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Allowing the Unexpected: The Power of Being Underestimated

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Allowing the Unexpected: The Power of Being Underestimated

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Sabrina J. Liu

Committee in charge:

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair  
Professor Marc Alexander Barricelli  
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2023

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The Thesis of Sabrina J. Liu is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2023

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Heidi Haipeng Zhang, and my father, Frank Yining Liu—without whom, I would not have even considered attending graduate school.

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Allowing the Unexpected: The Power of Being Underestimated

by

Sabrina J. Liu

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair

Before entering graduate school, people were often surprised at my level of acting skill. When I was accepted into the MFA Acting program at UCSD, I thought this pattern of underestimation would change. I was wrong. After beginning classes, I noticed the same pattern of response—people often praised me with a sense of wonder, as if it was curious that I could do what I could do.

I played many wonderful roles in my first and second year. However, I knew that I was capable of greater depth. I wanted to show people that I could do something wildly different.

In 2022, I was cast as Ariel in *Hells Canyon* by Keiko Green, a horror play. It was the most physically taxing production that I have ever been a part of. I wanted people to be blown

out of the water, and they were. Many people still speak about my performance to this day. However, the response was not one of surprise.

In an effort to prove that I could exceed expectations, I discovered that people's expectations of me were already high. My work in first and second year had shown them what I was capable of. They knew, simply through watching me, that I could do incredible things.

That lesson will stay with me: I may have been underestimated before, but as long as I show people my work, that is enough indication of what I am capable of. I no longer have anything to prove.