

**Final Sabbatical Report (Fall 2021)**  
**Scott Horstein**  
**Dramaturgy for *If I Should Wake* at Greenway Court Theatre (Los Angeles, CA)**

My sabbatical project for Fall 2020 drew on multiple threads from dramaturgy, a field in theater arts where I have spent the bulk of my professional theater career. I served as dramaturg for *If I Should Wake*, a monologue suite commissioned from eight playwrights by Greenway Court Theater in Los Angeles Nov. 20-Dec. 10, 2020, presented in an online hybrid theater/film format. Dramaturgs are professional story analysts in the theater who use close reading of dramatic text and research into the cultural, historical, and social world of the play to help stage directors conceive and reconceive stagings, and to help playwrights conceive, write, and rewrite scripts. Dramaturgs are a fusion of critic, in-house editor, and producer. Much of my work has been in the field of new play dramaturgy, developing scripts that have not previously been performed. I have related backgrounds in community-based theater, doing professionally produced theater by, for, and about specific communities, and in the dramaturgical practice of arts integration, embedding arts events and processes in coursework in a wide variety of subjects.

Dramaturging *If I Should Wake*, the Fall 2020 production of Greenway Court's "Greenway READS" arts integration program, incorporated all of these threads. As stated in the company's literature, Greenway is a community-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to unite communities through art, education, and social enterprise. Through Greenway's unique partnership with Fairfax High, where the theater is in residence, students are exposed to a myriad of opportunities for creative collaboration and engagement with professional artists, both in and out of the classroom, as they discover their individual voices and passions. Greenway seeks a genuine, deep engagement with its community by producing and presenting theatre, spoken word, media arts and dance performances that represent and reflect the unheard voices and rich diversity of Los Angeles.

Initially, the Fall 2020 Greenway READS production was to be an original adaptation of a to-be-determined pre-selected novel from the Los Angeles Unified School District curriculum. (Greenway READS is not "theatre for young audiences"; the production is part of the Greenway Court Theatre's regular season for its general audience as well, produced with a professional cast and creative team.) In addition to dramaturging the project I was to consult on the expansion of the Greenway READS program to other LAUSD campuses.

The arrival of the pandemic in 2020 forced Greenway to abandon these expansion plans, and reconceive its Greenway READS show for Fairfax High to a format that would allow artists and audience to stay safe: original commissioned monologues addressing the country's present moment, mostly filmed by actors in their homes, and streamed on-demand as a monologue suite via Greenway's Twitch channel. During the professional rehearsal period, and separate from the professional production, Fairfax students would in their online English classes work in a parallel process, writing their own monologues as a class project under the mentorship of Greenway's teaching artists.

In the initial project conception phase for *If I Should Wake*, my work as dramaturg focused on shepherding and clarifying aesthetic and project goals. I helped create a unified theme and show title, and also helped craft a unified writing prompt which we gave to each playwright to inspire each monologue:

*In the rupture between past and future, caught between the intensity of outward survival and the interior space of myth, the unconscious, and dreams, how will you find rebirth?*

The prompt was distilled from the intensity of local and global events in June 2020, as well as from two related sources of inspiration: One, Greenway's very first show, in the year 2000, the world premiere

of *Sonnets for an Old Century* by great contemporary playwright José Rivera, a monologue suite about characters facing the afterlife, and, two, the Buddhist notion of *bardo*, an in-between state that occurs both during life and after death.

I worked in collaboration with the co-Artistic Directors and Production Director to commission past and current Greenway playwrights to collectively write this suite of monologues for on-demand streaming. The playwrights commissioned have a wide range of aesthetics, cultural backgrounds, and histories of work with Greenway. Many are based in Los Angeles or are prominent in the American new play scene: Alex Alphaerah, Boni Alvarez, Arianna Basco, Diana Burbano, Ina Craig-Galván, Yehuda Hyman, Grace McLeod, and Larry Powell.

In the second phase, development and production, I helped to lead group writers' meetings, and led individual script meetings with director Reena Dutt and each playwright as they developed their monologue script. During online rehearsals on Zoom with actors and writers based around the country, I offered story and staging notes to the director, writers, actors, and producers. The monologues were shot and recorded with a combination of cell phones and laptop cameras, with different monologues taking different approaches to the hybrid film/theater approach, just as the scripts dramatized the writing prompt in different ways. In Alex Alphaerah's *Cassandra*, a young woman alone in an empty outdoor food court reads a letter from her father. The monologue was an exterior shoot on location, a continuous traveling take from a cell phone operated by the show's production designer; the audience heard the text of the letter read by the young woman in her thoughts via voiceover, while the actor's mouth remained still. In *Francis* by Boni Alvarez, a young man speaks to his dead father over Zoom. This was an interior in a bedroom, shot as a continuous take via a static two camera set-up, then edited, with the text delivered by the actor to the cameras via direct address. In addition to dramaturging the monologues themselves, I consulted on the filmed transitions between each monologue, which were videos of an actor in the shuttered Greenway theater, lit in provocative ways that suggested both isolation and hope.

In the final phase, post-production and opening, I wrote the marketing prose for the show. I also worked with the producing team to create arts integration opportunities for Fairfax High students, helping facilitate the student matinee stream of the show for Fairfax students and helping lead discussion with students. I also helped review monologues Fairfax students wrote on same prompt as commissioned playwrights, and helped select monologues for inclusion with the commissioned professional monologues for eventual publication.

The impact of this sabbatical project on my teaching has been immediate. Upon return from sabbatical I invited multiple artists from the show as guest speakers to class in Spring 2021. Actor Sammy June spoke about making a career in the arts and also on evolving practices around sexual and gender identities in Hollywood, while director Reena Dutt discussed making a career as a director and also the challenge of working for racial equity and justice in theater and film. The experience of working in the suddenly expanding field of hybrid theater with film and theater artists from Hollywood and around the country will directly influence how I structure the student experience in the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance's new play festivals this coming academic year.

The project was significant in the Los Angeles theater community – it was a “Culture Pick” in the *Los Angeles Times* and had an in-depth feature from *Spectrum News*. The project helped reaffirm my creative agenda of continued work in the American new play field and brought me into contact with a range of vital artists, discussions, and voices at a critical moment when the entire field of new play development was interrogating its core structures in response to the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd. The project also deepened my long-term relationship with Greenway, a groundbreaking and innovative leader in Los Angeles theater.

I am deeply grateful to Sonoma State for providing this opportunity to engage with my chosen field, and for providing this time and support, which was vital to my creative work and to helping me envision how to best connect my students to an ever-changing field.