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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

“This is the moment”: Leading *peerless* with Authenticity

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

in

Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

by

Emily Searles

Committee in charge:

Professor Lisa Porter, Chair

Professor Karen Dobkins

Professor Christine Harris

Professor Lora Powell

Professor David Ruiter

2022

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The Thesis of Emily Searles is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

For Katelin. Thank you for sparking a passion that has continued to burn. We all float on.

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LIST OF SUPPLEMENTAL FILES

File 1. Searles *peerless* Calling Script p.2-7, searles_01_peerless_Calling_Script_p.2-7.pdf

File 2. Searles *peerless* Calling Script p.78-83, searles_02_peerless_Calling_Script_p.78-83.pdf

File 3. Searles *peerless* Calling Script p.114-123,
searles_03_peerless_Calling_Script_p.114-123.pdf

File 4. Searles *peerless* Calling Script p.137-143,
searles_04_peerless_Calling_Script_p.137-143.pdf

File 5. Searles *peerless* Production Calendar, searles_05_peerless_Production_Calendar.pdf

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And a special thank you to Jon Reimer, for encouraging me to think outside 'Berg, the East Coast, and see the ritual in stage management.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“This is the moment”: Leading *peerless* with Authenticity

by

Emily Searles

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Lisa Porter, Chair

The central theme of the play *peerless* by Jiehae Park, based on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, is achieving success by any means necessary. The play emphasizes that sacrificing one’s humanity and integrity in pursuit of success will lead to suffering and loss. The production process of *peerless* revealed my default behavior of self-sacrifice. Throughout rehearsals, I denied myself the necessary space to replenish by giving all of my time, energy, and compassion to the process and my collaborators. Sacrificing myself for the production bred feelings of shame, disappointment, and resentment, which caused me to disengage. I began to question this response in order to reconnect to the production and identified a long-held and destructive belief that in order to be an effective leader, I needed to be completely selfless. I ultimately turned

further inward to examine how I could navigate my emotional responses and lead with authenticity to bring myself back to the process.

Several components of *peerless* reflected what I had felt and experienced during 2020 and 2021: loss, grief, cruelty, disregard for human life, and valuing the individual over the collective. I aligned my personal values of kindness, compassion, grace, and connection to my approach to stage management by leading conversations about the events in the play and themes of murder, arson, and death with care, empathy, and humor. I named and acknowledged when I was activated by these themes, and reminded myself to welcome the emotions rather than try to deny or suppress them. I modeled how to compassionately embrace my humanity by stepping away due to illness, overwhelm, and grief. These open and vulnerable conversations contributed to a brave space where all collaborators could discuss their honest reactions to the text. The eight weeks that I spent alongside characters who were embodying the worst of humanity revealed that my approach to stage management is centered on being whole and embracing authenticity while acknowledging that sacrificing myself leads to suffering, not success.