

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

I was very excited to receive the position of Assistant Director on *The Importance of Being Earnest* for the fall 2019 mainstage production at Muhlenberg College under faculty member Jim Vanvalen. As I had mostly only worked on dramas up to this point, it was eye-opening to work on a comedy and to learn some of the tools of directing a comedy.

Additionally, I was interested in working on this production as the show was cast all-female. It was very interesting to get to observe how an all female cast changes the script and therefore some of the meanings of the play changed. I also took Acting 1 from Jim Vanvalen, as well as Voice and Speech, and had learned so much in regards to Meisner technique from him. It was fascinating getting to watch Jim use Meisner work to direct. We had a one week Earnest bootcamp before classes started (eight hour rehearsal days) and so much of this time was about building an ensemble and doing Meisner exercises to set the groundwork for the actors. Jim also really knows how to work with actors and approaches his directing as an actor himself. This created a very collaborative environment.

This was a production of Earnest that you have never seen before. It was so zany and crazy and fun- all in the very best way. Jim had actors go all the way with choices and created a safe space for them to just go wild with the comedy. The most interesting part of the play to watch get created was the original prologue that Jim had come up with the actors stepping into their costumes and shoes on stage as well as choreography to a string version of Bad Romance by Lady Gaga. This original prologue is what inspired me to create the original prologue for *Dead Girls No Mothers* later in the semester.

As one of the Assistant Directors, I took notes for Jim. I also observed everything in my notebook and wrote an article for Onstage Blog about what I learned about how to Assistant Direct. I sometimes took scenes outside to the hallway to work upon Jim's request or ran lines with an actor (especially with the understudy for Lady Bracknell) or took volume notes during tech. Jim was also willing to hear suggestions during breaks about directing choices which was exciting.

I learned a lot through working on a comedy such as Earnest. I also went to some of the production meetings to understand the full scope of the production as it was the highest budget show that I have worked on. It was interesting to get to hear where each element (technical, costume) was in their process of the show as time went on as there was only five weeks to put this grand Elizabethan styled production together.

ARTICLE LINK:

<https://www.onstageblog.com/the-design-life/2019/10/20/10-ways-to-make-the-most-out-of-assistant-directing>

