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Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Business of Being: A Commitment to Personal and Artistic Truth

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

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Leovina Charles

Committee in charge:

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair
Professor Marco Alexander Barricelli
Professor Stephen W. Buescher
Professor Sharokh Yadegari

2023

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

University of California San Diego

2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis Approval Page.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Abstract of the Thesis.....	v

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Business of Being: A Commitment to Personal and Artistic Truth

by

Leovina Charles

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair

It is not lost on me that the profession I have chosen is one rooted deeply in perception. With a name like “show business” this aspect of performance, this action of “putting on,” has always seemed both implicit and inescapable. There is an inherent risk involved when one’s livelihood relies so heavily on the perception of others. It is a risk heightened for the artist whose work is self-expression, and greater still for the Black woman artist who is often relegated to playing a role both onstage and off. I came to UCSD because I had an innate knowing of my limitless possibility but felt as though my instrument was not always a reflection of that knowing. I felt confined by others’ assumptions surrounding my capabilities, and having spent so much of my life presenting, often questioned the level of authenticity I was bringing to my work. The past 2.5 years have served to challenge this

notion of limitation as I have moved through my coursework with this question in mind: What happens when the focus is not placed on showing but on being and what does it mean to allow ourselves to be witnessed? The result; a closing of the chasm between how I view myself, both as artist and character, and how I move through the world.

Through my vocal training I've rediscovered my sound and my ability to command space, growing far more comfortable in my chest resonance, and exploring areas of my voice that have unlocked new aspects of self and character. In my movement work I have realized the power of physical specificity and how humanity is so often revealed in our mistakes and the unexpected. In my work with speech and heightened text I have acquired a greater dexterity with language and an appreciation for the mystery that is meeting a character for the first time, now aware of the myriad of clues to be found on the page. These skillsets have allowed me to make bolder choices onstage and play characters that prior to Grad school would have been deemed out of my wheelhouse.

A clear example of this is my work as Toby in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. As someone who has often felt underrepresented in works of the Western Canon, Toby was one of my most transformative roles at UCSD, as it not only pushed me out of my comfort zone, but so clearly challenged external preconceptions. I was intent on using the tools at my disposal not to capture the idea of a character, but the honesty of the human themselves, hoping to explore what lay beneath the comedic relief Toby so often provides throughout the play. It was an opportunity to use all my training to reveal, and I attribute my success in that production to my coursework here.

My time at UCSD has been an excavation of self. I have learned to constantly be on the hunt for truth, to care less about showing and more about being, and to stop

apologizing for who I am and what I can do. My training and experiences here have proved invaluable to my growth and confidence as an artist, and I leave today with an instrument that is prepared for and attuned to the world of possibilities I know are available to me.