

Analysis of
the creative project

SHEPARD PLAYS

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In the dramatic works of Sam Shepard there exists an acute understanding of real life in America--the scope of experiences, dreams, differences in thought and expression and the way these facilitate or prevent communication between people. His use of the medium of theatre to display where our solutions to today's problems are leading us is full of the power of vision and realization. His dialogue is of the most natural to reach the stage and each of his character's speech is fitted integrally to that character's role. In other words it is evident that each of his characters thinks differently, holds different values and expresses them in a manner that is a culmination of the experiences of that individual. This variety of thought patterns is one of the factors that makes Shepard a challenge to produce. Still, as stated by Ralph Cook, "Sam Shepard's plays are the most totally realized in original script of any writer He has an instinctive sense of what is theatrically right for his plays that goes beyond rules and preconceptions."¹

The largest obstacle a director faces when producing a Shepard play is his desire to alter some of the vehicles of expression in the script, to adjust them for his audience. The power of Shepard's works comes from his use of these devices to present the common experiences of our culture,

¹Sam Shepard, Chicago and Other Plays (New York: Urizen Books, 1981), p. 2.

especially the middle class. He puts everyday events in a new perspective, often a perspective we had not before seen. He displays our life as it truly exists and then slowly transforms or develops it into a logical, possible, or symbolic future. Other times he interrupts the action abruptly, discarding any pretense of realism and leaving the audience suspended in a world they cannot understand yet believe they can. He depicts the death of the American Dream--America coming out of puberty and realizing the myths it held so dearly as ideals and believed in as answers are just the fantasies and theories of another generation who existed in a different world. And from this realization is reborn the need to understand where and why we are.

Shepard Plays consists of three works by Sam Shepard and an introductory exposition compiled from critiques and commentary on Shepard and his plays. Following "~~E~~position Time" the works, in order of presentation, were Cowboy Mouth, Killer's Head, and Fourteen Hundred Thousand. It was first produced in Carmicheal Hall, February 12 and 13, 1982, with subsequent productions in the Ball State Theatre and The Muncie Museum of Temporary Art.

Objectives of the production were twofold in nature. A first concern was to acquaint the Muncie audiences with the work of one of America's most honored playwrights. Second, and more important, the production attempted to initiate the realization of the need for immediate action designed to direct our national destiny away from the path we have put ourselves on by our lack of comprehension of our own human

characteristics, needs, and drives.

As previously mentioned, the show opened with "Exposition Times." This piece was an audience preparatory. It gave them information about Shepard's theatrical style to form a framework and perspective through which they could better experience the evening's entertainment.

The first play, Cowboy Mouth, reflects the world the young have lived through these last two decades. It is a display of the personal needs this era produced and the creation of rock 'n' roll to fulfill these needs. Two people are presented in a quest for some sort of reason for existing--some means of fulfillment. They have had all the dreams, thought about all the explanations, searched for all the experiences and tried to ask all the questions. They are looking for genuine contact with something greater than themselves, something that can give significance to their lives. The old God is too distant. Jesus isn't here to be touched. He is not here to share the pain.

One of the characters is Slim, who is in his mid-20's, powerfully alive, physical, and looking for that something that will provide him with meaning for his existence without breaking his ties to the past. Opposite Slim, his kidnapper/lover, is Cavale. In contradiction to Slim's philosophy, she believes in the need to destroy in order to create, to give up this moment in order to achieve the next. Slim's perception of Cavale's world is narrow. The word Cavale means escape and it is through Cavale and her conception of rock 'n' roll that escape is possible, escape from the isolation of our

own mind. The third character is the Lobsterman. He delivers lobster and looks like a lobster. His appearance is representative of the way he is entrenched in his job. It has become his function, his entire existence. He is able to communicate only through grunts. Cavale, focusing her calls to him through rock 'n' roll, is able to strip his limitations from him. She removes the shell that has enclosed the new rock 'n' roll savior. Playing roulette with a .38, he accepts the need to give up this moment and all it may mean in order to fully experience the next.

Killer's Head views a man's existence and accomplishments against the backdrop of the infinite continuum of time. It is a monologue delivered by a cowboy, Mazon, in the electric chair. He talks about what he is going to do today as if he were not about to be executed. He rambles about a pickup truck and horses but never verbally alludes to his situation. His death leaves the audience without an answer as to why his life was taken. Shepard is commenting on man's preoccupation with dying. He makes the audience ask the eternal question and paradox "why?"

The third play, Fourteen Hundred Thousand, is a tapestry of symbolism that begins realistically with a young husband and wife, Tom and Donna, giving a "friend", Ed, a guilt complex for not completing a bookcase for them. The only remaining chore is to put in the shelves, which keep falling down, and to paint it. The other characters, Mom and Pop, are ignored by the young couple except for what help they can lend to the project. Ed is the independent individual who wishes to

belong to the group without giving up his freedom of thought and action, his own choice of fate.

Two major themes are presented in this work: The paradox of the individual--to exist alone is to not exist; and our destiny is decided by the movements, opinions, actions and lack of action of the masses--this control has no conscious, no planned direction. These things are expressed through both literary and graphic symbolism. In the first part of the show, the realistic part, and in addition to the ostracism of Ed, there are several visions of action never completed and dreams never realized. The bookshelves and the books that litter the stage are representative of the apathetic and poor way we select and organize our knowledge and experiences, the insensible way we choose our priorities, values, and friends. A dirty, impure white paint covers the back wall suggesting the way technology will paint over rust to give the appearance of an improved environment. In a paint fight Donna and Tom also try to coat each other with white, succeeding to some degree. After this fight they respond simultaneously and in unity for the rest of the play. Ed, unable to communicate with them, has a breakdown.

Shepard employs theatrical devices to underline the themes of the script. As he does this the play leaves realism and acquires some of the characteristics of the genre of Happenings, where actors stop presenting roles and begin to simply carry out actions. It begins with Mom and Pop reading from different books the same short story in unison. They are joined by Donna and Tom and, finally, after his collapse, Ed. The

story is about snow falling until it drives them from their homes and even from their valley. The people just turn and walk away, never stopping and never looking back. Symbolically the falling snow is the continuum of time and the way it forces action in some direction whether we are prepared and comprehend it or not. At the end of this story, Tom, Ed, and Donna begin to dismantle and remove the set while Mom and Pop start to read about the lack of planning in the construction of a city. They propose and then enter a sales pitch about a plan for a universal city with ten mile squares of country between one mile wide linear cities. They get caught up in the excitement of planning and cannot stop. They put cities from continent to continent, under water and up in the air until there exists no more free space, just one huge metropolis and enclosing the Earth. The lines get shorter, the pace gets faster and the volume and excitement build right up to the final moment when they fill the last square mile of free space. Then they close their books with the finality of the slam of a coffin lid in the newly discovered silence of the other actors having completed their task.

The production of Shepard Plays was prepared with emphasis on the acting and the audience/actor relationship to aid their understanding of the theatre of Sam Shepard, the actors received excerpts about acting and watching plays by Shepard. "Exposition Time" was compiled from the same material. A copy of these notes is included in the appendix.

The technical aspects were severely hampered because of the limited budget. Thrust staging was employed for its relationship between the audience and the acting area. It allowed the greatest amount of seats to be placed as close to the action as possible. Set requirements prohibited the use of arena staging. These requirements were minimal but complex. Two of the works needed a door and a window. In Fourteen Hundred Thousand the set had to be dismantled and carried off by the actors. This play also had to have a bookcase with shelves that would fall on cue, be replaced and fall again, and have the stability to be hammered upon. The unit also had to be independent of the set walls and simple enough to be set up during a ten minute intermission. For the monologue an electric chair with an electrocution effect that could be controlled by the actor sitting in it had to be constructed. In consideration of the actors of Cowboy Mouth, who spent many moments wrestling on the floor, and to help define the stage from the house in the absence of platforms, a carpet was placed upside-down covering the entire acting area. This carpet was rolled back for the monologue. Set design, lighting design and other technical lists and schedules are in the appendix.

The requirements for lighting could not be met for Cowboy Mouth due to the lack of available equipment. The ideal lighting for this script is the lighting of a rock 'n' roll concert, with many colors, unusual angles and numerous changes in lighting to reflect the changes of mood. The

other two shows needed minimal lighting and were easily accomplished satisfactorily. For Killer's Head a single white spot was placed directly over the chair and controlled on its own dimmer. For Fourteen Hundred Thousand the script called for a general wash of white light that would change abruptly to a general wash of blue. Four white and five blue flood lights were employed, the whites on a dimmer and the blues controlled by an off/on switch. A combination of the blues on full and the whites from 70 percent to zero was used in Cowboy Mouth.

Make-up, costumes and props were incorporated as simplistically as possible and are detailed in the production lists in the appendix. Also included are the production schedule, budget, and a copy of the rehearsal schedule.

Producing any play presents several problems relative to the specific script and, no matter the amount of beforehand study, the performance and post-performance reflection will bring to light new dimensions and dictates of the work. In producing a work by Shepard, the newness of the script is, in itself, a major consideration. The appropriate method of bringing the work to life had to be deduced almost entirely from the script as few previous productions have been reviewed. Director's choices were made to alter many small aspects of the playwright's work, mostly in the area of technical performance. Examples include the costume for the Lobsterman, which should have looked like an actual, huge monster; the set decoration for Cowboy Mouth, which did not adequately reflect Cavale's personality; and the costuming and make-up, which

were hastily designed and executed. Had hindsight and funding been available prior to the production, these changes would probably have been avoided. Still, Shepard Plays provided both the actors and the audience with a new and unique dramatic experience, introducing to them a style of theatre they had never before encountered and, perhaps, awakening them to the message the author and the production desired to convey.

APPENDIX

- A. REHEARSAL SCHEDULE
- B. PRODUCTION SCHEDULE
- C. BUDGET
- D. PRODUCTION LISTS: SET, PROPS
- E. PRODUCTION LISTS: COSTUMES, MAKEUP
- F. ABOUT SAM SHEPARD: NOTES TO THE ACTORS
- G. FLOOR PLAN AND HANGING PLOT

Rehearsal Schedule for "Shepard Plays"

JAN	SUN	3	Cowboy Mouth	Music	Cathy, Greg
	MON	4	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Block All	All
	TUE	5	Cowboy Mouth	Run Lines	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	WED	6	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Run Lines	All
	THR	7	No Rehearsals		
	FRI	8	No Rehearsals		
	SAT	9	No Rehearsals		
	SUN	10	No Rehearsals		
	MON	11	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	61-73,80-85	Carla, Tom, Lesli Marcia
	TUE	12	Cowboy Mouth	199-209	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	WED	13	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	64-73, 80-85	Tom, Leslie, Marc
	THR	14	Cowboy Mouth	209-216	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	FRI	15	Cowboy Mouth	Music, Run	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	SAT	16	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Run	All
	SUN	17	No Rehearsals		
	MON	18	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	73-79,85-94	All
	TUE	19	Cowboy Mouth	199-209	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	WED	20	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	87-94	Ken, Carla
	THR	21	Cowboy Mouth	209-216	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	FRI	22	Cowboy Mouth	Music, Run	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	SAT	23	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Run	All
	SUN	24	No Rehearsals		
	MON	25	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	64-73,80-85	Carla, Tom, Lesli Marcia
	TUE	26	Cowboy Mouth	199-209	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	WED	27	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	73-79,85-94	All
	THR	28	Cowboy Mouth	209-216	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	FRI	29	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Run	All
	SAT	30	Cowboy Mouth	Music, Run	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	SUN	31	No Rehearsals		
FEB	MON	1	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Run	All
	TUE	2	Cowboy Mouth (IF NEEDED)	Lines	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	WED	3	Fourteen Hundred Thousand	Run	All
	THR	4	Cowboy Mouth	Run	Cathy, Greg, J.A.
	FRI	5	No Rehearsals		
	SAT	6	Build Set		Please Help!!!!
	SUN	7	Build Set	Full Run	Everyone Required Stand here on cut
	MON	8	Full Run		
	TUE	9	Full Run		
	WED	10	Full Run (IF NEEDED)		
	THR	11	Final Dress	Publicity Pictures	
	FRI	12	Show the First		
	Sat	13	Show the Second		

** Please Note--Specific Rehearsal Times, plus information concerning Costumes and Makeup will be announced as we go.

SHEPARD PLAYS

B

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

2-4 wire chair

2-5 gather: flats tarps
 carpet curtains
 trunk mattress
 shelves stool
 door electric chair
 window

2-6 move to CA115
 carpet down
 wall up
 hang curtains
 gather props

2-7 brace wall 2-7 real paint for fight
 set house

2-8 order chairs
 program to printers
 get crow
 make Lobsterman claws and cheeks

2-9 rig shelves 2-9 real food
 hang tarps

2-10 paint set and chair
 hang lights

2-11 pick up programs
 build headgear and straps - add to chair

2-12 OPEN
 preshow: set props
 rig chair flash
 prepare set
 kill hall lights
 set guitar level - tune
 check house
 postshow: put set up
 lock up props
 lock up dimmer
 sweep
 wash paint brushes
 wash painted clothes

2-13 pictures
 strike
 party

SHEPARD PLAYS

BUDGET

Royalties - reduced paid by Carmicheal	\$90.00	
Scripts	\$34.24	
Prompt script materials	8.30	
" " "	2.69	
Rehearsal tapes	2.42	
" "	2.42	
" "	1.00	
Makeup: K-Y	1.34	
Costumes: rit dye	1.03	
foam stuffing	3.06	
scarves	.50	
Cavale's and Slim's	4.16	
Props: pictures	1.00	
groceries	13.81	
Flyers	10.35	
Programs	15.55	
Tech: switch	3.11	
3 flash @ 3.58	10.74	
	<u>\$ 115.72</u>	total expenditure
2-12 audience @ 1.00	33	
2-13 audience @ 1.00	35	
	<u>\$68.00</u>	total receipts
	\$47.72	loss

SHEPARD PLAYS

Production Lists

SET:

16' x 16' carpet
 2 4' x 8' flats - white
 2½' x 6½' window - white
 3' x 7' door - white
 3 flat jacks
 3' x 10' curtain
 12' x 10' curtain

PROPS AND SET PIECES:

trunk	tennis shoes
stool	stuffed dolls
crate	ashtrays - 1 with roach
drums	gun
snare case	candles
amp	light blankets
electric guitar	mattress
guitar case	pillows - 2
bookshelves	wood scraps
electric chair	sawdust
stuffed crow	3 paint cans - scene paint, no fixative in one, white
Sears catalogue	2 paint brushes
tray	tool box
pink telephone	tools
hubcaps - 2	8' stack of books
raggedy costumes	tequila bottle
ribbons and lace	lobster
pictures of cowboys	4 toasted bialys with cream cheese
poster: Crucifixion, Dali	scrambled eggs
poster: Dylan	cream pie
clothes	sausage
empty beer bottles	pepsi
hammers - 2	
scarves	
switchblade	

COSTUMES:

Slim: Faded jeans, white western cut shirt, hide vest, cowboy boots

Cavale: Worn-out jeans, black T-shirt, black sleeveless cape

Lobsterman: Orange jumpsuit, claws, lobster cheeks, black hat over sleeveless black capezio jumpsuit, flared

Mazon: White T-shirt, jeans, cowboy boots

Tom: Blue T-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes, glasses

Ed: Short sleeve shirt, sleeveless sweater, cords

Donna: Jeans, sweatshirt, tennis shoes

Mom: Flower print dress

Pop: Cords, white short sleeve shirt, brown sleeveless sweater

MAKEUP:

Slim: None

Cavale: 4b base, heavy lines around eyes

Lobsterman: Grey triangles and eyeshadow

Mazon: None

Tom, Ed,
Donna: None

Mom: General age

Pop: General age.

But one sees in it all too - something most pertinent to a
 foundation on Shepard's plays - another and more subtle conflict
 a world of disorder and the wayward, of a nostalgic
 de one appeared by landscapes filled with detritus and later
 fore stream with debris, of floating images, unfinished sets,
 discontinuity and dissonance, ambiguities and illogicalities;
 on the surface with time for proceeding instead of existing all
 at once, like space; and with space for having things, like
 contours and fluidity.

What distinguished Shepard's plays from most others in the
 new American repertoire was their greater vitality and energy -
 that of so many energies and actions not "revelatory" thought
 properly dramatic. More than any other playwright of the six-
 ties, he broke down the fixed definitions of the dramatic.
 But going this brought risks. He has said he wants to create
 "total" theatre, and this ambition is both the goal to his art
 and the clue to his dissonances. For total theatre,
 where everything is present at once, can result in a cancelling
 out, a mark and confusion.

Shepard has always claimed... that these musical elements are
 as important to many of his plays as their speech, and that the
 same is true for his scores.

Shepard's physical materials and perspectives come largely
 from developments in the graphic arts and dance during his ad-
 vanced and early career. He has said that Jackson Pollock
 was important to him, but that some were active in his work -
 Pollock and abstract expressionism from the "hard-edge" phase of painting
 and sculpture, collage in the manner of Johns and Rauschenberg,
 and the mixed media experiments of the latter exist with John
 Cage and others. The sets reveal all these influences at two
 extremes: their occasional starkness, a bare space in which
 light is the only source or "acting" factor, and
 their frequent others in dark, sleek.

...the genre lies not in ideas or thought but in the texture
 of language; he seeks more to the eye, or to the ear (in terms
 of expressive sound, though not in terms of immediate sense),
 than to the mind.

Shepard seems to have come out of no literary or theatrical
 tradition at all but precisely from the breakdown of theatrical
 on the level of art it not commerce - of all such traditions
 in America. Such a thing is never a clean, absolute stride a-
 way from the ruins: fragments of tradition, bits of history,
 clinging to every razor edge and to one's eyes. But in his case
 one does see a movement with very little cultural time at the
 back, or only the thinnest slice of the immediate past, a WILLIAM
 movement, it might be said, for one suspects Shepard of want-
 ing to be thought of as a self-creation.

"I don't want to be a playwright, I want to be a rock and
 roll star." (1971)

Excerpts from an interview by Richard Gilman for SEVEN PLAYS.

NOTE OF IT AND HAD TO LIVE IN THREE ELEMENTS.
 any lives. The only difference is that here the actor lives
 the as much as "acting" as they do in our ordinary
 California mountains of a "living" that on Saturday, have
 about changes that occur in the play they can be taken as
 here. If there needs to be a notation for some of the
 to completely answer the question for the character, a
 of make or make in some without having to fill the need
 feeling them through his position and sense to make a
 that he, a living element in the play, is not a
 from the other (or "living" as they call it), but more
 as one actor playing many different roles, each one distinct
 a function or a function. This is not the same thing
 central theme. In other words, more in terms of collage
 fused whole with bits and pieces of characters living off the
 actor submerges himself into, he should consider himself a
 character" with logical motives behind his behavior which the
 when working on this play. Instead of the idea of a "whole"
 the term "character" could be thought of in a different way
 from ANGELO, by Dan Shepard from ANGELO, ONLY

And what he remembers about Shepard's plays is the way they
 display the new and unstable English and what makes the play
 feeling that it is, and that they display such half-dead
 half-living force that things that ought to be great, the ex-
 generated American circumstances, which Shepard's own law has
 questioning sensibility has made the scene, observation and poetry.

And might not the quest for identity really be the quest for
 a role?
 of the stage.
 life, while the living - spontaneous, unorganized and unpre-
 as a mode of behavior, takes a special urgency and
 itself as a theatrical reaction, but in Shepard's case it shows
 is obviously true of any drama, but in Shepard's case it shows
 relationship with life outside the theatre. Such a relationship
 work as existing in an especially intricate and shrewdly re-
 Beyond this, and as an aspect of it, we have to see Shepard's
 single continuing set of transposition.
 interdependence, the complete of a series of facets of a
 ought to occur, at least eventually, their vitality and
 tucked away like kernels in various sizes of husks, I think we
 changes into their respective depths to find elements which
 minds. Rather than try to keep them separate, trying by direct
 moreover, his plays coming, merging into one another in our
 of living that find this alive in Shepard and his
 it that we tend to look at all plays for their single "meaning"
 it is also a source of their vitality. Another element
 that is a source of the vitality in writing about them, or
 change, character-like, in self-protection as we look at them.
 to an end on highly unstable. They will over, they last. They
 many of his plays were partial, provisional, and finally brought
 in late 1964.
 Shepard's plays to be staged were done in New York

The basic elements of a Shepard production are unlike the elements termed essential in the theatre we know. Shepard is not as interested in plot as he is in the "feel" of the moment. The characters are not bound to a single reaction style or super-objective. They are the way feel at the moment. PHT is a perfect example of the technique involved. The characters' actions and reactions have motivations that change - evolve. The entire play is a dance and needs to be choreographed as one. Moments of reality dancing through the audience's mind. It is painting in space and time, a mosaic of theatrical elements caught eternally in transformation. gba