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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

“There comes a time of change” :
Engaging Vulnerable Leadership in *The Grapes of Wrath*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

by

Megan Sprowls

Committee in charge:

Lisa Porter, Chair
Tara Knight
Charles Means
Manuel Rotenberg

2014

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The thesis of Megan Sprowls is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

DEDICATION

For my family, for always supporting and believing in me and my crazy dreams.

(Even if they still don't understand what it is I do).

EPIGRAPH

“When we spend our lives waiting until we’re

perfect

or bulletproof

before we walk into the arena, we ultimately sacrifice

relationships

and opportunities

that may not be recoverable, we squander our precious time,
and we turn our backs on our gifts,

those unique contributions that

only

we

can

make.”

-Brené Brown,
Daring Greatly

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To my family, for supporting me financially and emotionally through eight years of school, five weeks in Ireland, and four really terrible months in Los Angeles. With their help, I became the first graduate of both college and graduate school in the family.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“There comes a time of change” :
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by

Megan Sprowls

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

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Lisa Porter, Chair

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the character of Ma exemplifies many traits I incorporate into my work as a stage manager. Ma keeps the family moving forward by carrying the weight of the family’s journey on her back while holding space for challenges along the way. She is the stage manager of the family and her unique fusion of authority with vulnerability is something I have incorporated into my work.

As both a leader and a collaborator, stage managers have the freedom to balance formal and informal authority. While formal authority can be inherently granted—like

Ma's authority as a mother—informal authority must be cultivated. The collaborative nature of the theatrical process affords stage managers the flexibility to integrate various styles of informal authority. Stage managers can become more open, wholehearted, and courageously engaged leaders by putting aside protective armor and practicing vulnerability. Like Ma, who sings as her family disintegrates, I discovered that being vulnerable strengthened my bond with my own theatrical family and positioned me as a trusted authority.

One of the oldest sayings in theatre is “the show must go on.” I realized, like Ma did, that the show only goes on when the people behind it keep driving forward. By embracing vulnerability, I found my place in the driver's seat, motivating the company to keep moving forward while creating a fluid collaborative rhythm. The show *does* go on because, in the words of Ma, “we're the people—we go on.”