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## Suspend Your Disbelief

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## THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

### CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Graham Kurtz, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 2000 successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on March 16, 2004.

The title of the paper is:

Suspend Your Disbelief

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Williams", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Terry Williams, Theatre

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jamie Reed", written over a horizontal line.

Jamie Reed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey Stephenson", written over a horizontal line.

Geoffrey Stephenson, Theatre

Lee Honors College

Thesis Project:

Suspend

Your Disbelief

By:

Graham

Kurtz

In an ideal world, every theatre patron would recognize the important concept referred to as “suspension of disbelief.” It is a proverbial contract “signed” by the audience member in which he or she agrees to subscribe to the ideas, characters, and circumstances portrayed by the actors they are about to watch. In many cases, these aspects of the production are highly out of the ordinary and require the audience to play along, otherwise any message or theme being communicated will be lost on the theatre-goers. The title of this cabaret performance is a demand that the audience allow the performers to take them many different places in a short amount of time. Stories will be told, hearts will be broken and mended, discoveries made, and catharsis’ had. It is up to the audience as to whether or not they partake in the experience.

For the sake of contrast, it was decided that, though only Graham was to use this experience as an honor’s thesis, the two performers would alternate between songs. Going back and forth between numbers sung by a powerhouse African-American woman and a lithe, quirky, Finnish-Slovenian “Euro-mutt” proved to be very engaging and allowed for a solid variety. Despite the physical manifestations of each performer, their songs were not limited to those sung only by characters similar in appearance. Their repertoire ranged from classical fodder, to pieces of cutting edge musical theatre sung by characters of all backgrounds, races, and lifestyles. In addition, each piece was separated and/or introduced by one or both performers either simply or through comic interlude. Aside from the introduction to “Tango Maureen,” all dialogue was created by the performers in order to suit transitions and/or add further dimension to songs.

The following is a description of the performance through Graham Kurtz’s point of view. However, due to involvement in some musical numbers along with Altamiece’ Ballard, some of her numbers will also be described. It began with Graham walking onto the stage to apologize for the tardiness of his partner. As a result of her absence he takes it upon himself to sing her first

number called “And I Am Telling You” from Dreamgirls. Once he has gotten a few phrases into the number, Altamiece can be heard off to the side joining in. Graham greets her, then shamefully scampers off the stage and allows Tami to finish the number.

Once the house has been brought down by one of the most dramatic and searing pieces of musical theatre, Graham enters the playing space and says, “Good evening. My name is Graham Kurtz. You may recognize me from such roles as... well... uhhh... .. the chorus in... A CHORUS LINE! I was in A Chorus Line.” This plays off the fact that he has not been cast as anything beyond the chorus in a mainstage production during his college career (aside from A Chorus Line which was only because he filled in for an injured performer). This leads him to explain to the audience that “That we have nothing to remember, so far.” The song “So Far” is taken from the score of Rogers and Hammerstein’s staged version of State Fair. It is to indicate that, though Graham has yet to get a lead role in any production, good things are yet to come.

Graham’s following number is Howard Crabtree’s “Last One Picked.” This song laments the trials and tribulations his character had to endure during his school years in gym class. It is a comic character piece that relies on the use of word play and the endearing qualities of the performer. Graham was easily able to identify his own life with this song, however, notes with false illnesses and injuries were never forged during his elementary/middle/high school career.

Melisande is a story song from 110 In the Shade by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt. It describes the perils of “King Hamlet” as he embarks on a quest to obtain a golden fleece for his beloved “turtle dove,” Melisande. It is taken out of the context in which it is used by Starbuck in this musical adaptation of the play, “The Rainmaker.” It is used as a device by which Starbuck endears himself and gets closer to the leading lady, Lizzie. Graham treats it as a story to stand on its own, and also to showcase his more classically trained voice.

Graham's first duet with Altamiece' follows. "The Tango Maureen" is from the rock opera, RENT. Using the actual script from the show, this number depicts a scene in which a character named Mark meets Joanne, his ex-girlfriend, Maureen's current lesbian lover. They find common ground by discussing the trials and tribulations of dating Maureen. Unlike those depicted in the majority of the other pieces, Graham and Altamiece' could feasibly be cast in these roles in the near future. This number also allows them to showcase their movement abilities as dancers as they move and interact throughout it.

Promptly after the previous number finishes, Altamiece' introduces the following number by saying that every year there is a senior Music Theatre Performance major that loves the movie The Little Mermaid. This year... it's not her. Graham stalks onto the stage and proceeds to sing "Poor Unfortunate Souls;" a number performed by Ursula, a half-woman, half-octopus sea witch in which she tricks the mermaid, Ariel into giving up her voice so that she can become human and Ursula can use the voice for her evil deeds. It proves to be quite the crowd-pleaser as a result of how well-known the material is and the contrast between the original artist and Graham.

After this, Graham begins to wrap up this cabaret with a simple rendition of "Something Good" from Rogers and Hammerstein's movie score of The Sound of Music. Immediately afterwards he runs to a higher area while Altamiece' pretends to be going in for an audition for a producer. He booms his voice at her, saying, "We here at Western Michigan University like to do things a little differently. Tell me a little something about yourself." The program then lists him as singing "Let It Sing" from Jeanine Tesori's Violet, however, his voice was not up to the large, black man's song at that point, so it was cut.

Following Altamiece's final solo, Graham joins her onstage to encourage the audience to donate money to the seniors who are going to perform a showcase for agents and casting

directors in March. Then they end the performance with Jason Robert Brown's "All the Wasted Time;" a heartfelt duet between a Jewish man and his southern belle wife. Once again, disbelief must be suspended, but the show ends on a solid note and a passionate kiss between the two performers.

THE ★  
STARS  
AND ☾  
MOON  
CABARET  
SERIES  
IS  
PROUD  
TO  
PRESENT



SUSPEND  
YOUR  
DISBELIEF



FEATURING  
★ ALTAMIECE' ★  
CAROLYN BALLARD  
★ & ★  
GRAHAM KURTZ



THE  
STARS   
AND   
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IS  
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# SUSPEND YOUR DISBELIEF

FEATURING

ALTAMIECE' CAROLYN BALLARD & GRAHAM KURTZ

And I Am Telling You...	<i>Dreamgirls</i>
So Far	<i>State Fair</i>
Everybody's Girl	<i>Steel Pier</i>
Last One Picked	<i>Whoop Dee Doo!</i>
Last Midnight	<i>Into the Woods</i>
Melisande	<i>110 In the Shade</i>
Old Fashioned Love Story	<i>Lippa's Wild Party</i>
Tango Maureen	<i>Rent</i>
Poor Unfortunate Souls	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>
Ladies Who Lunch	<i>Company</i>
Something Good	<i>The Sound of Music</i>
Broadway Baby	<i>Follies</i>
Let It Sing	<i>Violet</i>
All the Wasted Time	<i>Parade</i>

Accompanist: Courtney Lang

## Special Thanks...

From Altamiece'...

God, Mom, Dad, Alexis, Friends and Family, and Graham

From Graham...

Mom and Dad, Lucy and Leah, his Thesis Committee, and Altamiece'

From Altamiece' and Graham...

D. Terry Williams, Faculty, and Courtney Lang