STOP KISS:
Surviving the Kiss

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Artistic Aims

Stop Kiss by Diana Son has been a light of hope for me since I was thirteen years old. I first discovered it my freshman year of high school, searching out scenes for drama class. My classmates and I scoured the Lincoln Center library looking for any classic we could get our grubby little hands on, when I happened upon that pink cover. I sat reading, with an overjoyed heart, and watched *Stop Kiss'* beautiful love story come to life. I was shocked. I had never read a script that portrayed such a truthful queer relationship. My friend Caroline and I wanted to try *Stop Kiss* for our freshman scene, but our teacher wouldn't let us, claiming it wasn't "close to self." Truly it was the closest to what I wanted my *self* to be. Even though I grew up in progressive Park Slope, and in a very progressive household, I still carried shame about my sexuality. I saw little to no lesbian representation in the media, which made me feel isolated and that being gay was taboo. I had to go searching for queer stories. *Stop Kiss* was the first gay play I encountered that portrayed gay women as fully lived people. It was a breath of fresh air and a revelation.

I came back to *Stop Kiss* my freshman year of college, when asked to do Callie's heartbreaking hospital monologue in my Fundamentals of Acting class. That monologue brings the actor through a range of emotional lows and highs. Callie is at Sara's bedside, talking to her broken unconscious body, asking her to wake up so they can face the world together. I consider it the most challenging scene of the play, because at the end Sara does wake up; Callie's monologue must effect that change. Though I heavily identified with Callie, I found myself drawn to Sara. She's kind, adventurous, and thoughtful, filled with naiveté and optimism. So, when I took scene study here at

Purchase I was determined to work on Sara at least once.

Beyond its boldness in representation, I've wanted to do *Stop Kiss* for a number of reasons. The text is so rich and nuanced, and filled with subtext. At Purchase, I often work with scripts that are almost blank when it comes to character. I find that I work best and enjoy acting most, when engaging with a character that has been fully thought out by the playwright. I knew that Diana Son's script would allow me to dig deep into the craft, and become truly passionate about the project.

Stop Kiss was a challenge for me as an actor, because as a person I am nothing like Sara. She's spent her entire life in St. Louis tethered either to her parents, or to her boyfriend. Sara is completely naive about New York, and always sees the good in people. She's gracefully guiding herself through a massive change. Consistently vulnerable throughout the entire show, Sara is ready to throw herself off the deep end and see if she can swim. I am a pessimistic New Yorker, so embodying Sara's naiveté was, honestly, a relief. She gives me such hope, and taught me to be kinder in every circumstance.

Another challenge to performing this role was that I had to drastically change my physicality and mental cognition every other scene. Researching her condition was a big component of my character development and I was careful in the rehearsal process to treat this with the utmost delicacy and respect. Halfway through the play, Sara is beaten into a coma, leaving her paralyzed on the right side of her body. She can't verbalize, but is completely lucid. She can make sense of her surroundings, but can't form words. She is frustrated, overwhelmed, and forced to go back to basics. Yet she

continues to push for her own independence, and is determined to have a better quality of life. Shifting from one extreme to the next was an exciting emotional hurdle.

Stop Kiss was written by Diana Son, a first-generation Korean-American woman. One of the many reasons I found it so important that I do this play, is to showcase both women writers, and writers of color. We must tell the stories of the disenfranchised with an earnest heart. The Production Team and I were going to reach out to Diana Son, hopefully to gain insight on her process and ask questions about character or meaning. I personally wanted to ask her about why *Stop Kiss* hasn't been turned into a movie, and why she didn't kill off Sara. Why was it important for her to give the audience and the LGBTQ+ community hope? In the end, we could not get in contact with her, but luckily answered these questions for ourselves.

LGBTQ+ plays rarely are put up at Purchase, which I find very odd. Our art should reflect the community, and the Purchase community is both queer and diverse. In the rehearsal process for *Stop Kiss* we planned to reach out to LGBTQ+ groups in the area, such as high school GSA clubs, and invite them to rehearsals or performances to facilitate conversation. We also planned to talk to Purchase clubs like QPOC (Queer People of Color) to come for a talk back, and to help facilitate a community discussion. Purchase College has an issue with predominantly white casting. *Stop Kiss* calls for diversity, in fact Diana Son demands it in the forward. Due to the fact that both Callie and Sara were played by white women, the *Stop Kiss* team made sure to keep true to Son's charge during the audition process.

This work was so exciting to me, as was the chance to act alongside Calliope Pina Parker, and Charlie Gonzalez. They are both dedicated to their craft, and I trust

them in any artistic setting. I have worked with Calliope on three productions at Purchase, *Take Care, Attempts on Her Life,* and recently *The Skriker*. I have had many scenes with Calliope, and was overjoyed to have her on as Callie. Charlie and I had been in *UrineTown,* and *The Skriker*, though we hadn't had the chance to share considerable amounts of stage time before this project. It's was so thrilling working with close friends whom I respect. Megan Stacey signed on as director, and Cara Cincione as our Stage manager. Jonathan Mannato is the dramaturg, and Luke Wright also a senior, ran the social media. Over the course of my years at Purchase, I had seen these people deliver great theatre, and heading into rehearsal, I could not have been happier with the team we assembled.

We rehearsed the play as the original production did in its rehearsal process, in chronological order. It really helped both Calliope and I get a strong base in the emotional arcs to track the course of events in sequence first. The episodic structure keeps the audience engaged, but can feel like a sprint for the actors. Running the show several times with all costumes/set before tech would be necessary, as we planned to be working in the new theatre building. We've had a couple tours, but were relatively unfamiliar with the space. While in talks with Megan Stacey, we decided to set *Stop Kiss* in the round. It didn't feel right to put the show in proscenium; *Stop Kiss* is so intimately written and needs to be in the audiences' face. We wanted the viewer to be immersed in the story, we wanted them invested in what makes our characters relatable. We also wanted to illustrate that they're experiencing live theatre by having a live band, and revealing the actors as they change their costumes in the vomitoriums. In our original plan, our band would act as supers, dressed as street musicians, to help

move props and set pieces along with run crew. Having them would help smooth over transitions so we weren't operating in a chaotic mess. Some actors too, like Charlie participated in the band. We auditioned people specifically for the band, but if actors had musical talents they were encouraged to join. Our sound designer and band leader Keaton Comiskey, had ideas for entirely diegetic sounds; performed live on stage, nothing pre-recorded, all conducted by him. For example, during multiple scenes Callie's upstairs neighbors make a heinous stomping noise, so loud you can barely hear the dialogue. Keaton conducted the drummer to bang on buckets and boxes. The telephone ringing turned into a live bicycle bell, the rain storm, a rain stick and symbols. Keaton had so many ingenious ideas to keep the audience on their toes when it came to sound.

The only issues I could see arising was reaching our fundraising goals, adjusting to the new space, and both Megan Stacey and I's involvement in the mainstage. We had plans in place for budget concerns, and the seniors are applied for grants. The rights had been obtained for our exact dates, and we were confident we could put up *Stop Kiss* in the time allotted. I planned on memorizing and marking out actions and beats over the summer while in Italy. When jumping between rehearsals from mainstage to *Stop Kiss,* I would be prepared. Calliope also studied abroad in Italy over the summer, we continually worked and discussed *Stop Kiss.* I wanted to tell this love story with the utmost truth and respect. *Stop Kiss* has stayed with me for seven years, and a play of this importance had to be seen.

Technical Essay

In truth, what prepared me the most for *Stop Kiss*, was living with and acting opposite Olivia Grady my junior year. I watched her create a complex, and tragic character in *The Skriker*, all the while producing a stunning show. I was able to gain an inside perspective on the process: the good, the bad, and how necessary it is to be wholeheartedly committed to your art. After that wonderful experience, I knew I had to work with my friends, on a story about which I was equally as passionate. That is how *Stop Kiss* came to fruition.

I usually play the “strong female”, or the “crazy lady”, characters that I can pull out of my back pocket. In *The Skriker*, I was able to play Lily the young ingénue, a role I had never been given the chance to play. Lily gave me the reassurance to tackle Sara. Though there are stark differences between the roles, they have the same core, and motives. They’re caring, naïve, optimistic, and determined. Lily informed my character development for Sara. I have been working on *Stop Kiss*, unintentionally for my entire college career. In acting fundamentals, and scene study I played both Sara and Callie. This play has always on my mind, as an unachieved dream.

Another dream was to work with Charlie Gonzalez, Megan Stacey, and Calliope Pina Parker. Charlie and I have been very close since our freshman year, and he is such a smart actor. I had never had the privilege of acting beside him before. My favorite scenes in *Stop Kiss* were when Callie, Sara, and George were in a room together. We’re all such good friends in real life and because of that we had fun. We surprised and challenged each other in every scene. We kept each other on our toes, consistently trying new tactics. There were times when Calliope and Charlie would have

such a comedic repartee, I had to stop myself from breaking by bowing my head. To transform into these complex characters with him was such a treat, I just wish we had more onstage time together. Watching George and Callie's relationship was invigorating for me as an actor. They meshed so well together, and would make me excited for our next scene. They laid the groundwork for the world, and made it easy for me to truly feel like a newcomer.

When Calliope and I were first considering doing *Stop Kiss*, we knew that the only person who could direct this immense show and give us a productive amount of constructive criticism, was Megan Stacey. I worked with Megan on *The Skriker*, she was the assistant director, and she helped me on most of my character work. I trusted her vision and knew she had the experience to make this a beautiful piece. Megan had already directed multiple senior projects before *Stop Kiss*, and I trusted her. I was so excited just to be able to focus on my acting concentration. Megan gave me great ideas for Sara, she was able to tailor her notes to each actor. Different kinds of techniques and prompts affect each actor differently, she found out what specifically would benefit me. My training is based in Meisner, Calliope's in Growtowski, and Charlie's strictly in musical theatre. Megan was able to take the best advantage of each one of these techniques, giving us very individual, analytical, and exacting notes.

At one point, I was struggling with Callie and Sara's fight, in scene eleven. They're supposed to attend a fancy awards ceremony, but Callie doesn't tell Sara how important this event actually is. Sara comes late and, even worse, in jeans. Awkward, frustrated subtext ensues, and escalates into a full-blown fight culminating in Sara's door slam. My first instinct was to act passive aggressive and snippy, but quickly found

out that action wouldn't help build the conflict. Passive aggression didn't feel organic to Sara, nor to the situation. Megan pulled me aside and said "You're a teacher, help Callie to fix the problem. You're not angry when she doesn't take your advice, you're frustrated and hurt. Play that hurt, play into that rejection." It completely changed my view, and made the performance much more exciting. Another of Megan's ideas that really helped us gain our footing, was to rehearse the show in chronological order, as they did with the original production at The Public Theatre in 1998.

Originally *Stop Kiss* felt to me like two contrasting narratives that inform each other: a romantic comedy, and then a poignant tragedy. In chronological order, I was able to feel the ebb and flow of Stop Kiss more thoroughly. It helped me flesh out Sara's arc more thoroughly, and I was able to discover patterns, and new behavior. I realized how determined and self-sufficient Sara truly is, how hardworking and compassionate. I feel very grateful to have had Megan as director, she provided the seniors with the perfect amount of support. Megan always listened to our ideas, and gave us the space to explore. Megan's directing style made it feel like *Stop Kiss* was an open, collaborative effort.

Calliope is a force of nature, and it was so fruitful to work beside her. You know your acting partner is good when it feels like you're doing barely any work. When you both can just breathe on stage together, it feels like a triumph. We were extremely lucky when it came to our cast, Jeremy Nuñez as my fiancé Peter broke my heart. He is such a giving actor. In our scenes Sara is unable to talk, so the scene is driven by Peter pouring his heart out. I wasn't even acting, just listening, stunned by his vulnerability. Though I wasn't able to act directly with Jonathan Sawyer Coffin or Megan Siepak, their

characters stole the show. Sawyer's Detective Cole was nuanced, and vibrant. Megan Siepak is a chameleon, and fit Mrs.Winsley perfectly. Sadie Kalinowska-Werter played the nurse, and she served as a super as well as actor. I feel forever grateful to the cast, and to the band for making this process smooth and complete.

Stop Kiss did experience some bumps in the road, like every production. We were originally supposed to be in the new building, but due to construction and lawsuits, all the plans for our year's senior projects being mounted in that space went up in flames. Everyone had to find new spaces, and we were lucky enough to secure The Humanities theatre. We changed our layout from full arena, to arena with vomitoriums. This proved to be difficult with the frequent transitions, and the numerous massive set pieces.

I don't think we were prepared for how long the transitions, and the costumes changes would take, especially because our run crew would change day to day. Luckily Megan started cutting set pieces, and we gathered a tight group of people for run crew. I am indebted to Ace Browne, Caroline Loftus, Samm Lynch (our wonderful ASM) and Sadie Kalinowska-Werter. They were quick thinking and responsible, they took a lot of stress off my back when it came to transitions. Our costume people, Kitty Fishman and Tzara Kane saved both Calliope and I. They were backstage ready to go, with a smile on their faces telling us which scene was next (as we often forgot) and slipping us into our next costume. Because of Kitty and Tzara, we got our costume changes down to seconds.

Costuming was a stressful part of our show. Calliope, Charlie, and I made our own costume charts, and worked through everything Tuesday night before faculty

showing. Then we came in the next day to be told that Megan and Cara had completely changed our costume order. It frustrated me that we weren't asked beforehand as we had put in so much work. But in the end their plot made much more sense, and if anything, they took it off our hands. The costumers adapted immediately, so there were no issues. Another slight hiccup lay on the production end of things. Jonathan Mannato, Calliope, and I had to take over many aspects promotion and social media. Jonathon created a wonderful dramaturg Instagram account, Calliope and I printed out and put up most of the posters. The majority of Luke Wright's (our social media director's) ideas fell through, so the other seniors on the project stepped up to cover slack in advertising and outreach. We did still manage to sell out within the first couple of days tickets were available. One of the biggest notes we were given by faculty was that our playbill didn't have Diana Son's name on it. But luckily Luke managed to fix it before true opening.

One issue I came across for myself was time management. I found that being involved in the mainstage as well as putting up your own senior project would prove to be chaotic. My school work fell to the wayside, as did my sleep schedule. I was strained both mentally and physically after completing the mainstage *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* I had to work hard and long on the acting and music composing/coordination for *Revolt*, which meant *Stop Kiss* had to move to the backburner for a bit. That is something that I never wanted to let happen, and it saddened me. I slowly learned to balance my focus between the two, as well as factor in the usual school work. The mainstage took up massive amounts of time and energy I occasionally lost my enjoyment of it. Those moments when I was able to come to *Stop Kiss*, I savored every second. They were magical. I was back in my roots and fighting for Sara's life.

Stop Kiss as a play and as my senior project production, holds my heart, and I feel so grateful to have told this story. Our team worked so hard to create an impactful, truthful piece of theatre. Yes, *Stop Kiss* is a love story, and it is also a rallying cry. The response from our community reflected that and it showed the need for more diverse stories on this campus. One reaction specifically moved me: a girl who I had seen around campus but never interacted with, said she had never experienced a more accurate depiction of falling in love with your best friend. The play confirmed her sexuality. She felt seen. I still don't know her name, but now we always greet one another. That is the kind of interaction I want to have with all my art, to feel seen, to feel challenged. *Stop Kiss* encapsulated both.

Surviving the Kiss

Stop Kiss and *Indecent* are both groundbreaking, queer-centered plays, that feature acts of violence against members of the LGBTQ community. Yet, they stand out for more than their thoughtful and considered depictions of violence. They stand out because there are very few works of theatre to begin with that showcase lesbian protagonists. Most often, if lesbian characters are included, they are villainized or killed off by the writers. In these situations, the harm that comes to most LGBT characters is loaded, carefully calibrated, and the victims are commonly marginalized queer people of color. In these cases, the calibration is made with intent to harm not only the character, but the community to which they belong. *Stop Kiss* and *Indecent* are calibrated instead to protect these communities, and to critique the violence against them. *Stop Kiss,* a story about a hate crime, requires one kind of blunt trauma, while *Indecent,* a play about a seemingly controversial play, lesbians, and anti-semitism, requires another. Representation of the LGBTQ+ community comes with its share of violence and dehumanization, *Stop Kiss* and *Indecent* both challenge this norm.

Before 1990 there was limited representation of gay characters in theatre, film, or television. If the characters existed, they were more than likely presented in a negative light. Many LGBTQ+ characters were portrayed as master manipulators, like Ms. Danvers in *Rebecca*, or as the butt of a joke like Charles Coleman in *Sailors Luck*. Ms. Danvers is coded so explicitly as a lesbian villain, dressed in all black with bulging eyes, she is obsessed with her late mistress Rebecca de Winter. She keeps all of Rebecca's clothing, folded and clean like a shrine. Mrs. Danvers pulls out Rebecca's underwear and caresses it, putting it to her face. Murder, mystery, and Laurence Olivier ensue. In

the finale, we watch as Ms. Danvers burns down the mansion with herself inside it. No one tries to save her, and we see her body burning with the rest of Rebecca's possessions.

Plays like *The Children's Hour* by Lillian Hellman (1934) or *Suddenly Last Summer* by Tennessee Williams (1956), portrayed troubled homosexuals who die explicitly because of their sexuality, either by savage attack or committing suicide. Sebastian in *Suddenly Last Summer* is torn apart by the male prostitutes he hired himself. They tear him limb from limb and eat his flesh, leaving nothing behind. All of these films share a clear message: if you are gay, society will quite literally chew you up and spit you out. When Martha admits her feelings for Karen, in *The Children's Hour*, she is dismissed and Martha shoots herself. She takes her own life because she cannot bear the shame of being "other." Historically on stage and in film, LGBTQ characters had disastrous ends to their storylines, or they were provided with no story at all.

The Hayes Film Codes, initiated in 1930, lead to the demise and censorship of LGBTQ characters in popular media. The Hayes Film Codes, were created by a conglomerate of U.S senators and catholic priests dedicated to circumventing the smut of Hollywood films and TV. One of their many goals was to suppress any depiction of positive gay life in the media. "Suddenly, queer imagery in film, typically in the form of comic representation of gay men, lesbians, and ambiguous sexuality did not seem so funny anymore, least of all to those charged with applying Hollywood's Production Code to film content" (Lugowski, 2). Even with its abolishment 1968, LGBTQ characters were seen as taboo, or two-dimensional sycophants, if they were even seen at all. A lot of formerly queer characters were cut, coded, or turned straight.

This trend leads directly to the erasure or softening of the representation of female desire in film and theatre. Lesbian partners were censored into best friendship, like in the film *Fried Green Tomatoes.* “Without a doubt, critics, spectators, and/or activists interested in increasing lesbian visibility must still insist that no matter how wonderful representations of female friendship may be, they are not acceptable substitutes for representations of lesbian sexuality and love.” (Holmlund, 44) This creates a one-sided view of companionship, and erases women’s sexuality all together. While *Fun Home*, a musical by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori from (2013) made huge strides in representing fully fleshed out lesbian characters, one of the aspects of life it documents for the main character, Alison, is the pressure to stay in the closet. Little Alison sings ‘Ring of Keys’ a song about recognizing someone else as similar to oneself. Allison sees this beautiful, butch woman, and has a revelation. “I know you, I know you” she sings over and over again. Her father recognizes what is happening in his daughter Allison because he himself is gay but in the closet and in denial. He shuts her down, and makes a rude remark about the mysterious woman’s appearance, pushing Allison further into the closet and affirming society’s intolerance for gay identity. Not being able to see accurate representation of oneself leads to isolation and at times can be disastrous.

Today only 4.8% of characters on primetime broadcast tv fall under the LGBTQ umbrella. That makes only 43 queer characters as opposed to the 854 heterosexuals. That is quite a small number, and to make matters worse the media is continuing to kill off its gay women. “Lesbian representation decreased dramatically from the previous year, down to 17% (12) of regular and recurring LGBTQ characters. This is a drop of 16

percentage points from last year's 33% (23 characters)." (Stokes, 6) More than half of the lesbian or female bi characters were either killed off or mysteriously disappeared from their TV shows, and most of them were women of color. "Lesbians of color and of the lower classes exist outside the mainstream definition of beauty; therefore, their images are not palatable or consumable to mainstream consumers" (Tsai, 2) The media says you cannot be pretty and gay, you cannot be black and gay, you cannot be pretty and black. It would not be appealing to the wider patriarchal market, so it must be circumvented. Take for instance the post-apocalyptic TV show *The 100*. Clarke, the series ingénue after a season and a half of intense sexual tension, finally confesses her love to Lexa, a woman of color, her best friend and fellow warrior. They fall into bed and talk about how happy their future could be, they kiss and cry with joy. The audience has been waiting for this moment for two years, and get to see everything they wanted for these characters come to fruition. Not thirty seconds later, Lexa is shot and killed, in the same bed they just had sex in. Another strike against people of color, and queer people, and a lesson to the viewer: you can't be gay and happy and survive. This trope of killing your gays is still enmeshed in our society and reinforced in film and theatre.

Lesbian representation is minimal not only in TV, and film but also, surprisingly, in theatre. If we look specifically at lesbian characters in commercially successful musicals the only mainstream examples are Maureen and Joanne from *Rent*, Allison from *Fun Home* and more recently Emma in the Broadway show *The Prom*. "In contrast to the visibility of gay men in advertising, lesbians are vastly underrepresented. Whereas gay men are predominantly presented as being white, upper-middle class, and trendy consumers, the representation of lesbians in advertising similarly demonstrates a

highly skewed definition of gayness." (Tsai, pg. 36) There is an influx of gay white male protagonists with three-dimensional storylines. The media can only accept your queerness if you have those two other 'normal' attributes: being white and a male. 50% of LGBT storylines on television are about gay white men. "Racial diversity has dropped again among LGBTQ regular and recurring characters on cable programming. Only 25 percent of the 142 characters counted are POC, a drop of three percentage points from last year. Of the 65 LGBTQ characters on original and U.S. exclusive streaming series, 29 percent (19) are characters of color." (Stokes, 8)

In the inscription of *Stop Kiss*, Diana Son demands that the casting reflect the diversity of New York City. This call for a queer, nonwhite love story is essential to why this show is still done. The representation draws an audience not usually catered to. The fact that *Stop Kiss* has been produced around the country for two decades as a commercially successful piece of theatre is nothing short of a miracle.

The focus in gay representation on white cisgender male stories extends beyond the fictional media into actual news coverage. October 6, 1998 two months before the premiere of *Stop Kiss* at The Public, a young man named Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and killed in Laramie, Wyoming. This hate crime became a media storm, and started a national conversation about the discrimination of the LGBT community. Matthew Shepard's murder was a marketable hate crime. A sweet white college boy, involved in the community, shy and an avid reader, he was the perfect martyr. His history with hard drugs and mental illness were swept under the rug for the benefit of his angelic image. A beautiful white gay boy is brutally beaten and killed, Shepard became a one-dimensional commodification for the media. "The saint frame signaled Shepard's

transition from an everyday person to an extraordinary symbol—a symbol with the power of a religious icon situated within the nonreligious cultural world of social movements." (Dunn, 624) Whereas when Amia Tyrae Berryman, a black trans woman, was killed there was barely any coverage. The media does not deem you worthy if you are LGBTQ+ and black. You are not beautiful or appealing or something they can sell. There is continually more coverage for white people when violence is perpetrated against them, this inequity bleeds into the LGBTQ+ community.

Diana Son saw this day-to-day discrimination and was affected by the national intolerance for the truths of the LGBT community. Despite her sexuality (straight), Son is clear that she does "feel responsible to the gay and lesbian community. In the sense that I consider carefully how I portray gay characters. If I had written a play in which a Korean American woman was beaten by a racist, would people think the message of my play was 'If you're Korean American, you'll get beat up?' It's dramaturgically unsound" (Son Interview). Son is gentle with how she handles the violence perpetrated against her characters. In *Stop Kiss* we never see the violence against our heroines. We watch them struggle with the terms of violence throughout the show. The audience sees the aftermath, but not the actual brutal beating of Sara, only through Callie's recounting of the events and the evidence of Sara's broken body. This absence is crucial. Diana Son made a choice to not sensationalize the violence, to not reinforce audiences' ideas of the inherent disposability of queer life brought on by the standard portrayals of lesbian women. TV, films, even recreated events on the news regularly sensationalize this violence. She refuses to give power to the attacker; we never see him, he is not given a name. Son ends the show with a kiss, a promise that these

women will survive. She could have ended it with hate crime that follows in chronology, instead she chose this intimate gesture to end the show. "I set out to write a romantic, not sensational, female relationship and that's the spirit with which I wrote the play and it's incredibly gratifying when I hear that that's how people experience it….the number of gays and lesbians who appreciate that sexuality is represented within a story that is about living life more fully" (Son Interview). Son chose to challenge heteronormative and white ideals through theatre, by writing a simple love story. It is a love story between two women, not sexualized to the point of softcore porn. A love story that overcomes a hate crime and gives a rallying cry for hope. "Because unquestionably the last beat of the play is: love wins"(Son). This kiss is what breaks up the common trope, communicating that queer characters deserve to live. Queer, non-white love, is shown to the viewer as beautiful and worthy. The audience and characters are allowed to enjoy the kiss as a final, positive gesture.

Indecent by Paula Vogel, is a play about the history of the infamous show *God of Vengeance*, and its author Sholem Asch. Written in 1906 by a straight Polish Jew, *God of Vengeance* immediately became a smash hit across Europe, much to the dismay of Asch's Jewish peers, who told him to burn it. The subject material was racy for the time: a Jewish brothel owner forsaking the Torah, Jewish prostitutes, and a Jewish lesbian love affair. *God of Vengeance* was translated into multiple languages and toured Europe and the world with rotating actors and crew. Asch wanted to tell real stories about the Jewish people, complex and substantial. In the portrayal of him in *Indecent*, he is seen trying to diversify the Yiddish cannon, discussing taboo subjects on stage. "Asch turned to theater in a belief that he might expand his own audience to the global

stage. *God of Vengeance* stirred more controversy than any other in the history of Yiddish theater."(Wisse, 2). In 1923 *God of Vengeance* was produced on Broadway, but censored. They were told they must cut the lesbian storyline in order for the play to be commercially successful. They must scrap the rain scene, the crux of the story, when the two girls kiss. Even with the cuts, *God of Vengeance* was shut down by police, and the cast and crew were sued for indecency. Asch who had immigrated to the U.S, was slandered by the Jewish-American community and put on trial. The play was not produced for many years, all that were involved went back to Europe. None of Asch's peers, actors, or crew survive the Holocaust. This backlash struck Asch profoundly; he attributed the causation of the Holocaust to *God of Vengeance*. Asch believed that talking about "indecent" subjects in relation to the Jewish people made it easier for white Europeans to hate them.

Indecent tells this history, and the history of those involved in the play within the play's creation. With only eight actors taking on multiple roles, the fifty-year history of *God of Vengeance* is told over a span of ninety minutes. Vogel's ambitious scope creates harmonic dissonance throughout the decades, with the continuous theme of censorship. Asch's peers try to censor his work, then the American public, and then the final censor, the Holocaust. The actors open the show singing, with dust pouring out their sleeves, pants legs, and hats. We know that the characters will meet a harsh end, but they choose to keep on telling this story. The story of two girls falling in love, Manke (a prostitute) and Rifkele (the daughter of the brothel owner). "As far as *Indecent* is concerned, *God of Vengeance* is a play about lesbians. Not only that, according to Taichman and Vogel (both of whom are gay), lesbianism also defined the backstage

drama of its performance history: They depict the lesbian characters being played by lesbian actresses who live openly together as the play tours Europe and comes to America. The American censorship of the play was due to its depiction of lesbianism." (Wisse, 2) We meet Ruth and Dine, originators of Rifkele and Manke on the Yiddish-American marquee, who are in love on and off stage. They struggle with the alterations made to the script, as well as the translation from Yiddish to English which they must take on in order to move to Broadway. The final straw for our two actresses is when the rain scene is cut from the script by their male producer and their source of representation is censored. The play would be performed in English and be swept clean of its lesbianism. Not only could they not speak a foreign language in the commercial theatre, they could not be openly gay in the mainstream. Vogel honors this struggle by reviving the text and the story of its censorship; she gives the victims of this mass censorship a voice. *God of Vengeance* and its history had been forgotten by the twenty-first century public as it was only performed a handful of times after the indecency scandal in 1923. "Vogel—only now receiving her first Broadway opportunity, twenty years after her Pulitzer—has rescued *God of Vengeance* from the stacks of a research library; and brought both Asch's play and her own, with that very special rain scene, to vibrant life." (Suskin) In *Indecent* we never see the violence of the Holocaust enacted upon these gay women, only the suggestion of it, through dust, projections, and dialogue. Paula Vogel decides to actively save the lesbian characters Rifkele and Manke from death in the final moments. They burst out of the line, free from prosecution. Rain pours down, and the audience finally gets to see the rain scene in full. They dance, sing, touch and kiss. Rifkele and Manke, two Polish Jews were finally

allowed to express their love on Broadway, for the mainstream, without censorship, violence, or death.

Diana Son and Paula Vogel both understand the reality of violence against the LGBTQ+ community. To try to diminish or lessen this truth would be just as dangerous as denying it is not a part of the culture's history. Instead, both playwrights refuse to give violence the final say. Vogel revives a gorgeous text from the censored past, and breathes life into it, while Son writes truthful representation for lesbian women of color, and refuses to kill off either of them. They both use stories about violence and intolerance to propel the audience towards action and hope, not to further put down or threaten the community. These characters are given voices, and told they are worthy. The audience sees complex stories about marginalized people; they watch the characters fall in love, face death, live through it, and struggle through hardships. The audience is taught to empathize with these characters, not hate them. *Stop Kiss* and *Indecent* break the social narrative by letting their lesbian characters kiss with the knowledge that they will survive.

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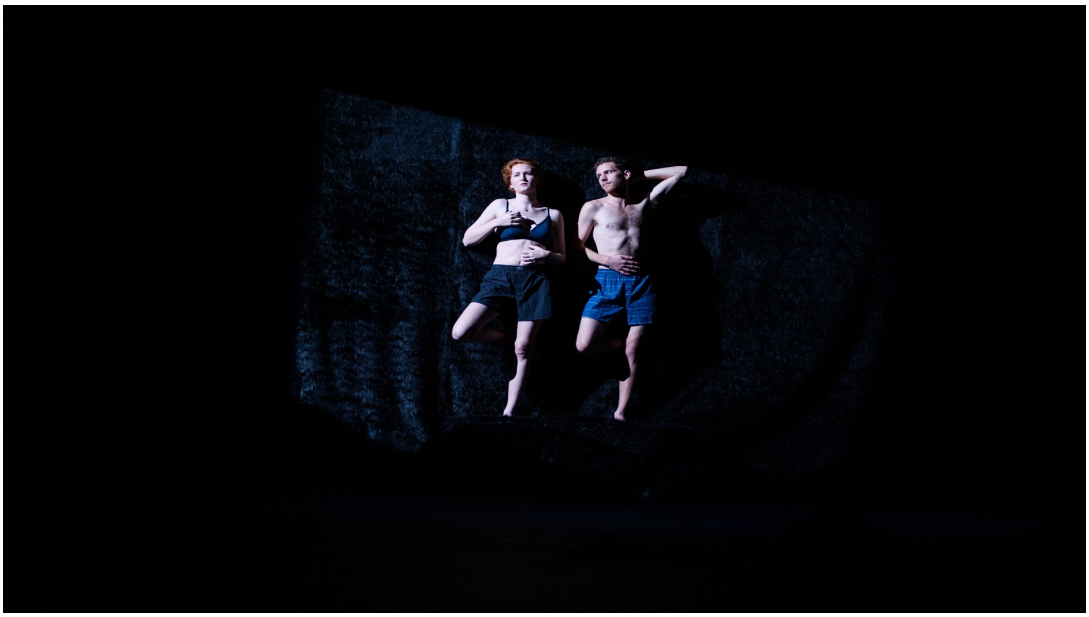
Stop Kiss Photos

(Taken by Jewel Slade)

Selected Acting Portfolio



Attempts on Her Life

Senior Project, April 2017

Written by Martin Crimp

Directed by Parade Stone

Role: Ensemble

Attempts on Her Life was the first senior project I became involved in. An ensemble based show, with no determined characters only beautiful text. It was fiery feminist show, led by senior actor Libby Larkin. *Attempts* taught me the importance of ensemble based work, creating character outside of text, and how movement informs the work. The company valued hard work and dedication, we had to lean on each other for support. If someone lost focus, or became too prideful the show would fail. *Attempts* was a great lesson in balance.

The Skriker

Senior Project, April 2018

Written by Caryl Churchill

Directed by Kelsi Ford, Megan Stacey

Role: Lily

The Skriker, a show about underworld creatures who come to take back the polluted earth, and mess with some humans along the way. It was so wonderful to act alongside Melina Finck and Olivia Grady on their senior project. *The Skriker* was an immense show, due to the fact of a huge ensemble, complex costume/makeup, and set. Olivia, Melina, and I worked relentlessly in rehearsal to create a strong emotional base and arc, so the ensemble could flourish. We each had a third of the dialogue in the play and worked vigorously on actions and beats. It was the first time I played an innocent ingénue; playing Lily gave me the confidence to tackle Sara.

Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.

Mainstage, November 2018

Written by Alice Birch

Directed by Rachel Dickstein

Role: B, Dinah, K

Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again. Was one of the most rewarding experiences I've had at SUNY Purchase. I created a score from scratch, gathered musicians, music directed, and acted. The show is a political feminist punk piece, and I was overjoyed to be a part of the process. We had a powerhouse cast, incredible musicians, and dedicated crew. *Revolt* prepared me for the quick paced nature of *Stop Kiss*, and enticed me to make more political and impassioned art.

Stop Kiss

Senior Project - Calliope Pina Parker, Charlie Gonzalez, Cara Cincione, Luke Wright, Jonathan Mannato, and Cornelia Silsbee. December 2018

Written by Diana Son

Directed by Megan Stacey

Role: Sara

Stop Kiss was the perfect culmination of my career at SUNY Purchase. The story is poignant, the script full, and the joy palpable. I felt challenged, passionate, and truly blessed to have taken on Sara. Diana Son wrote a timeless love story, that we were lucky enough to perform. Working with close friends, and an all LGBTQ+ production team, felt freeing. This show was a celebration of love and community, I have never felt more comfortable with a group of people. I feel extremely grateful that the faculty supported us, and we were able to create thought-provoking work.