well-received sketches of the show, and ever since writing and performing it, I have wanted to make it into something bigger.

I have been working with my friend and longtime collaborator, Tatum Jepson, a composer and composition major at JMU, to compose 2-3 more songs for a larger product: a filmed adaptation of the first act of *The Dancin' Business*. This act would include the opening number ("Mr. Dance's Dancin' Home for Boys") with an ensemble of six Dancin' Boys, the introduction of Mr. Business ("The Rhythm Isn't In 'Im"), "A Businessman," and "A Businessman: Reprise." I felt with the timespan allotted to complete this project, it would be feasible to create a final product with a runtime of about 30 minutes, as a feature-length film would be unrealistic to pursue.

I intend to produce a high-quality filmed version of a staged production of the musical. I will utilize a traditional performance space (most likely a black-box theatre) to capture the energy of the stage and the theatricality of the actors' performances with artistic cinematography to create a compelling film. To clarify further, the final product will not be performed live. Rather, it will be

a narrative film which takes place in a theatre space, and it will be far more artistically involved filmmaking-wise than typically seen in “pro-shots” of musicals, where cinematic techniques are more minimalistic, and the stage itself is emphasized rather than varied and artistically composed shots. Though it will unfold in a theatre space, this project’s filmic aspects will take priority.

Required Equipment and Performance Spaces

I am most focused on securing camera and audio equipment that will allow me to freely move around the actors as they perform. To make the most of the camera I already own (Panasonic Lumix G7), I intend to purchase a sturdy tripod dolly and a zoom lens to extend my current setup’s dynamic capabilities. For sound, I have consulted with Professor Rasbury as well as my sound and film mentor, Tyler Lyon, on how to best approach high-quality sound design for this production. Because there will be a combination of sound sources used in this production, especially for the musical elements, I intend to purchase a high-quality boom mic and an audio interface that can take 4 audio inputs simultaneously. Along with this setup, I will be utilizing resources from the Wilson Media Studio, Robertson Media Studio, and Ruffin Hall’s Gutter to source other equipment for free such as boom poles, lavalier mics, 2-input audio interfaces, lighting, and B-roll cameras. I have access to scrap wood and woodworking training through the Studio Art department, which I will utilize to build minimal set elements as needed, and I will be allocating part of my budget towards the purchase of set elements and costumes to be thrifted from second-hand stores in the area. Finally, I will be working with Professor Kasra to make use of theatre spaces available on Grounds for the set and performance, ideally the Helms Theatre.

Concerns and Limitations

This is a complex project that will involve many different components across a variety of artistic disciplines, so it will require an extreme amount of focus, organization, and collaboration. I originally applied to be a Miller Arts Scholar because I was heavily invested in the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration as a core principle of filmmaking, and I feel this project encompasses that objective—I will not only be working within filmmaking, but also across screen and playwriting, theatrical production and performance, and musical composition at the very least. While this is an ambitious proposition, I am nonetheless extremely excited at the prospect of such a collaborative project, and I feel like with my current place at the university setting in combination with the connections and resources I have found through the Miller Arts program so far, there is no better time to take on this project.

Mentorship and Outcome Presentation

Finally, my faculty mentor, Professor Mona Kasra, has been extremely supportive of my idea, and she has invaluable experience working both with video production and theatre settings through her extensive work as a video and projection designer. She has a deep knowledge of the components necessary for producing staged performances, specific knowledge of performance spaces available to students at UVA, frequently collaborates on interdisciplinary art projects in

her own work, and she has experience with video editing and the post-production process. I am very excited to continue working under her guidance and mentorship.

The completed film will be ready to be screened at the Outcome Presentation in April 2026, along with a trifold display detailing different points of the production timeline with accompanying images and descriptions.

Project Timeline

Summer

- Finalize script and musical compositions
- Work through pre-production: final script edits, script breakdown; start sourcing materials, costumes, and set components from thrift stores and online sites
- Create and distribute casting memos + PR materials online through newsletters and social media, contact relevant professors and departments, and post flyers around Grounds
- Create demo tracks for musical numbers as reference for cast
- Book rooms on Grounds to hold auditions in Early Fall

Early-Mid Fall Semester (August-Mid October)

- Hold auditions and cast the show
- Book performance spaces for 3 rehearsal blocks and 4 shoot days (3 days + 1 backup)

Late Fall Semester (Mid October-December)

- Assemble physical elements: order correct sizes for costumes + source remaining costume materials from thrift stores, assemble and decorate set pieces
- Rehearsal block 1: cast meet and greet, give overview of production and timeline
- Rehearsal blocks 2 and 3: rehearse music and record the reference track

Winter Break

- Breathing space to make refinements before moving into production
- Encourage cast to memorize scripts, review choreography, etc., in preparation for filming

Early-Mid Spring Semester (January-February)

- Shoot entire performance by the end of February across 3 shoot days: 1 shoot per week with breathing space for a 4th day to cover any potential mishaps or reshoots

Late Spring Semester (March)

- Prepare final edit of the film in time for the Outcome Report and Presentation -- this leaves one month for any last-minute corrections, needs for ADR, etc.

BUDGET

Note: all prices for items sourced online were found between 3/20/25 and 3/28/25 from the following websites: Amazon Prime, Sweetwater, B&H, Adobe, and Discount Dance Outlet.

Equipment and Software		
Final Draft 13	Permanent access to a high-end screenwriting software that will support the formatting needed to write both filmic and theatrical/musical parts of the film	\$199.99
Zoom Lens for my current camera setup	Panasonic Lumix G X Vario 12-35mm f/2.8 ASPH POWER O.I.S. to assist with wide shots, dynamic shots, and low-light studio setting	\$415.00
Tripod dolly	A wheel rig where I can place my tripod, allowing me to film sweeping shots around the performance space	\$55.99
RODE NTG 5 Boom Mic	High-quality boom mic to be used in combination with UVA's audio equipment resources to capture full soundscape	\$499.99
Tascam 4-input Audio Interface	A 4-input interface that would be used in tandem with similar audio recorders available through the Robertson Media Center. This would allow me to record multiple sound sources simultaneously (up to 8 total) to fully capture each cast members' singing voices as well as the performance space's atmosphere.	\$279.00
Adobe Creative Suite – 1 year subscription	Yearlong subscription to Adobe programs for editing and creating promotional material. I will be relying upon programs like Premiere and Audition especially.	\$294.00
Costume, Set, and Props		
<i>Sources for set and costume elements will be split between online ordering and thrift stores for more general pieces.</i>		
Sequin Suit	A flashy sequin suit to be donned by Mr. Dance, paired with a top hat included in item below.	\$49.88
12-pack of Sequin Hats	A multipack of colorful sequin top hats for Mr. Dance and the Dancin' Boys	\$29.99
8 pairs of tap shoes	8 tap shoes (available in all sizes) for each actor. $29.50 \times 8 = \$236.00$	\$236.00
6-pack of bowties	A multipack of colorful bowties for the Dancin' Boys	\$12.99
Single sequin tie	Mr. Business' sequined business tie.	\$8.99
Wardrobe – Thrift Store Budget	\$37.50/person to be distributed for 8 costumes sourced from thrift stores. This would make up most of the Dancin' Boys' clothes, similar to the style of <i>Annie</i> or <i>Newsies</i> costuming (in combination with the sequined elements).	\$300.00
Set – Thrift Store Budget	\$230.00 to be spent on furniture, props, and set decorations sourced from thrift stores. This would be used to create sets for the Dancin' Home for Boys, Mr. Business' room, and Mr. Dance's office.	\$230.00
Snacks for Cast and Crew	\$100.00 to be put towards bulk snacks and drinks for 3 shoot days for a combined cast and crew of roughly 15 people.	\$100.00
Contingency		
Contingency	Just under 10% of the \$3000 award will be put towards contingency in preparation for any unanticipated changes per the recommendation of my mentor, Professor Kasra.	\$288.18
Total		\$3,000.00
Budget Income, Funding, or Other Awards		
Income item:	MAS Third Year Award	\$3,000.00
Total		\$3,000.00

Evidence of Participation in the Arts

In the Arts, I am primarily engaged as a filmmaker and comedienne, which I pursue both through my coursework and my extracurriculars. As a double major in Media Studies and Studio Art with a concentration in Filmmaking, I do a great deal of work both analyzing and producing film and other media. I have already taken two semesters of Filmmaking classes for my Studio Art major coursework, where we learn the best practices for composing shots, recording sound, and editing with programs like Adobe Premiere and Audition, and next year, we will be expanding our focus to digital filmmaking. Additionally, through Media Studies, I have taken many genre-oriented classes which I feel contribute to the knowledge I am bringing into writing this film. I also actively work to take classes outside of my majors to develop other skills related to filmmaking and production. These include classes like *Producing Film*, *Script Analysis*, *Video Design*, and *Art of the Moving Creature* in the Drama Department, as well as classes in Creative Writing and Music Ensembles. I also plan to take a course in Sound Design next year.

I also participated in the ADRENALINE film festival this year, where I worked with peers from my filmmaking courses as a crew of three to produce a short film in under 72 hours. We ended up winning one of three possible awards, and it was a fantastic way to learn more about filmmaking on a tight schedule. I also plan to apply to other independent film festivals, entering short films I have been creating both through my coursework and on my own time.

Outside of class, I am extremely passionate about comedic writing and performance. I am the President and co-video manager of UVA's sketch comedy group, *the ___ incident*, and I have been working hard to improve our club and our reach. This year, I organized a joint "inter-comedy" show with two other comedy groups, yielding a turnout of over 300 people for our first performance this semester. In addition, I have worked on many video projects for each of our shows. I also am the design chair and a performer in Amuse Bouche Improv, where I combine my passion for studio art and filmmaking with comedic performance and event promotion. I led a promotional initiative that was inspired by A24 films ("AB24"), where I made a series of high-quality parody posters and a parody film trailer for our previous show. I am also very intentional about supporting my peers' creative projects and performances, and as such, I am an avid attendee of music, theatre, and workshop events.

Finally, I highly value artistic collaboration across disciplines, and I frequently work with my peers on artistic projects that combine my expertise with areas I am less familiar with. One of the primary reasons I sought to join the Miller Arts Scholars program was to build an interdisciplinary community of artists, and I believe I have found success in that regard. Over my time at UVA, I have built a highly extensive network of collaborators and mentors across the Arts, and I believe this project would be the perfect opportunity to bring these experiences to fruition.

Thank you for your consideration!

Portfolio Examples

Excerpt from *Dinner with Vampires (2025)*, 16 mm film (00:40)

<https://virginia.box.com/s/rckoelv7d9edixuozaaxjnhob6xdmlnv>

This is an excerpt from a silent film I made as part of my filmmaking course this year, where we sourced costumes and set elements to create a gothic setting for a vampire short film. Take note of the *mise-en-scene*, which we worked to design, assemble, and decorate with objects sourced almost entirely from local thrift stores, as well as the studio lighting setup. I would use a similar strategy and lighting equipment to build, decorate, and light the set for *The Dancin' Business*, as reflected in my budget and proposal.

Excerpt from *Please Hold (2024)*, Digital (01:26)

<https://virginia.box.com/s/c3x1xzl8vqd8y61kjenlidg7z5h9a1b5>

This was a film I made in under 72 hours as part of Lighthouse Studio's ADRENALINE film festival with a three-person film crew. We worked closely with one another to write, direct, source actors, acquire props, costumes, and build set elements, compose shots, and even create an original score for the film. Through the making of this film, I got extensive experience working on a tight schedule across each medium required throughout the production process (writing, prop design and building, musical composition, sound design, etc.).

Excerpt from *How to Survive Your First Date (2022)*, Digital (00:31-2:56, 02:25 total runtime)

<https://youtu.be/0vKghuZNxQI?si=HTrVhO9bBnApL7bW&t=31>

**For this link, please adjust video quality settings to 1080p if not automatically selected and pause the video at 2:56.*

This is one of my most involved film projects, where I worked hard to create an era-accurate parody of a 1950s instructional film (with a horror twist). I took care to source and create era-accurate dialogue through my writing, costume pieces, set design, art design for the title cards and credits, and post-production effects. It is also an example of my directorial work with more theatrical projects, as you can see with the actress and narrator's exaggerated performances.