

***The Bear: A Senior Project by Dante Nastasi***

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## **Artistic Aims for The Bear**

**By Dante Nastasi**

This fall I am directing a modern adaptation of Anton Chekhov's short one act play, The Bear. It is a comedic drama that tells the story of a wealthy Russian widow named Popov who is visited by a landowner named Smirnov. He is owed money from her deceased husband Nikolai, and he refuses to leave until he is paid. The two personalities clash until an unexpected bond forms between the two at the very end. But this production takes the story and puts it into the context of the current day Covid-19 pandemic. Nikolai passed away after catching Covid-19 months before. Since then Popov has not left the house, and Smirnov's income has suffered as a result of the pandemic. He is forced to reach out to several of his debtors in order to pay off the mortgage on his land in time. He requests to join a Zoom chat room between Popov and her servant Luka. All three characters come face to face amidst a pandemic and the frustrating technology and online services they have no choice but to work with.

In addition to the context of the pandemic, the characters of Popov and Smirnov will interact realistically as two strangers meeting each other on the internet for the first time. Their anonymity emboldens them to confront each other with decidedly more hostility than they would if they interacted in person. They take below the belt jabs at each other that get increasingly mean as their argument develops, much like you'd see in the comments section of a YouTube video. Since these people aren't face to face and only get a small idea of what type of person the other is, they react more irritably to not immediately getting what they are after. But when they

finally do meet in person (as portrayed in a separately shot piece of footage to be integrated into the performance), that immediate hostility isn't quite there. They're both nervous and not as quick to resort to personal insults. This is the first time each character has seen another person outside of their immediate social circle since the pandemic began. As they talk, each begins to see the other as the person they truly are. This is ultimately the turning point where these two begin to fall for each other.

The modern context not only adds to the character dynamic and themes, it informs the comedy of the show as well. Many of the things that can go wrong in a Zoom chat happen in this adaptation. Luka is still an older man as he is in the original text, only this time he's struggling to use today's technology. He speaks too loudly into the microphone, mutes himself, gets too close to the camera, and at times is unaware he's visible to the others. At the same time, Popov and Smirnov both use the limitations and functions of Zoom to spite each other. Popov and Luka are host of the meeting and when Popov is annoyed by Smirnov, she mutes him and we see his frustration without any sound coming from his camera feed. He then has to struggle to communicate with Luka to turn his microphone back on, and make him cohost to prevent being so easily muted.

Perhaps the most notable comedic scene is the final page of the script. Popov and Smirnov argue over whether to have a duel, and the two ultimately share an unexpected kiss as Luka walks in. This production will feature a different approach to this scene. Once the moment of the kiss is reached, at first the two will struggle to find a way to properly express their love without breaking Covid-19 guidelines. After a moment, Smirnov does a wedding carry with Popov and walks off screen. The filmed scene ends and the next thing the audience sees is both

of them returning to their cameras, with Smirnov placing a wedding veil over his screen, and slowly lifting it as Luka rejoins the chat and reacts in horror. This approach not only accommodates the limitations of Covid restrictions, but makes the final scene all the more outrageous and funny without being a detriment to the character arcs.

My senior project has gone through a considerable evolution since the start of the year. Originally I didn't even intend to direct *The Bear*. I was initially disheartened to put a hold on my original idea. But after the onset of the pandemic made in-person performances all the more difficult (borderline impossible a few months ago), it became obvious that *The Bear* would lend itself better to an online performance than my original full-length idea would. Once I realized this, I became increasingly excited about the possibilities in this approach.

When the pandemic started, I was extremely turned off by online theatre. Most of the performances I saw tended to drag on for far too long, and they lacked the intimacy and immediacy of live, in-person theatre. But as time went on I began to recognize that some performances were able to consistently capture the attention of the audience, and offer a unique experience that wouldn't necessarily have been as easy to portray on a traditional stage. This is the main goal I wish to accomplish with this production. I want the production to entertain those who tune in, and to serve as another reminder that this field is constantly evolving and is capable of surviving, even in the midst of world changing circumstances. I think it would be beneficial for many of our viewers to be able to take a bit of a break from the stresses of this year, and have a good time watching something like this (even from a distance). That being said, I do want the modern context to prompt the viewers to re-evaluate online culture and behavior. In a chaotic year such as this one, we really need to encourage the public to empathize with others and have

more thoughtful conversations. I want the production to discourage unnecessary hostile behavior towards others based on how a person presents themselves. I especially hope that the ending (as outlandish as it is) reminds the audience of the true value of human connections, especially during times of unrest.

There are quite a few challenges to overcome along the way. The obvious one that exists in all productions is working around everyone's schedule. Thankfully with such a small cast (three actors), it's much easier to find times when everyone is available to rehearse. The two challenges I am most concerned with regard physically blocking the scenes, and doing proper in-depth character work with the actors. Blocking an actor's movement with the limited screen space of their cameras is no easy task, especially when trying to create a visually interesting performance that maintains the audience's attention. To combat this, during rehearsal we will spend much time experimenting with the actor's position relative to the camera (in their own personal filming environment). We will be sure to have all of the movement feel natural and not forced in for the sake of having something move on screen. In addition, I would like to play around with character posture and how close they get to the screen during certain sections of the script. This contributes to dynamic body movement and also serves to indicate the level of respect certain characters have towards others.

Having energetic actors play characters with such an intense and complicated dynamic makes me somewhat disappointed that I don't have them face to face. Portraying the intensity and range of emotions between these two over a Zoom call will be decidedly more complicated. I will be spending extended time with the actors establishing emotional beats for each monologue and inspiring them to think about the subtext of each line. Making sure they are

properly warmed up and ready to engage with the script each rehearsal will prove vital in this case as well. Both physical warmups to ensure they're able to move around their space with ease, and vocal warmups to make sure their voice is as clear and audible as possible over the Zoom connection.

For better and for worse, I want the project to show my development as a director since I first started the concentration in my studies. The things I have improved on and the aspects of my approach that still need work. In that regard, I want the production to encourage me to continue to evolve as a director without letting self-doubt affect my decisions too much. I want the experience to inform me where I should go from here. How I should apply what I have learned to future projects or similar instances when I take up leadership. I would also like for my actors to take away something similar from the production. That way they can feel more comfortable performing and expressing themselves over a medium they aren't used to doing so with.

Hopefully after the project has concluded, I can direct a production in person afterwards. The project can be the beginning point for ideas and concepts yet to come. But if it takes a while before we have properly handled the Covid situation, I hope that The Bear inspires me to experiment with the online medium even further.

How to Create Attention-Capturing, Socially Distanced, Online  
Theatre in the Midst of a Worldwide Pandemic  
A Research Paper by Dante Nastasi



Picture this for a moment. A production team has begun work on a new production to be performed in a matter of months. The casting is completed, the venue is chosen, and the first set of rehearsals are about to begin. Then suddenly a pandemic hits and throws everything out of order. It makes in-person theatre almost impossible to do safely. As a result, productions get canceled, entire theatres start shutting down, and even Broadway itself becomes a ghost town. This is not even the first time something like this has happened. The 1918 Flu Pandemic similarly resulted in public venues being closed down for the sake of reducing the spread of the virus. Hollywood halted the production of all films until the virus was gone. Theatre companies in New York City on the other hand were a bit more stubborn. As there were no feasible ways of creating performances that weren't in person, the health commissioner of New York (Royal S. Copeland) briefly encouraged Theatres to stay open at a limited capacity. Compared to today, going to a Theatre to see a show was an even more vital part of people's social lives at that time. People weren't quite ready to give that up, especially as the virus coincided with the climax of the first World War.

Though eventually most theatres would close down as the pandemic worsened, there was a clear void left by the closures. A void many feel today once again, especially those working full time in the Theatre industry. But the important thing to remember is that after the 1918 pandemic ended, Theatre came back in a big way. The public was so starved for live entertainment that

once the restrictions were lifted people came in droves to sit in those seats again. While it is still unclear when that moment will happen for us moving forward, it is equally as important to remember that today we have advantages Theatre artists did not have in the early 20th century. The most obvious advantage is our access to technology and the internet. Yes, some staged performances have been filmed and streamed on the internet, but something a little more intriguing is becoming popular in Theatre across the globe. That being online theatre, or as Jonathan Mandell describes it, “theatre created for the internet, without ever having been performed on stage” (Mandell, Paragraph 9).

Even before the pandemic, Theatre companies have utilized online resources to enhance performances, and in some cases to create new venues. Actors can go through blocking and recite dialogue in the comfort of their own home for an audience to see over an online stream or group chat. Some companies have even dabbled in Virtual Reality technology to enhance the visuals of the performance. But unfortunately it's very common for an online performance (especially over Zoom) to become uninteresting or downright boring. If the script is long and the performance lasts for more than an hour with minimal visuals, it's likely the audience will begin to lose interest before the end. The key to any great piece of theatre is that the performance grabs hold of the attention of the audience, and engages them throughout the runtime of the show. To do so with an online performance is more difficult as not only are there more distractions for the audience, but the intimacy of an in-person performance is lost. Yet despite this, multiple theatre companies have found ways of creating online theatre that captures attention.

How does an online production go about engaging an audience? It depends on the content and type of performance one wants to create. For example, some Theatre companies have been

using Virtual Reality technology. This offers a great opportunity to engage the audience as VR directly places the viewers into the perspective of a character directly involved in the story (oftentimes the protagonist). They can interact with the environment they see and in many cases can even influence the outcome of the story. An example of a performance experimenting with this concept is a show called *Miranda: A Steampunk VR Opera*. The show is a collaboration between LUMA, Tri-Cities Opera, Opera Omaha, and Enhance VR. It is set in a dystopian future in which imbalance between socio-economic classes has approached an all time high. A rich woman has been murdered and the viewers of the show are placed in the shoes of the judge and jury. It is up to the audience to decide who of three suspects is guilty. One of the more interesting aspects of the show is illustrated in its description on the Tri-Cities Opera website. The description ends with the following question: “The online audience will serve as judge and jury—but can they even accept their own role at face value? Or has the game been rigged from the start?” (Warfield, Paragraph 3) Audience members who read that will question to what degree (if any) they have the ability to influence the outcome of the play. Yet it is precisely this uncertainty that hooks viewers into coming to see the show, as it’s the only way they can find an answer. It also ties into the show’s themes of political corruption and injustice. Even before the audience has seen the show, this production does a terrific job of giving people a reason to care. “We have to choose whether we will participate and abide by the rules: we must determine the murderer. It forces our attention” (Galbraith, Paragraph 4).

The production team could have pre-recorded performances to keep the streaming process simple. But instead the show is actually performed live each time it is streamed.

“Miranda features professional actors in motion capture suits performing on-stage in real-

time” (Carlton, Paragraph 3). It may not be in-person theatre, but the urgency of the present time can be more easily felt by the audience if it's performed live. They have the knowledge that anything can happen at this particular performance, which can heighten their curiosity. The live motion-capture also allows for the actors to move freely about the space to complete their blocking. As the show is an opera, it's important for the actors to feel unrestricted by the technology they are using as they sing and move through the performance. It allows the audience to further immerse themselves in the world as well, with the actors moving unpredictably through the space in relation to the viewer's perspective.

The environments may not look entirely realistic, but the production team focuses more on creating an aesthetically unique world previously unknown to the viewers. As Carlton puts it, “Luma, Tri-Cities Opera, Enhance VR, and Opera Omaha put a lot of work into creating an incredible steampunk world that feels like a mash-up of Blade Runner and Knives Out. The avatars of each character looked like they stepped out of a classic Agatha Christie novel” (Carlton, Paragraph 5). It is reminiscent of an RPG video game both in its look and its mechanics as a quasi viewer-driven experience. Yet the developers decided to make the show available for a 2D screening on YouTube if the viewer in question lacked a VR headset. Having extra options like this allow the show to be more accessible. Even if those watching outside of VR won't quite get the full experience.

The developers created an original software framework for the show's design. They used the networking engines *Photon* and *Unity* to make it. *Miranda* is the first show that has used this software. Unfortunately, this means that some technical issues were bound to arise. The motion-capture technology ultimately did not create emotionally expressive faces for the 3D characters.

Along with this, the character models would often appear to float through spaces as they walked, or made awkward and sudden physical movements. In addition, problems with audio commonly occurred throughout the performance, with some viewers unable to coherently listen to the music or lyrics. “Sometimes I could hear the actors as they went about performing their scenes. Most of the time, however, I could only hear background noise, which was especially disappointing considering the incredible list of talent” (Carlton, Paragraph 6). The camera work was not without its flaws as well, as viewers were often forced into looking at certain areas of the world as they were relevant for a scene. This can prove to be disorienting to viewers and a potential turn-off. Despite these issues however, the show has managed to find ways to make the audience care. With further experimenting and fine tuning of the VR technology, performances are capable of improving.

What if a dance performance company wishes to create online content? In this case something a bit more traditional would be effective. Filmed performances of staged dances are very commonly available on dance company websites. For something like this, a production team would need to focus more on the ways in which a dancer is filmed when performing. A dance performance must be well shot and staged, with plenty of space for the performer to move around it (without having to worry about whether or not they can be seen by the viewers). Many dance companies have taken to streaming recordings of performances that went up before the pandemic. While archived performances have proven popular in several areas of performance even outside of dance (take for instance Hamilton), some dancers have not limited themselves to only this. The renowned Martha Graham Dance Company has been carrying out both streams of archived performances, as well as some new, original content for their subscribers.

The company has shown a great deal of attention and care towards community engagement and connection. In the introductory statement on their website they proclaim, “Virtually everything will be available to you this season — from a front row seat at our popular Graham Studio Series shows to insider videos from our dancers and unique gems from our archives” (Graham, Paragraph 3). Despite the challenges of the times, they let the public know that they are still working towards providing their supporters with unique content. In the case of their archived footage, it is content not previously available to the public. An event entitled, *Punch and the Judy* will stream footage of the company’s performance of Annie B. Parson’s “*I Used To Love You.*” This is a unique opportunity for viewers to see footage they likely didn’t know existed in the first place. In addition to archived events, online dance classes taught by members of the collective are offered to the community as well. This offers an interactive component to their online projects. Another online event is a “*Holiday Bash.*” /that features new performances by Graham School students, including one by Lloyd Knight, a popular principal dancer for the company. What Graham may lack in terms of opportunities for in-person performance, it makes up for in offering unique opportunities to hook dance performance fans into tuning in for events. In a time when those very fans may need the escapism of watching performance now more than ever. To quote Lloyd himself, “Dance is humbling in the way that it always brings you down to earth with what you can do, cannot do and have the potential to do. Nothing for me is better than knowing that I can escape into a realm, and take someone watching to somewhere else” (Lloyd Knight).

There comes a point, however, when archived performances and dance classes won’t cut it on their own. Viewers will quickly devour the archived content and be hungry for more

(particularly something they've not seen before). As Mandell put it when discussing uploads of these performances, "The task of updating has turned from challenging to impossible, as has watching it all" (Mandell, Paragraph 14). The wellbeing of performers should also be considered, as many are out of work due to limited opportunities. Archived footage streams aren't going to offer opportunities to get their work out there (or be compensated for that matter). Is there a way around this?

An interesting development in the world of dance performance are companies that support the works of other artists amidst the pandemic. An example of this is a company named *Candy Bomber*. The founder, Kate Duhamel, started the company to create visually evocative dance performances. In addition she desired to allow artistic collaborators to have a space to work on and display their ideas. Or as Duhamel herself puts it, "I am interested in creating meaningful opportunities for extremely talented artists to experiment, and stretch to create experiences that have impact within cultural landscapes and social spaces" (Kate Duhamel). She finds it especially necessary in the face of a pandemic to assist artists in getting their work out into the world. So she and the company created "*CandyBombersCommissions*," an outlet for collaborators who worked on recent *Candy Bomber* projects. She offered each dancer \$500 dollars to create and film original online dance performances to be posted on the company's website (as well as on YouTube). "They range from short dance films to a mini-doc, digital video, music composition and video sculpture. It's an explosion of creative activity as artists have been dreaming, dancing, strumming, and editing an imaginative and inspiring array of works from their homes" (Kate Duhamel). A total of thirteen dancers submitted material for the Commissions project. Each submission was released along with a brief video of the dancers

describing the technical aspects of their submitted work, and why they made the choices they did. Take for instance Maddie DeVres' video, entitled "*Azure and Gold.*"

The performance features Maddie dancing as she walks down a vacant highway near her home. The camera follows her as she moves down the road. The footage contains multiple cuts between takes instead of one long, continuous shot. The editing together of these takes creates mesmerizing visuals for the viewer to take in. 360 shots were used as well in order for the audience to get a good look at the environment that surrounded her. Maddie says she used the emotions she felt during quarantine to inform the direction of her motions. "I was locked in my house, feeling like I had all these emotions, and going through different phases of being uninspired to just down and low, to then all of a sudden being hyper. A lot of mood swings and emotions. I feel like the piece was for me getting that out. Emotions needing motion" (Maddie DeVres interview). Through projects like Commissions, *Candy Bomber* has managed to engage both audiences and other fellow dance performance artists in the process. Viewers have access to new, well shot performances, while the artists have the opportunity to share their personal creations and the thoughts that went into making them. "It occurred to me that giving them a creative opportunity in conjunction with some funding might be particularly appreciated, and so I decided that raising a small fund to commission new work made a lot of sense" (Kate Duhamel on the project).

Can this attitude of offering artistic opportunities to struggling performers apply to a more traditional style of theatre? It seems it can as companies such as *24 Hour Plays*, have been managing to do so. *24 Hour Plays* is a company that prides itself on its unique concept. The concept being to write, direct, and perform short plays in just 24 hours. This premise has become



so popular, the company has allowed other collectives to apply for licensing to put up their own productions using the concept. At the suggestion of arts administrator Howard Sherman, the company decided to create virtual versions of their productions. One of the ways they decided to do this was by having the individual actors record monologues. “Twenty actors submitted getting-to-know-me videos to twenty playwrights and an hour later, one-on-one matchups were determined. The next morning at 9am, each actor received a monologue to record in front of a camera” (Dale, Paragraph 5).

While casts for 24 hour plays have typically been kept small, performances usually haven't been one person short plays/monologues. They're usually performed live as well, but in the case of these online monologues, they're pre-recorded. Yet despite the noticeable differences in presentation, the online monologues have actually proven to be quite well received. Michael Dale wrote in his review, “they may not exactly be deemed as live theatre, but there is a site-specific nature to the overwhelming majority of them, as the actors portray characters who are videoing themselves and, in a sense, casting "audience members" as their viewers. And there's also a time-specific nature, as most of them present situations related to the current health emergency” (Dale Paragraph 6). Many of the monologues boast timely subject matters. “*A Little About Me,*” (by Kathleen Hale) puts the audience in the perspective of Isabelle Fuhrman's new roommate. In the show she video calls you from the other room as she discusses safety and health precautions to be taken while living with her (particularly bathroom arrangements). The subject matter is likely something most audiences can identify with, and the fact that she's talking directly to viewers adds to this.

Though well-known actors such as Hugh Dancy and David Cross have done monologues, the company still offers the opportunity for anyone interested to participate, and to even create their own 24 Hour festivals. Licensing is still widely available for online collectives interested in following the company's lead. It is completely free of charge as well, only requiring an application to be filled out on their website. This is yet another perfect example of a company directly involving and engaging both their audience, and fellow performers looking for project opportunities. Since March, the company has continued to create content of this caliber and inspire others to do the same. "They've delivered a new batch of about a dozen original monologues nearly every Tuesday since, making 24 Hour Plays one of the three earliest and most consistent sources of legitimate online theater created during the pandemic (Mandell, New York Theatre, Paragraph 3).

The common aspect of each of the performance companies previously discussed is that they all have found ways in which to directly involve the audience. VR shows like *Miranda* feature the ability for the audience to choose their own paths. Dance companies like *Candy Bomber* offer opportunities for others to join in on their creations. *24 Hour Plays* do the same by still allowing others to license their concept. Despite their flaws, they have above all else found their own way to engage their audience according to their performance styles. They put their audience and community engagement above all else. Making your audience feel as though they are a part of the conversation that is elicited from watching a performance is key. For instance, Jonathan Mandell described performances of online plays entitled, *Teenage Dick*, and *The Siblings Play*. After each show concluded, live after-show conversations between the audience and the cast were put together over video chat. It allowed the audience to properly and directly

express their experiences with the performance, and for the cast to show them how the show was put together. Mandell described a certain intimacy to these chats. “It’s these conversations, oddly enough, that made me feel most as if I were attending live theatre: when an audience member at Teenage Dick observed that the video “brought back a little moment of normal” and that it had “that live feel like I could have been sitting there”; when an audience member at The Siblings Play observed: “There’s such a sense of isolation in the play that I think can resonate differently right now” (Mandell, Paragraph 22).

While their popularity may dwindle once the fateful day Theatre’s are able to fully re-open, online performances such as these will continue to have value in a post Covid world. They may allow for artists to experiment with their ideas, tell stories in new and immersive ways, or simply to connect with a wider audience. Online theatre is not simply a crutch to be used until the pandemic ends. It will continue to be a mode of performance long after. “The work happening in theatre now will enhance and expand the future of digital and remote platforms for performance, pedagogy, and communication more generally in the future” (Jones, Paragraph 16).

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## **Director's Notes**

### *Scene Rundown:*

Scene 1: Good Mourning (Pgs. 1-2)

Luka tries to convince Popov to go outside, but she insists she continue to mourn. Smirnov joins the chat.

Scene 2: Rude Awakening (Pgs. 2-3)

Smirnov asks for money owed to him by Nikolai and Popov refuses. Smirnov gets angry and Popov mutes him before turning off her camera.

#### Scene 3: Venting (Pgs. 3-5)

Smirnov vents to Luka about his frustrations in attempting to collect his debts. He refuses to leave, much to Luka's frustration.

#### Scene 4: The Confrontation (Pgs. 5-7)

Popov turns on her camera and insists Smirnov leave empty handed. Smirnov extensively berates her, and criticizes all women. Popov makes a compelling counterpoint, and tells of her husband's unfaithfulness. Smirnov is not moved, and Popov is furious over his behavior.

#### Scene 5: The Bear (Pgs. 7-8)

Smirnov threatens Luka causing him great distress. Popov calls Smirnov a "Bear." He is so insulted by this he challenges her to a duel, which she accepts.

#### Scene 6: Revelations (Pgs. 8-9)

As Smirnov prepares for the duel, he realizes the bravery of Popov, and how attracted he really is to her. Luka frantically tries to intervene.

#### Scene 7: The Duel (Pgs. 9-10)

Smirnov and Popov are about to duel. But after briefly showing her how to shoot, Smirnov pronounces his love for Popov, which she initially rejects. As he continues she realizes her love for him as well. They express their love for each other as Luka walks in.

*Actor Scenes:*

*Note: Actors are to have their cameras off when not in scene.*

Good Mourning: Popov, Luka

Rude Awakening: Popov, Luka, Smirnov

Venting: Smirnov, Luka

The Confrontation: Popov, Smirnov

The Bear: Popov, Smirnov, Luka

Revelations: Smirnov, Luka

The Duel: Smirnov, Popov, Luka

*Character Work:*

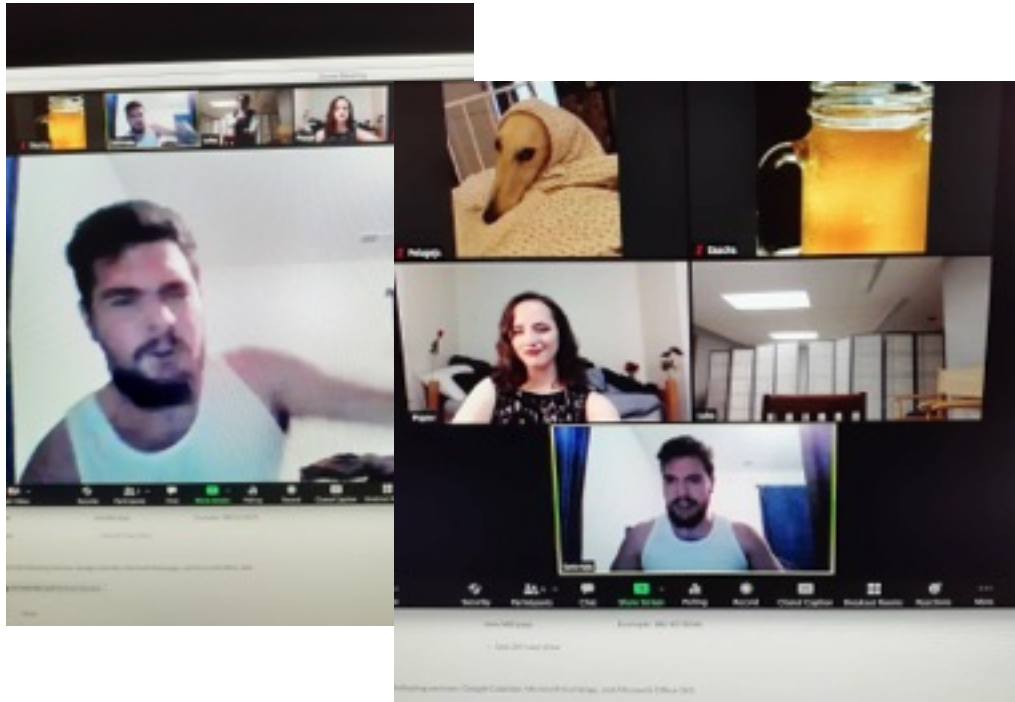
- i. How did Nikolai die? He died of Covid. Popov stayed with him during his final days.  
Leaves her with conflicted emotions.
- ii. What kind of man did Popov see Nikolai as? Why are you still faithful even after discovering his infidelity? She thought of him as a dashing and charming man. She fell



head over heels in love with him. She felt betrayed after the discovery, but stayed faithful to prove herself the bigger person.

- iii. Does Luka like his job? All Luka knows is Serfdom, and as such he relies on his routine.
- iv. Does your character have a family? Luka has no immediate family outside of his deceased wife. Popov has a strained relationship with her parents, and has no children. Smirnov is envious of his siblings. He had a strict father and a warm, loving mother.
- v. What are the political beliefs of your character? Luka supports the status quo. Popov is a conflicted anarchist despite her wealth. Smirnov swings whatever way suits his business interests at a given time.

**Proof of Performance:**



*Link to archived performance:* [https://vimeo.com/488130787/3860850408?](https://vimeo.com/488130787/3860850408?fbclid=IwAR0yBymj6Q5OTa2JSMBTqEoVNeNGKAQ7Q2MA29H8YUPd47XAKKEqICgdqi)

[fbclid=IwAR0yBymj6Q5OTa2JSMBTqEoVNeNGKAQ7Q2MA29H8YUPd47XAKKEqICgdqi](https://vimeo.com/488130787/3860850408?fbclid=IwAR0yBymj6Q5OTa2JSMBTqEoVNeNGKAQ7Q2MA29H8YUPd47XAKKEqICgdqi)

### **The Bear: Technical Essay**

The Bear presented numerous challenges for my production team and I throughout the semester. Readjusting to an online medium that none of us had really worked with before was a daunting task. I must admit, there were a few things that did not go as smoothly as I had wished (and a few things that flat out did not work). Ultimately however, the final performances managed to achieve several of the goals my team and I had set out to accomplish when we began in August.

When we had officially casted each role and decided upon how we would present the show (over a stream), it was around mid-August. It was decided that we should begin rehearsals immediately, in order to give ourselves ample time to experiment and put on the best show we could. The first few rehearsals were basic read-throughs of the script. Unfortunately, scheduling rehearsals proved difficult in these early stages due to conflicting work hours between production team members. It was not until the third rehearsal that we had everyone in attendance (for the first two rehearsals, we had our lovely stage manager read the lines of the missing actor). Once the official read-through was complete, we decided to cut the script into separate scenes that we could rehearse individually during rehearsals. For the fourth rehearsal, we worked on a section dubbed, “the first scene” (the first page of the script). At the end of each scene rehearsal, I would spend some time doing some character work with the actors. I asked them questions about their sense of the character they played, and what could be learned about them from a given scene. I was sure to ask them questions that weren't directly answered in the script as well, in an effort to

get them thinking more about their characters by filling in the blanks. This proved particularly effective. For instance, though not directly stated in the script, I asked Lizard how Nikolai died. After some thought (particularly taking into account the new lens we viewed the play through), they decided Nikolai died from Covid 19. This added a new context to the character's insistence on staying inside to mourn, instead of going to public events in the middle of the pandemic.

Along with this, I had the actors create fake social media profiles on Instagram for their characters to interact with (this also increased publicity for the final performance). They would create posts their characters would likely make, and react to each other's stories as well.

While character work was ultimately no issue, blocking was. Each actor was in a different space with separate limitations in movement. For example, Seth was only able to rehearse at a desk in his room, that had very little space behind or to the side of him. This made his more aggressive moments more difficult to block. Along with this, some nights it was difficult for the actors to freely emote to their scene partners when they are ultimately just yelling at a computer screen. It's disappointing that Lizard and Seth were unable to physically act in the same space together (aside from the final scene of course), as their differences in physique and stage presence would have been easier to experiment with. In an attempt to make the best of this, we spent extensive time experimenting with different types of blocking. Oftentimes when a character was exceptionally angry, we would have them come close to the screen as they yelled their dialogue. In Seth's case, we had him flip his chair and pace around his room as if Smirnov was attempting to compose himself. In Brennan's case, we utilized his more spacious room to play up Luka's more comedic moments. He would often walk and run across the room when his character was in distress. One rehearsal during a moment of anger for the character, Brennan

knocked over a divider that was in the room, and clumsily tried to pick it up. It ultimately added to the scene, and we decided to keep it.

For the duel, we decided it would be essentially close to impossible to stage completely online. We couldn't just have the two point guns at their computer screen. Ultimately it was suggested that we make the performance multimedia, and film the duel scene on campus to be edited into the performance later. The planning for this process began about two months before the official film date. Seth, Lizard, and myself picked a date we would all be free (that would also allow time for them to get off book for the scene) in late October. Seth and I purchased a pair of prop revolvers online (together costing around \$230). For the pistols, we wanted to be sure we were being as proper and safe as possible when bringing them on campus. We contacted UPD, filled out official forms, and scheduled to meet with them the day of the shoot to confirm that we were allowed to use the props (this was ultimately pointless however as UPD never showed up). Finally we rented some filming equipment from CTS and got our friend Andrew Miranda to help with filming.

The filming itself, while successful, was a very daunting and stressful task. Despite how good it would have looked outside, we decided to film the scene in the CMFT practice room in order to avoid audio issues from the wind. Andrew and I had never filmed anything with equipment like this before, and we had a limited time before the room we were filming in was to be closed. We each spent about half an hour figuring out how to work with our equipment before we started recording. Ultimately Andrew figured out how to use the camera, and I figured out how to use the boom mic. For the sake of time, (and making Brennan's job of editing the footage easier) we composed very simple shot layouts for most of the scene. Many were wide shots of

the two staring each other down from across the room. Thankfully, we were able to get somewhat creative with angles by filming the separate reactions of each actor to a given set of lines. But I must admit, I really wish I had hired a combat choreographer for some of the scenes (particularly the bit where Seth pushes Lizard off his knee). No one was hurt thankfully, but I shouldn't have taken any risks.

Looking at the final edited version of the performance, I was satisfied with the majority of it. We managed to separately record footage of the characters typing hate comments back and forth in the chat box. Those scenes had a nice timing to them and offered a good bit of variety for the visuals. The sound cue for Seth breaking his chair worked much better than I was expecting it to. I had Marli (our Stage Manager) share her computer's audio for this scene, as she played the stock sound of wood breaking as Seth clutched a piece of 2x4 from below. Of course the actors themselves all delivered terrific and passionate performances that we worked on together throughout the rehearsal process. Ultimately though, there were a few decisions I made that I regret. In particular having the profiles of the Kvas and Dog present in the final cut. It was originally meant to be Dascha and Pelegeja, two of Popov's other servants who she called out for at one point. The implication being that they were either not there, or not paying attention to the chat with their cameras off. Unfortunately this didn't land because the profiles did not have their names listed underneath. So all that's left in the final cut is just two odd pictures taking up space and occasionally drawing attention away from the actors.

The night of the first performance I learned a valuable lesson I will never forget. Never use your regular WIFI connection when streaming something. This basically guarantees a laggy experience for the audience. There were multiple instances of the audio and video cutting out

completely, and one moment where everything completely stopped, and I had to restart from the most previous point that the audience was able to see (I had a heart attack when this happened). Thankfully, I was given the advice later that night to use an Ethernet cable to stream the show for the final two nights. This worked incredibly well, with the final two performances being completely without lag issues. Also to my relief, the audience for the first night was able to legibly see most of the show despite the lag issues at times.

One of the more interesting aspects to the show that I hadn't necessarily considered when we were making it was the audience chat box. Viewers were commenting throughout the show by jokingly insulting characters they didn't like (downright shitposting at times), reacting to scenes, and cheering on the actors themselves. When we had started this project one of our goals was to replicate some resemblance of audience engagement you would find in a live, in-person setting. Despite it being neither, the chat created an unexpected intimacy between other viewers and the actors, throughout the performance. Audience involvement gave the show that much more life and excitement. Not to mention that it was always amusing to see the chat box reactions to the ending of the show.

Considering the circumstance, I am immensely proud of the show. A few short months ago I was not sure that I would even be able to do one. During a year in which a lot of things went wrong in my life (as was the case with many people this year), it felt really good to have this be one of the things that worked out despite all of the odds being against it. Though I did make mistakes and I still have growing to do, this experience taught me a lot. Probably the most valuable lesson I learned from directing *The Bear* regards optimism. When working in this field, it is essential to have optimism despite the challenges that face you. Not to mention that at the

end of it all, I had a passionate and hard working production team to face those very challenges with me.