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Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement

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Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors

June 2011

Honors Capstone Project in Acting

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Date: _____

Abstract:
Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement

Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement is an exploration of Japanese culture through performance. The piece incorporates stylized, ritualistic, and contemporary movement. The device used to portray our research was a folk tale told solely through physical expression. Music by Japanese composers and projections of the country supported the movement and helped to tell the story of the culture.

We were deep into our research when we embarked on our trip to Japan to observe the specificity of the culture in everyday life and performance. Everything that we read, watched, and took part in manifested itself in the final presentation. The stylistic form of the piece was influenced by our studies and experiences within the Syracuse University Drama Department. We used a Japanese traditional folk tale about a young girl named Tokoyo to demonstrate both the physical culture and the societal priorities of the Japanese people.

The process began with rigorous research of everything from the mie poses of Kabuki theatre to the way in which Japanese people board a subway car. Once we learned all that we could from books and videos we were fortunate enough to travel to Tokyo to immerse ourselves in the culture. In Tokyo we furthered our understanding of the Japanese lifestyle through observation, conversation, and participation.

The process of developing an entertaining and educational piece of theatre began with story boarding, developing characters, and devising a way to include traditional and contemporary movement in one unified performance piece. We started our choreography of the story with a prologue to establish the relationship between the two central characters: Tokoyo and her father. Each movement was specific to what we had learned in our research and placed in the piece to demonstrate an aspect of gestural language. This made the work of creating the performance twice as difficult, not only focusing on storytelling but on the research that we had accumulated.

The piece was well received by audiences that left the theatre with opened eyes to a culture so far from their own as well as an avant-garde theatre style. Though the audience didn't understand or acknowledge the significance of every single nuance of the culture, they understood the themes of the story and the underlying emotions of the characters. Our performance educated our audience on a culture of which they may have had no prior knowledge. To do so through movement is extremely powerful. Movement has no language barrier and though the gestures may seem foreign the feelings emoted are clear. Body language is the ultimate communicator; watching an American member of our audience moved to tears by an unknown Japanese phrase of movement proves that this is true. This universal connection of humanity is just what we sought to demonstrate when we decided to explore cultural movement.

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Advice to Future Honors Students

I remember as a freshman, learning of the Senior Capstone Project and thinking, “I will never be able to do that.” Now, after just completing the project, I can tell any Honors student that is having similar thoughts, “You most certainly can!” While the Capstone Project is one of the largest endeavors I have taken on in college, it is also one of the most rewarding. However, without a few key factors the process would have been much more strenuous. The first factor was my topic choice. This may seem to be an obvious assertion, but finding a topic that will interest you is most important when beginning your Capstone journey. As an actor, I am personally interested in the movement aspects of theater and thus came up with a movement-based performance to create. If I had chosen to direct, write a play, or even compile a Shakespeare piece I do not think I would have been as eager during the process or as fulfilled as I am at its completion. Do not be afraid to change your mind because the process is long and lengthy. You do not want to spend an entire year researching something you are not interested in because you were too afraid to change it. This is your project so take control! Second, take every opportunity given to you. The Renee Crown Honors Program has a multitude of opportunities just waiting to be snatched up! The Crown, Wise-Marcus Scholarships are set up not so you can do basic research, but so you can go above and beyond! I can honestly say being a Crown Scholar was one of the best experiences I was given at college. I was able to travel to Tokyo, Japan to study and observe Japanese culture and

lifestyle. When I picked my topic, I never imagined I would be given such an opportunity. Lastly, my best advice is to keep pushing through. Even during those nights when you are convinced completion is impossible, do not give up. Finishing a Senior Capstone Project is an incredibly rewarding experience and one that I will take with me for years to come.

A Reflection of Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement

Melissa and I began thinking about our Capstone project in the Fall of our Junior year. Instead of drinking hot cocoa and watching Christmas movies like most of our classmates, we spent the entire day brainstorming. We decided to do a joint Capstone project, together, because of our shared interest in movement theater. Since Melissa and I are Drama majors we wanted to do some sort of performance, but we wanted it to be research based and an original project. We had a significantly shorter time frame than most Honors students because we are spending our last semester at the Tepper Semester in New York City. Originally, we thought coming up with a research based movement piece would be fairly simple. We thought we just needed to come up with some sort of concept and start creating! Little did we know, there was a whole world of movement we had yet to explore and variation upon variation of ways to apply it. Thus began the journey to creating “Tokoyo, a story of Cultural Movement.”

After talking to our Capstone Advisor, Lauren Unbekant, who recommended that we look at Asian cultures and their gestural languages, we decided upon four different Asian countries to research. We chose to explore the gestural languages of China, Vietnam, India, and Japan, and look into not only the differences, but also how over time the four cultures were influenced by one another. We then began our research. We started with traditional research, making many trips to the library for books and videos. We first

studied Japan because of its rich history in movement and theater arts. It was during this research process that we started thinking about the Crown Scholarships and how one could help to expand our studies. It was becoming fairly evident that much of what we read about in books could not be fully realized without first hand encounters and primary sources. One can only comprehend so much about a Noh or Kabuki walk from reading about it. We began to realize that the only way to really understand was to see it ourselves. In addition, the more we read about Japanese culture the more we wanted to experience it first hand. We wanted to immerse ourselves in the culture and therefore applied for a grant to visit Japan. Luckily, we were fortunate enough to become Crown Scholars and receive the grant for which we applied.

No book could ever compare to the abundance of research we acquired through observation and first hand participation. At a glance, the Japanese culture may seem very similar to Western culture. While, it became fairly apparent that the Japanese strive to westernize their lifestyles, we still were amazed by the rich cultural traditions of the country that were variously different from our own. We decided to spend our first day, a Monday, in an area called Ueno Park. It is a large, spacious park located in the Ueno section of Taito, Tokyo and is a popular spot for school children on their ways home, businessmen during their lunches, and families taking leisurely afternoon walks. It was while sitting on a bench that we began to notice the specific details of their movements and how they differed from our own.

Growing up in a metropolitan area I am used to a fast paced lifestyle. Whether I am walking through Cincinnati's Mt Storm park or down a city street, everyone seems to walk with the intention of getting from one place to another as quickly as possible. People do not stop to catch a glimpse of the beautifully lit cityscape, or to admire the nature living around them. Everyone seems to be too concerned with where they need to go and how to get there. However, sitting in Ueno Park I saw person after person take the time to let in their surroundings and appreciate them. This observation led me to the conclusion that the Japanese have a much stronger relationship with nature than westerners. Families would spend an entire day in the park walking leisurely and admiring the trees, flowers, and animals that scurried by. In general, their pace was exceedingly unlike that of Americans. Americans tend to be very fidgety and easily distracted, while the Japanese stand very still most of the time and walk at a very leisurely pace. I saw very few people that day that even looked in a hurry. This great respect for nature also lends itself to a great respect for one's fellow neighbor. In Japanese culture there is a much greater respect for others. Everyone seems eager and willing to help a person in need whether they know them or not. There were multiple occasions in which Melissa and I were looking at a map and a person offered to help us find where we were going. Most of these people spoke very little English and because of this, one of them, a very kind young lady, walked us four blocks to a museum and then ran back to catch her train.

One specific way of showing respect is their use of the bow. At first, Melissa and I thought that a bow was used solely for the purpose of greeting. We observed various people bowing to each other to say hello and goodbye. We realized, eventually, that the level and length of bow related directly to respect and authority. For example, we observed two businessmen bowing to each other as they left. One businessman was clearly younger and bowed significantly lower and longer than the older businessman. We then understood that the lower the bow, the more respect one was showing another person. Friends would bow to each other only slightly, but children would bow very lowly to their parents. Sometimes a person would want so much to show respect, they would not stop bowing until the other person stopped first. As time passed, we noticed people bowing much more often than just greetings. We observed bows of apology if someone bumped into another person, bows of appreciation if they wanted to say thank you, and even bows of humility, sincerity, and remorse.

The bow is especially important when praying at Temples and Shrines. Melissa and I visited at least one shrine or temple a day and therefore learned proper prayer etiquette. Outside of all shrines and temples is a fountain of water with multiple ladles at the side. At first, we were very confused and thought that we were possibly supposed to drink the water. We soon learned the water is for a cleansing of the hands before entering a temple or shrine.

This is to make sure one is pure and cleansed before entering a place of worship. Once entered, one approaches the altar and bows lightly. Then, a coin is thrown into the box in front of the altar, and one must ring the temple or shrine's bell. After, it is etiquette to bow deeply and respectfully twice, clap twice, bow deeply and respectfully once again, and finally bow a final time, lightly, before leaving. Some people would stop after they bowed two respectful bows and take time to articulate a prayer while others would simply go through the motions and leave. Despite the amount of time a person took, each individual prayed with a deep sense of devotion. While the Shinto and Buddhist religions are individualistic, religion is certainly instilled into the Japanese lifestyle. We saw businessmen come to temple to pray during their lunch breaks, mothers bringing their children, even those that were very elderly took time each day to pray.

The respect and devotion the Japanese practice in prayer permeates their entire lifestyle. In general, the Japanese are devoted to whatever they do, especially in the workforce. Originally, based on our observations in Ueno Park, Melissa and I thought that the average Japanese lifestyle was very laidback. However, we soon realized that the way people move on an afternoon in a park, is very different than that of a workday morning. On the second day we got up very early in order to buy tickets for an upcoming Kabuki show. In order to get to the theater, we had to take the subway. It was in this subway that our misunderstanding became realized. The passageways

were packed with businessmen and women all moving with the same purpose: to get to work on time. It was very clear that every person had a designated schedule and no desire to alter it. This manifested itself in businessmen's bodies and the way they walked. Everyone walked at a forward angle, starting with his or her head. It was as if they were so determined to get where they needed to go, the lower half of the body was trying to catch up with the upper half. No one stopped to enjoy his or her surroundings or to say hello because getting to work was the top priority. It became clear that success in one's occupation was something the Japanese put great value upon. In fact, it was so important, that men are hired during the morning to physically push people into the subways. Instead of waiting for the next train, businessmen and women are jammed into the subways to get people to and fro more efficiently. In addition, work is taken so seriously in Japan that men and woman only wear their nicest suits and dresses to work. We did not see a single person dressed in anything short of business formal. We came to the conclusion that again, this came from how strongly the Japanese value respect. If someone is even a minute late for work, it shows disrespect for coworkers and the office.

Along with our detailed observations of gestural language and culture, Melissa and I researched traditional Japanese theater styles by viewing performances. During our trip we were fortunate enough to see a full day of Kabuki. The performance consisted of five different Kabuki plays presented together as one piece. Kabuki is an extremely specific theater style for which

men train their entire lives to perform. Various children in the separate shows were all in the training process and will one day move up in rank to perform the lead character and dance roles. The first play was a jidai mono play, which means historical play. In this play two school teachers were hiding the son of their banished Lord, disguising him as a peasant. The emperor sent the top general to search the school for the son. The teachers find a boy, who looks similar to the Lord's son, to sacrifice in place of the other boy. The general enters the school house and takes the bait. He orders the young boy to be killed. The audience soon discovers that the boy who was killed was actually the general's own son who he sacrificed in honor of his former Lord.

Throughout the piece Melissa and I noticed the differences of the Japanese Kabuki style from western theatre styles. All of the movement was extremely specific and every motion had meaning. A very important aspect of the Kabuki style is the mei poses certain actors form. The pose is powerful and emotional/ While many may not understand the exact meaning of each pose, the movement is so specific and conveys so much emotion that it is impossible not to convey the general idea trying to come across.

We were also able to watch a Noh performance at a Buddhist Temple. While there are many characteristics of Noh theater similar to that of Kabuki, the Noh performance was much more ritualistic. While the Kabuki performance was comical and lively most of the time, the Noh performance was very formal and solemn. There was very little speech and mostly dance

and movement. The actors of Noh take on a very specific walk throughout the performance. The actors walk without taking their feet off the floor or moving the level of their head. The walk is very slow and drawn out. Every character walked in straight line in almost a square form. Sometimes during moments of great importance, one of the actors will do a series of stamps with their feet while still keeping the level of their head the same. The use of masks is a very important aspect of the Noh theater form. The masks are given so much respect that each is given its own name. Masked characters are of great importance and are usually spirits or women. One of the masked characters we saw performed a Noh sword dance which was extremely ritualistic.

While the theater styles of Japan are rich in tradition, they are not the only traditional art form. During one of our last days in Tokyo, Melissa and I were able to take part in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. The woman performing the ceremony knew we were in Tokyo for research so she made sure to point out all the specific movements of the ceremony. Before we were allowed to enter the tearoom we first had to remove our shoes on the tatami mats. We then had to kneel down and bow formally with our hands in front of our foreheads. In order to enter the room there is a specific movement. We had to stay on our knees and use our knuckles to drag us into the room. These movements are used to show respect. Once in the tearoom we had to admire the corner of Japanese art and ancestral belongings. Each tearoom has a unique corner in which the owner places art that he or she finds beautiful and

artifacts passed down from generations of ancestors. The tea lady, like the Noh actors, also walked in a square pattern, dragging her feet in small steps. This movement is due to the constriction of the kimono. Since the kimono does not allow for large strides the women must adjust. Every time she kneeled she did so gracefully without the use of her hands. She began the ceremony by cleaning each cup and utensil by the use of a cleaning ceremony. This included a series of quick, specific movements with a ladle and napkin. Once she gave us each a cup of green tea we had to perform our own ceremony. We first bowed to the tea and then picked the cup up, holding it out in front of us. Each cup has an engraving on it of the owner's choice. When the cup is picked up the engraving should face the holder. The holder then must turn the cup clockwise so the engraving faces the tea maker. Then the tea must be quickly drunk. In order to let the tea maker know that the tea was enjoyed one must slurp the final sips loudly. Finally, the cup is wiped with a napkin and turned counter clockwise so the engraving faces the drinker. The cup is then placed down and one must bow a final time before giving the cup back to the tea maker.

Even the way people dress in Japan is unique and specific to character. On our first day in Ueno Park we stopped inside a zoo and encountered numerous groups of school children. Each group looked slightly varied from the others but they all had the same basic fundamentals. School children are always dressed in uniforms accompanied with a brightly colored hat, usually

yellow. While Melissa and I originally thought these hats were simply a great use of fashion, we discovered that children are purposely given these hats in order to stand out in a crowd or on a street. These hats make children easily seen so cars will stop as they are crossing roads or so teachers can find them if they straggle from the group. Similar to those in the work force, children are given very nice clothes, such as skirts, dresses, and button down shirts, to wear to school each day. This again emphasizes the importance of success in ones occupation. The occupation of these children is that of students and they therefore should look presentable when attending their place of work. Specific lifestyles also offer special traditional clothing. For example, sumo wrestlers are always seen in traditional sumo robes. In addition, those who study the tea ceremony are seen dressed in traditional kimono. On the other hand, teenagers tend to dress rather extravagantly. While Japanese fashion tends to be much more conservative than western trends, teenagers still managed to shock Melissa and I with their fashion statements. Many teens dye their hair platinum blonde, wear large heels and puffy skirts and dresses unlike anything one would find in the United States. Mickey Mouse and Michael Jackson are also extremely popular not only among teens but among adults and children as well. This was the most obvious sign of the Japanese wanting to westernize their culture. While people obviously took great interest in us, the obsession with western icons made it clear that western culture was incredibly “in.”

Upon returning to the United States Melissa and I had an abundance of information and no idea how to compile it into a creative presentation. I decided to look at what I had learned from my movement and creative classes for tools on where to begin. As an artist, I am taught to pull from many different sources in my work. I spent the last four years in the Syracuse University Drama Department learning a variety of acting, movement, and voice techniques. I take bits and pieces from each of them to form my own process in which to approach a piece. While my personal process is still in the making and will take many more years to perfect, I do have a tentative method that I use on a daily basis in my class work and which I applied to Tokoyo: A Cultural Movement Piece. Since the story is told strictly through movement without the use of dialogue, I evidently incorporated mostly that which I have learned from the movement department. Someone who has become an inspiring mentor to me is my advisor for this project, Lauren Unbekant. I first worked with Lauren during the fall of my Junior year. She cast me in the Syracuse Stage Children's Tour production of *The Song from the Sea*. Upon reading the script, I thought the show was very sweet and kid friendly but questioned how we, as actors, would keep the children's attention with such a wordy text. I soon learned that during much of the dialogue Lauren would incorporate movement to enhance the audience experience. Prior to rehearsals, I had never been a part of a movement-based show. I had no idea how to fully use my body in my acting. Lauren spent four weeks teaching us how to maneuver our bodies in ways we never imagined we could. We learned how

to create many stylized visual effects with our bodies such as walking, running, skiing, swimming, falling, and climbing, all while never moving forwards or backwards an inch. Audience perspective was a key aspect of our movement training. By changing the perspective of the audience you can create a 3-D world that would normally only be possible with special effects or elaborate sets. However, we learned how to create images only use our bodies. After a three month run of over forty shows I could use my bodies in ways I never previously imagined.

In the next semester, the spring of my Junior year, I took a class called Backstory. This, I would learn, was the next step to my movement training putting my new movement skills into storytelling. Backstory is a class designed to teach students how to create original one-man pieces using movement to tell the story. During the first few weeks of classes each student must pick a person they want to base their “Backstory” on and begin creating. I chose to go a different route and instead of picking an actual person, I picked a topic and created my own character. I decided to research child beauty pageants and ended up creating a charismatic child beauty queen named Suzie. I struggled for many weeks with my piece. The reason I struggled most, I learned, was because I would write pieces of my script and then try and add movement on top of it. However, over the course of the semester I learned the easiest, most organic, way to create this type of movement piece was to write a script with movement in mind so the two blend cohesively together. I began

to develop the mindset of a movement actor. I would think of beautiful visual images I could make with my body, and write a script that could use them, all the while basing my script on the research I had been collecting. In the end I developed a fifteen minute piece that was informative as well as visually stimulating.

The following summer I traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland for the International Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This festival is the largest of its kind in the world and brings in over 500,000 performers and spectators to the city of Edinburgh for a four week festival of self produced theater. It was due to a spontaneous gut decision to see an a vanguard show that I saw what I had learned the past year put together in one single cohesive piece of theater. The show was entitled The Dream of Sancho. Coincidentally, it was created by a movement group from Japan. It told the story of Don Quijote through the eyes of his sidekick, Sancho. The story was told completely through movement, without any dialogue, and was supplemented by visual and audio effects. I exited the theater with a much clearer understand of my past years education because I had finally seen a piece that tied all of my learning together. I saw how it was possible to tell a story completely through movement and how much projections and audio sounds can enrich a piece. It was then that I knew what type of piece I wanted to do for my Capstone and luckily I had all the tools to do it based on my education of the past year.

When Melissa and I returned for the 2010-2011 school year we were on the same page. We wanted to create a movement piece that told a story completely through our bodies with the absence of any dialogue. However, we first needed a story to tell. We began to look at ancient Japanese folktales for inspiration. We needed a story that could be captivating if told simply through movement. This became one of our first challenges. What elements of a story are needed in order to clearly articulate a message? We began to look for stories that dealt with the elements. The elements force the body to move in vastly different ways and can easily demonstrate change of scene. We also wanted to find a folktale that could be put in contemporary times since the basis of our research was on modern day Japan. We happened upon the story of Tokoyo and knew immediately it was what we were looking for. The story allowed us to move through land, air, and water and could, with some effort, be set in this century. The young girl, Tokoyo, is the daughter of a Samurai, who is banished by the Emperor. The Emperor thinks Tokoyo's father put a curse on him and therefore sends him away. Tokoyo begins a journey to find her father. On the way, she meets many different characters including a fisherman and a priest who help her along her journey. In the end she is cast into the ocean where she battles a serpent to break the Emperor's curse and her father is allowed to return.

Thus, we began the process of converting a tale of a Samurai's daughter's journey to that of a top-notch businessman's daughter's journey.

We started with the specific characters and how each character would translate into a person today. The little girl became a schoolgirl, the Emperor became a CEO, the father became a successful businessman, the fisherman became a tea lady, the priest became a hobo, and the serpent became a crab. Creating these characters made us realize that there were significantly more characters than there were actors to play them. One of us would have to play Tokoyo and the other, the rest of the characters. There are many ways to deal with an actor playing multiple roles in a piece. Costumes are an obvious choice; applying different costumes to each character. However, since the piece is movement base we decided to find a way to define each character not only with costumes, but with specific physical traits. Each character walks and moves differently in order to differentiate between them. In addition, we decided to unify the characters by making them all functions of a single character. Buddha is the symbol of the Buddhist religion and a character we added to help Tokoyo on her journey. With the exception of the father, every character who guides Tokoyo is Buddha in a different form. This allowed us to play with the element of fantasy. Buddha is a magical character in our piece who guides Tokoyo in situations she might never survive. With this magical aspect we could play with the idea of one person moving another without touch. In other words, Melissa as Buddha, could initiate a movement with her finger which would be reciprocated through my entire body so it looks like she has the power to move me with a simple gesture.

The next hurdle we encountered was how to deal with the curse the Emperor blames the father for. Since curses are not something people normally believe in, we had to find a different reason as to why the father would be banished or, as it is in our piece, fired. Since the Japanese have such a respect for their ancestry, we decided that the CEO keeps an ancestral sword in his office that is the icon of the company. Only the CEO and the father have access to sword but Buddha decides to steal it in order to send Tokoyo on a journey which will allow her to grow up into a young woman and learn to be independent.

Finally, we had to come to a decision as to how we were going to incorporate our knew found knowledge of Kabuki and Noh. The best way to do this was to dedicate a each theater style to a specific character. Since the CEO and the tea lady seemed to be the most traditional, we decided to give the CEO Noh aspects and the tea lady Kabuki aspects.

Once we composed the basic story line it was time to start moving. In the Syracuse Stage Children's Tour, we opened with something called a prologue. The prologue is a movement piece which prefaces the story in order to establish character, setting, and relationship. A prologue is important because helps audiences to get a grasp on what they are going to watch. It is especially important for a movement piece because there is no narration to explain any circumstances. So, we began to create a prologue in order to

establish the characters of Tokoyo, her father, their relationship, and the Japanese way of life. We decided the best way to do this was by presenting an everyday morning ritual between the two characters. We went back to our research in order to figure out what a morning routine would look like by someone living in Japan. We decided on two important aspects: paying respects to the ancestors, and looking presentable for work and school. We created a prologue with these ideas in mind, making a long segment of numerous bows to the ancestors and another segment showing the importance of how one presents themselves for work. We also added in clues to relationship by the way we acted towards each other. For example, the father and the daughter have a daily race to who can get to the alcove first and a tickle competition which shows their loving relationship.

The next scene takes place in the father's office building. Since the CEO was decided to be a Noh character, we chose his ancestral artifact to be a sword. Using a sword allowed us to recreate the sword dance we saw in the Noh show in May. Each time the CEO enters, wearing a Noh mask, and exits he demonstrates a Noh pose that represents power. The CEO walks on in the slow, sliding, Noh walk, performs a sword dance honoring the sword of his ancestors, and walks out. Once the father arrives at work the CEO enters again to discover the sword is missing and performs a variety of Noh related movements to banish the father. The father, in response, demonstrates a Noh

pose which translates to weeping. As he leaves he reenacts the Noh stomp walk to reemphasize his anger towards the father.

We squeezed as much information and research into the piece as we possibly could. Much of the information could go unnoticed because very little is presented as “information.” For example, the father walks with his head tilted, leaning forward, as we observed of the businessmen and women in the subway. In fact, we added an entire subway section in order to fully demonstrate the idea of the importance of the work force and moving with a purpose. In the original folktale, Tokoyo gets around by boat. Boats at the time were the main form of mass transportation. We translated the form of mass transportation to that of the subway. In order to portray the Japanese connection to nature we added a section where the tea lady brings Tokoyo to multiple places in nature such as a stream, a meadow, and a mountain in order to teach Tokoyo respect for her surroundings. In addition, the tea lady teaches Tokoyo a Kabuki dance which means young lady in order to portray to the audience that Tokoyo is learning how to grow up. We also added in a portion of a traditional tea ceremony which we learned from a Japanese student here on campus.

Our stage manager could only begin coming to rehearsals the week before the performance. Before that, we had to learn to be our own stage manager. We scheduled our own rehearsals, found our own rehearsal spaces,

and set our own goals for successful, timely, completion of the project. We were forced to learn how to manage our time, and manage it well. In addition to this, we had to create and find all of our own costumes, set, and props. We took many trips to the Salvation Army for basic costume materials and then added detail and accessories to make the costumes more specific to each character. Many of our props we had to make ourselves from materials we borrowed or bought from crafts stores. We also had to design a set that would be minimalistic, but able to work in multiple different settings.

After all of our hard work, one of the most beneficial parts of the process was the final presentation on Tuesday December 7th, at the Red House. While the collaborative process gave us incredible tools that will help us in our future career as actors, the final performance in front of an audience gave us insight on our piece and how to make it better. Melissa and I want to take this piece to venues in New York and possibly around the country. So, discovering what the audience resonated with was an important key to improving the piece. When we had our preview at the theater, the two of us got nervous because the audience was quiet most of the show. However, the verbal feedback they gave us at the talkback proved that their silence was due to their concentration and focus on the piece instead of boredom. We found the second audience to be a little more lively even though there were still many parts where the audience was incredibly silent. We realized a piece must put the audience through multiple emotions in order to truly captivate an

audience. People will get tired of straight drama or straight comedy, but with a piece that incorporates both at opportune times, they will be with you the whole way through. In addition, I learned that it is a trap to attempt to tell the audience how to feel. If an actor broadcasts the audience exactly how he or she is feeling, expecting the audience to feel a certain way about it, they will most likely fail. The audience has a mind of their own and each audience is different. Since our piece is very close to our hearts Melissa and I had expectations for the audience and many of them were not met. However, what we later realized was that they surpassed our expectations in many ways as well.

As my Capstone Project comes to a close I find myself asking the question “What have I learned?” I can easily say I learned how to manage my time and work under pressure. However, I think what is more beneficial to consider is how I can use this experience to grow in my field and further my career. One of the most important ideas I took away from the semester was how to work in a collaborative environment. Working with another person forced me to express my ideas articulately as well as to have the maturity to let them go if they did not fit. I now understand how valuable listening is in a collaborative process. Many times when one is creating new work, a director will not be present to guide the actors in choice and ideas. The only people to work with will be yourself and a few fellow actors. I have learned not just to

focus not just on myself and what I am personally doing, but how what I am doing benefits the piece as a whole.

Since I had to learn how to be my own stage manager and designer, I can now use my new time management, organizational, and even design skills to create new work on my own. As an actor, I cannot always count on other people to give me work so I must know how to create my own. A great way to be noticed by directors and agents is through the shows they see you in. So, if I hit hard times and have trouble getting cast like many actors do from time to time, it is extremely beneficial to know the process of producing an original show for directors and agents to come to see. Overall, I have taken away incredible skills from this project that I will continue to use in the future to further my career as an actor.

Capstone Summary

Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement is an exploration of Japanese culture told solely through physical expression. The presentation includes Kabuki and Noh movement styles, as well as contemporary gestural language. The gestural language of a culture refers to the way people relate to each other and communicate through their bodies. These movements are often derived from rituals and daily life. The most frequent and widely recognized example is the bow. Bowing in eastern Asian culture has a variety of meanings: one used in place of the American wave “hello.” The story of Tokoyo is an ancient Japanese folk tale through which we demonstrate this specific form of communication. To incorporate both modern and ancient traditions, the story is set in contemporary Tokyo with appearances by traditional characters informed by Kabuki and Noh performance styles.

The original story of Tokoyo is centered around a young girl whose father, a samurai, has just been banished from the kingdom by the emperor. The emperor is plagued by a curse and blames her father. Devastated, she sets out to find him. The journey is long and trying, but her loyalty to her father is too great to ignore. Tokoyo, a young and naive girl, climbs aboard a boat in the hopes that she will stumble upon her father. When she discovers it will not be that simple, she seeks guidance from other various fishermen. The fishermen, focused on their work, are of no help, leaving Tokoyo alone in unfamiliar surroundings. Coincidentally, Tokoyo finds herself at a Buddhist temple where she prays for Buddha’s help in finding her father. Wrought by

weariness, she falls asleep. Tokoyo is awoken by the sound of a girl crying. The girl, about to be sacrificed, is being held over a cliff by a priest. Tokoyo, with no hope left inside her, offers to act as the sacrifice in place of the other girl. Tokoyo dives into the ocean, all the while praying to Buddha. Once on the ocean floor, Buddha guides her to a statue of the emperor hidden in a cave. Tokoyo puts the statue on her back and swims to the surface. She knows this statue is the key to saving her father. The priest and the girl carry her back to town where the emperor summons her. When Tokoyo pulled the statue from the sea, the emperor's curse was lifted. He thanks her for her good deeds and releases her father from banishment. Tokoyo and her father are reunited and his honor in society is reestablished.

The adapted piece begins with a prologue introducing Tokoyo and her father's relationship through a series of morning rituals. The two part ways as they begin their journeys to work and school. The scene changes to an introduction of the CEO, who is the equivalent of the emperor in our story and is informed by Noh movement. The Japanese currently view the business elite as they did the samurai in ancient times. The CEO is seen paying respect to the sword that represents the lineage of his family-built corporation. When he is out of sight, Buddha, in the form of a prankster, steals the sword. When Tokoyo's father arrives at work, excited to begin the day, he is greeted by an angry CEO. The CEO, having discovered that the sword is missing, blames the father, the only other key holder. The father is sent to jail, never to be with his daughter again.

Tokoyo, on her way home from school, visits her father at work. There she finds an empty office, a letter telling her what has happened, and her father's key. She sets out to find her father. Parallel to the folk tale's journey on the sea, Tokoyo descends into the subway station, the main business travel medium. In the subway she is overwhelmed and finds no help. Tokoyo collapses and Buddha, in the form of a young woman in traditional dress, observes her distress and offers her assistance. The woman takes her to her home in the outskirts of the city where she performs an authentic tea ceremony. This character is informed by Kabuki style. The young woman teaches Tokoyo how to be a young woman of society and suggests that Tokoyo visits a temple to pray and seek guidance.

At the temple, Tokoyo prays in traditional fashion and falls asleep. Midst her slumber, the statue of Buddha comes alive and performs a dance indicating to the audience that he will guide Tokoyo for the rest of her journey. At the end of the dance he transforms into a homeless man. Tokoyo wakes up and hears the homeless man outside. He is attempting to steal her school bag and umbrella that she left outside while she was praying. In an attempt to regain possession of her belongings, Tokoyo engages in a Kabuki-style sword fight with the homeless man. The umbrella is used in place of a sword. The fight ends with the homeless man throwing Tokoyo into the water. As she falls to the water Buddha takes her hand and flies with her over the ocean. When they arrive over a designated spot, Buddha releases her into the sea. Once under the water Tokoyo is led to a box which holds the sword

of her father's corporation. She knows that this will save her father and carries it to the surface. She returns home where she presents the sword to the CEO and she is reunited with her father. Cherry blossoms bloom as Buddha watches over them and smiles.

This piece was developed through traditional research and observation. Before leaving for Japan last May, we researched the conventions of Kabuki and Noh theatre, Japanese theatre culture, and Japanese daily culture. We also researched cultural movement as a field of study. We investigated the origins of culture, how rituals are formed, and how they manifest themselves in performance. This was achieved through traditional research and a look at images and video clips. Once we arrived in Japan, our research became based on physical observation, museum exhibits, attending theatre, and immersing ourselves in the culture in every way possible. We attended Kabuki and Noh performances and made physical, vocal, and aesthetic observations. English guides helped us to understand the dramatic stories being told and the importance of the different aspects of the performances. Each day we observed human behavior in different areas of life. We recorded human interaction in business, leisure, educational, and familial settings. The physical distinctions between age, class, and status became clear. We attended a private tea ceremony to study the movement involved in the ancient tradition and travelled to many shrines and temples to observe the culture's emphasis on spirituality. Parades and festivals provided information regarding relationships and unity in Japan, while the morning

rush hour demonstrated the individuals determination for efficiency. Even how people eat, walk, greet one another, and show affection are subtle but important aspects of behavior when studying a culture. After returning from Japan, we continued traditional research to support our findings in the country. We also met with a Japanese student here at Syracuse University to learn the tea ceremony and more about modern culture from someone of our generation. This research is what has shaped our creative piece and added many different layers of the intricate Japanese culture.

The creation of the piece was a difficult and lengthy process that was achieved through multiple drafts. We used techniques taught in our acting classes to develop the characters of our story. The movement that we developed is based on traditional movement, contemporary movement, stylized movement, and metaphor. The piece includes many storytelling techniques that we have worked with in our training in the Drama Department. These techniques include various movements and patterns of physical storytelling. For example when Tokoyo finds the sword she brings it back to where the story began. Instead of taking the audience on the entire journey back, we use a technique called backwards mapping. Tokoyo simply repeats recognized movements from the story in reverse order. This acts as a rewind for the audience and brings them back to the beginning quickly and artistically.

The presentation of this composition will educate our audience on a culture very far from our own. The differences and great similarities will

become clear. It addresses essential themes of Japanese performance that are also extremely present in American performance. These themes include family and business loyalty. Though the country is physically very distant, the ideas presented are very close to home. Furthermore, the principle that movement is the universal language is very significant. The specific movements may seem odd or foreign, but the emotion conveyed still makes them relatable. Though each culture's artistic expression is drastically different, each is developed from a universal humanity. We can convey stories simply through our bodies; art can be a communicator.

As drama majors, we are especially interested in human behavior and specifically how the body moves to communicate. Each individual culture looks at life differently. Based on climate, location, religion, and other cultures' influences, a culture develops stories, rituals, language, and gesture. As emerging artists, this piece was a wonderful and challenging experience. To have the opportunity to create a piece of theatre from our own research, observations, and brain power is thrilling. Devising a piece without speech that still tells a story is a great accomplishment. The amount that we learned in observing another culture has endlessly impacted our theatre training. Tokoyo's story is timeless and Tokoyo: A Story of Cultural Movement will educate our audience and continues to educate us.