***One-Man Hamlet*: A Reflective Essay**

by Clayton Jevne

One-Man Hamlet was initially conceived in an impulse to "stick it to the man." However, during its sixteen-year gestation period, six-month preparation stretch, and seventeen-year performance history, it grew to represent for me an extended period of personal artistic experimentation in which I worked to expand and incorporate a unique performance approach that had been passed on to me by two mentors. Both artists had received no formal training as actors, and as such remained free of the influence of the theories and exercises that form the basis of actor training programs. Theirs was a completely practical approach that satisfied the requirements of skill-based learning. As part of this reflection, I will describe the essence of their method and its relevance to skill development theory; and for those who are familiar with current actor training practices, it is my hope that the unique practicality of this approach will stand in contrast to generally accept theories of the acting process. I will summarize the theoretical basis of my performance approach to *One-Man Hamlet* as it grew out of this acting approach, and describe the process leading up to the initial performance of the show. I will conclude by revisiting some of the incidents that accompanied the seventeen-year run.

It is during this last section that I ask your indulgence. While developing *One-Man Hamlet*, I governed my vision for the final product by my desire to create something that I, myself, would be interested in seeing. I did not overly dwell on trying to build a show that would fulfill any particular audience group's expectations. I wanted to break with traditional convention, as well as—within the context of the show—to break the non-traditional conventions I established with yet further conventions. As a result, I succeeded at times in alienating myself from certain critics and traditionalists whose sympathies might have proved advantageous. While composing this article I have again found myself wanting to create something that would be fun for me to read. I enjoy participating in the reflective process, thinking back on what actually prompted me to make the choices I made, but I also have a desire to shed the intellectual process and engage my imagination for no other reason than for the sake of engaging my imagination. I invite you to share both the reflective process of the first part, and the series of

following fragmented memories that have made a journey such as *One-Man Hamlet* part of this actor's life experience.

In 1975, the idea occurred to me do a one-actor presentation of *Hamlet*. I made this decision following a few failed auditions upon graduating from one of the theatre schools I attended. At the time there was little opportunity for young actors to play classical roles of significance in a professional context without the sanction of the professional regional theatre circuit. Fringe Theatre Festivals had yet to be established in Canada, so I did what most young actors did. I made the audition rounds. In my naïveté I chose, as an audition piece, the one speech that I would now—as an artistic director—caution anyone from choosing: Hamlet's "To be or not to" speech. In school I had worked on the major speeches from *Hamlet*, reasoning that if I wanted to be at my best as an actor, I would be wise to try to master the greatest dramatic monologues. My auditioners were not impressed.

In an attempt to regain my self-esteem, I organized a "home concert" presentation of Hamlet's monologues. Perhaps my invited friends were just being polite, but I took their enthusiastic response as an endorsement of my performance, and as someone with an actor's ego I began to consider doing the whole play by myself. I wanted to show "them" that not only could I pull off the monologues, but the whole play as well. I began obsessing about performing solo outside the Stratford Festival. Fuelled by such fantasies, I threw myself enthusiastically into preparations and began memorizing the script.

With the first scene under my belt, my enthusiasm waned. This was a very long play and although I had the vision I lacked the patience. I abandoned the project and for the next sixteen years the idea lay dormant. I enrolled in yet another theatre school, while simultaneously taking steps towards a new career path. Both these decisions contributed to my decision to later revisit *One-Man Hamlet*.

As a theatre student, I took advantage of an opportunity to work part time (and later full time) as a puppeteer with Patchwork Puppets, one of Canada's premiere puppet troupes. My years of experience with this troupe prompted me, with two colleagues, to begin own puppet troupe, later to become Theatre Inconnu. After a decade of national and international touring with both Patchwork and Inconnu, my colleagues and I established a permanent puppet theatre space in Victoria, BC, where we mounted three

seasons of extravagant puppet productions. While the shows were critically acclaimed, we failed to convince the local population that puppetry was a serious art form, appropriate for adults as well as children. After three seasons of playing to audiences of mothers and toddlers, my colleagues left in frustration, and I found myself alone with six months remaining on the lease.

What could one actor/puppeteer do with few funds and six months' access to a performance venue? My interest in the solo *Hamlet* project resurfaced. While this interest was no longer tied to the original "angry young man" theme, it was again coloured by my desire to use the show as a vehicle as something other than simply a fun showpiece. I had, during the previous decade, been experiencing a growing awareness with regard to the dynamics of performance. My views on acting had been significantly reshaped by two mentors, thus my renewed commitment to this project was sustained by my desire to incorporate their teaching into my approach.

Mentor number one was Roy Small, founder of Patchwork Puppets. During my time with Roy he encouraged me to observe human behaviour and then to reproduce specific physical and verbal inter-relationships through my puppets' vocal and gestural communication. He reasoned that without this essential understanding, a puppeteer could not endow the puppet with what is recognized as normal communicative behaviour. Because facial expressions were more or less "fixed" on our puppets, it was this relationship between the verbal and gestural communication that allowed the puppet to become more than just stitched together fabric over styrofoam or polyfoam.

Mentor number two was Jean Paul Destrubé. Jean Paul, a native Parisian, was a mime teacher in the Camosun College Professional Acting Program in Victoria, BC in the early to mid 1970's. During my final year in this two-year program Jean Paul took over as head of both the school and the acting classes. He was a self-taught actor/mime and the method with which he trained himself was the method we were taught. His approach to these two disciplines was not based upon established theories or training regimes. Instead, it grew out of his own discoveries as to how best he could use these disciplines to represent the human action and interaction that surrounds us daily.

Like Roy, Jean Paul reasoned that if he wanted to portray the characteristics of real-life behaviour, then he should develop specific criteria as to what constituted the

identifiable qualities of real-life behaviour. As a teacher and practitioner of mime he was meticulous in his recreation of the muscular activity that went into the smallest of human physical tasks. As students we spent seemingly endless hours learning the finger and hand movements that went into the simple act of lifting a glass from a table, among many other mundane tasks. The physical awareness this awakened in me with regard to the intricacies of human movement set the stage for the acting instruction that was to follow. Jean Paul's exceptional understanding of how movement and speech worked together represented a knowledge base for acting that was completely new to me within the context of actor training.

Jean Paul pointed out that the relationship between a speaker's verbal and gestural communication could be observed to undergo distinct pattern changes depending upon the level of spontaneity inherent in the situation. When he compared the characteristics of these different levels of spontaneity with the characteristics of what he generally observed on-stage, he noticed that actors more often than not demonstrated characteristics that, in real-life interaction, represent non-spontaneous circumstances. He logically assumed that this was because the process of speaking memorized text had an overpowering influence that would override the actor's desire and attempt to appear spontaneous. Therefore, he developed a series of training exercises that would allow the student to consciously maintain the dynamics representative of spontaneity, while delivering memorized speech. Here is an example of one of his observations of a non-spontaneous characteristic commonly seen in stage, and a following exercise designed to counter this phenomenon.

It can be observed that actors often punctuate the syllables of the words they are speaking with a repetitive movement happening in sync with each syllable that is being spoken. The punctuation starts and ends at the same time the spoken syllable starts and ends. This can take various forms such as: hands or arms punctuating up and down; fingers jabbing back and forth; head shaking or nodding; or raising up and down on the balls of the feet. This observation can be borne out simply by attending live theatre, or by watching DVD's of filmed stage productions. Such an example is Fritz Weaver's speech as Creon in the Broadway Theatre Archive DVD of *Antigone* when he punctuates every syllable with his finger as he speaks the passage that begins and ends with: "You

have cast me for the villain . . . you take the offensive" (Venza, 1972).

Jean Paul realized that such a relationship between verbal and gestural communication only happened in real-life situations under non-spontaneous circumstances, as when someone was speaking from a very specific pre-conceived agenda, such as a politicians giving a speech. In actual spontaneous interaction he saw that gesturing began *before* the associated word phrase and ended as the word or phrase ended. The gestures were not repetitive, but descriptive and flowed from one into the other. He also noted that when people were speaking in a highly excited manner gestures came as frequently as one per word, and when the speaker calmed down, the movements settled into one or two distinct gestures per phrase. Peer reviewed studies verify Jean Paul's observations on verbal and gestural interplay in situations both non-spontaneous (Bull, 1987, pp. 128-129; Chawla & Krauss, 1994; McClave, 1994) and spontaneous situations (Beattie, 1983, p. 72; Chawla & Krauss, 1994; Cohen & Borsoi, 1996; Hadar, 1989; Le Baron & Streeck, 2000; McNeill, 1992, pp. 35 & 83; Morrel-Samuels & Krauss, 1992; Rimé, Shiaratura, Hupet, & Ghysselinckx, 1984, Rogers, 1978)

To preempt the body's natural response to speaking memorized text, Jean Paul assigned us the exercise of choreographing a gesture for every word (including articles) in a five-minute speech of our choice. While speaking the words, we were instructed to start the gesture before the word and end it as the word ended. The next gesture was then to grow out of this finished gesture in a non-stop movement sequence. This assignment replicated the interaction of speech and gesture at the highest level of spontaneity. The purpose of the exercise was to gain a second-by-second conscious monitoring capacity so that we would be able to adjust our gestural language in accordance with the content and level of spontaneity inherent in any spoken phrase. This was no easy task, and it took weeks of concentrated practice to end up with a five-minute speech during which I could confidently monitor every gestural nuance that was occurring word by word.

Without prior knowledge of skill development theory Jean Paul—through this exercise—was following the procedure for behaviour substitution in which an alternate behaviour is substituted and practiced that will interrupt and replace the body's natural response to a specific circumstance (Ackerman, 1988; Delingnieres, et al., 1998; Harmon, & Miller, 1968, p. 344; Fitts, 1964, p. 277; Jones & Nisbett, 1971, p. 15; Latash, 1993, p.

302; Schmidt 1975; Schneider & Fisk, 1982; Simon & Bjork, 2001; Smethurst & Carson, 2001; Sparrow, et al., 1999).

His method hinged upon two conditions: 1) the access to criteria with which we could measure the level of our success (the dynamics that he observed in real-life representative of varying levels of spontaneity) and 2) the ever-present circumstance of using only memorized text while performing the exercises. The logic of Roy and Jean Paul's approaches (which were quite similar) in ensuring the presence of these two conditions is a logic that is supported by research, which has determined that these two conditions must be in place to successfully learn a skill (Delingnieres, et al., 1998; Schmidt, 1991, pp. 76, 69, 72; Shea & Wulf, 1999; Swinnen, Lee, Verschueren, Serrien, & Bogaerds, 1997; Winstein & Schmidt, 1990). Apart from Jean Paul's classes, these conditions had not been met in any of the preliminary exercises I had received in the six years and three institutions that represented my post-secondary actor training education.

I became determined to exclusively employ this acting approach in my development of *One-Man Hamlet*. I set out, in my preparation activities, to follow the criteria for human behaviour that I had learned from Roy and Jean Paul. Because the criteria specifically described the relationship between verbal and gestural communication as it varies depending upon the level of spontaneity inherent in a particular situation, I needed initially to establish the level of spontaneity in the specific text segments I was memorizing. This level was dependant upon three motivators of human speech—emotion, intention, and action—that were renewed at specific intervals (Arnold, 1970; Ellis, 2000; Leeper, 1970; Panksepp, 2000; Tomkins, 1970).

Experimenting with verbal/gestural dynamics, and playing around with the different motivators, made each moment one of discovery. I wanted to be as objectively confident as possible that every phrase I uttered would be coloured by the vocal and physical dynamics appropriate to the action of the text.

This did not mean that my problems concerning how to actually present the show were solved. I had an overriding acting-technique goal that determined my approach to the text, but I needed to develop some kind of overall performance convention with regard to the reality I was creating. I was indeed trying to create an altered reality simply in my choice to go solo.

I could understand why a lone actor on stage—sans sets, costumes, and props—might be impressive if the voice was well-trained, the emotions and intentions clear, and the body language appropriate. However, it seemed to me that such a presentation would best suit an audience with prior knowledge of the play. I wanted my presentation to be as readily accessible to any type of viewer. If I were to act out all the roles using just voice and movement, there could be a short period of confusion while the viewer without prior knowledge of the play, struggled to assemble the clues that would define the emerging character. What I needed were unique visual representations of each character—apart from my own physical and vocal manipulations—and ways to incorporate these elements onto my own person as I moved from one character to the next.

The structure of the text suggested that the play would be best served by two main conventions: one representing the present time dialogue and monologues, and the other representing the narrative scenes that described off stage past action.

I began to get some ideas, so I decided to go shopping. Due to financial necessity, I chose to limit my shopping to thrift stores, and began thinking of the project as "second-hand Shakespeare." I accumulated a sizable collection of rag dolls, hats, caps, scarves, plastic toys, Halloween props, old Christmas decorations, and a hodgepodge of other items that defied classification.

The off-stage narrative descriptions seemed to fit into a style of "acting with objects." I matched a half a dozen rag dolls, including Bert from Sesame Street and Raggedy Andy, to different characters. I mention these two universally recognizable dolls' personas as it strikes me now that my choosing them invites some analysis. Using these familiar characters to represent characters in *Hamlet* was a parallel move to using myself to represent characters other than myself. The audience would obviously realize that Bert was not playing Bert, just as Clayton was not playing Clayton. Bert was playing Claudius, not Bert. Raggedy Andy was playing Hamlet, not Andy. I was giving my dolls a similar responsibility to that which I had assumed. As children my sister and I had endowed our toy stuffed animals with similar skills. They were called upon to convincingly portray all sorts of different characters, and yet under this veneer of pretence, my sister and I were always aware of our animals' own unique personalities and

names. Looking back, I see that by reviving this childhood activity in the creation of *One-Man Hamlet* I was more easily able to unfetter my adult imagination.

These dolls needed support items. They required certain props and set pieces. I picked through my stash for the toy castles, boats, and plastic flowers that could service the narrative scenes.

(Photo 2011 – 20th anniversary performance, photo taken by Graham McDonald for Theatre Inconnu)

What about the non-narrative scenes, the ones that consisted of immediate dialogue between characters? I had a number of costume and prop items that I could either wear or hold which would help to define the characters on stage, but what could I do when more than one character was on stage at a time? I had only two arms, two hands, and one head. I needed some kind of apparatus that could wear clothing and hold props. It should also have qualities that could allow it to be easily moved, accommodate my "melding" into it, sit down, collapse, and come apart.

I was prepared to build what was needed, so I began sketching structures. After several attempts I ended up with something that looked curiously like a music stand with a balloon on top. I decided to stray from the mandate limiting me to second hand stores.

(Photo 2011 – 20th anniversary performance, photo taken by Graham McDonald for Theatre Inconnu)

The fact that balloons come in various colours allowed me to code the different characters: yellow for cowardice (Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Osric); red for clowns—the big red nose—(the grave diggers); pink for an entire family of innocents (Laertes, Ophelia, Polonius); purple for passion (the player); white for terror (Marcellus and Barnardo on seeing the ghost); green for wholesomeness (Horatio); black for black-heartedness (Claudius and Gertrude); and true blue for loyalty (Hamlet). Even without headgear the audience would be able to recognize who was who. There was an added bonus. Balloons have a built-in capacity to dramatically die—something most of the characters in the play eventually do—in total disintegration with an explosion of sound. There would be no doubt when they shuffled off their respective mortal coils.

There was, however, one character for which I did not think balloon representation was appropriate: the ghost of Hamlet's father. The audience would have to see immediately that this character was not of the same world as the others. They had to know he was dead. They needed to recognize a ghostly attribute to his bearing from the moment he appeared. A flying assemblage of bones could fulfill these requirements. It being early October at the time, I had no trouble casting the role with an inflatable skeleton. He would make his entrances and exits via a clothesline style of rigging floating above the stage. A plastic sword and two identical flat cardboard skeleton

masks rounded out his regalia. One of the masks I would tie onto the skeleton's head and the other I would mount on a handle so that when taking on his persona I could pop my head in between his dangling legs, hold up the identical mask, and demand revenge.

(Photo 2011 – 20th anniversary performance, photo taken by Graham McDonald for Theatre Inconnu)

I began rehearsing in earnest. Challenges presented themselves. For instance, having assembled one purple balloon-headed, black-caped "player" to represent the actors that were to perform the play within a play, I was faced with a problem. How could he/they perform a sub-play that involved another half dozen characters? Fortunately music stands have little metal rods on either side that can be lifted up to press against the sheet music to prevent it from falling off the stand. These little metal rods can also wear a pair of gloves. On the gloves can be glued Velcro, and on this Velcro can be attached different sets of ping-pong ball eyes, decorated with eyebrows and wigs made of yarn and fake fur, thus readily identifying the different characters in the play-within-the play. During this segment, all I need do is don the cape and gloves, flip the old army footlocker on end—the one central set piece containing all the dolls, props and toys—and

turn my hands into mouth puppets as I enacted the *Murder of Gonzales*, switching ping pongs ball eyes as the different characters came and went.

(Photo 2011 – 20th anniversary performance, photo taken by Graham McDonald for Theatre Inconnu)

Specific objects were re-incorporated into different scenes to represent different items, providing a surprising element of continuity that I had not anticipated. Knitting needles, used as such for ragdoll Ophelia's "sewing in her closet" scene, later became pens and swords for other ragdoll characters. An old miniature photo album became Ophelia's love letter from Hamlet, the miniature portrait holder for the "counterfeit semblances of two brothers," and the written orders for Hamlet's death. The process continued; but one troubling shadow loomed over it all. Eventually I would have to present whatever it was I was developing to an audience.

I had advertised opening night date, followed by a three-week run. I was coming to the end of my rehearsal period. I had shown it to no one during the preparation time, as I was terrified of losing my nerve as a result of any discouraging remarks. However an old friend of mine—an acting school colleague with whom I had developed a close bond, with shared perspectives on art and life—was in town for a short visit. He expressed an interest in watching my final dress rehearsal and I decided that if anyone would be receptive to my take on *Hamlet*, he would be that person. A few supportive words would go a long way in bolstering my confidence. He sat watching for over two hours as I dashed about the stage, playing with my toys, popping balloons, donning and doffing

costume pieces, rushing music stands on and off the playing area, all the while rattling off dialogue and monologue.

When the action ended he looked as if he wanted to be anywhere but where he was. He reluctantly informed me that the show was a guaranteed disaster. I was devastated. Should I hang a sign on the door with news of my leaving town on an emergency? He had given no specifics as to why the show would fail, and in retrospect I am thankful that he did not. My trust in his judgment would have prompted me to make last minute adjustments, or to suffer moments of panic during the presentation when the "problem" areas were being performed. I had come this far, and decided that I would go through with the premiere performance as planned without altering a thing, almost six months to the day after starting work on the project.

Opening night arrived. I introduced myself to the audience and hit the blackout slider with my foot. I was controlling all lights and sound cues with my feet. Another switch triggered off Fleetwood Mac's 1969 recording of "Oh Well." I had chosen this song as the lyrics and hard-edged musical attack represented for me a combined attitude of disillusionment and anger. I found it quite easy to imagine a twentieth century Hamlet relating to Peter Green's cynical voice: "I can't help it 'bout the shape I'm in, I can't sing I ain't pretty and my legs are thin. But don't ask me what I think of you, I might not give the answer that you want me to." A burst of laughter. A shared recognition of a timeless theme? Or nervous confusion over the musical choice? The lights remained out and the audience became quiet—and apparently attentive—during the opening exchange among Marcellus, Bernardo and Horatio. When the lights snapped back on more laughter burst forth at the sight of the three music stands. Two stands were wearing helmets on top of white balloon heads and bearing weapons: Marcellus with his plastic axe and Bernardo with the equivalent sword. The third unarmed music stand sported a stylish French beret on top of the balloon: the green-headed Horatio. This auspicious beginning set the tone for the rest of the show. The audience allowed itself to accept the dialogue as sincere, and reacted with surprised delight with each freshly introduced performance "convention." The show concluded with an enthusiastic standing ovation, and I breathed a huge sigh of relief. I think my friend's words were, "What can I say?"

The run continued to full houses, and led to the securing of grants to keep the company going in its capacity to produce regular seasons of alternative theatre (it continues to do so). The success of this initial run of *One-Man Hamlet* also served as the launching pad for Theatre Inconnu's staging of a summer Shakespeare Festival that grew into a major summer attraction in Victoria, continuing from 1991 through 2002.

The show itself toured periodically for the next seventeen years, playing in every geographical region in Canada, as well as touring to Scotland, Mexico, and the United States. I stopped counting after 600 performances.

While my initial motivation had nothing do with creating a show that would make Shakespeare more palatable to young people, it turned out that much of my performing took place in high schools. This opportunity for school touring presented itself after a number of teachers saw the show during a Canadian Fringe Theatre Festival tour the summer following my initial Victoria run. Most schools requested a shorter version of the show than the original 140-minute show, so I edited the script down to a 90-minute version. This length seemed to be acceptable for the first few years. Then, while making a pass through northern BC, I received a request from a community in the North West Territories for a 60-minute show that would take place in two days: the same amount of time it would take for me to drive there. Even at 60-minutes I discovered that I was able to preserve a coherent story line, as well as being able to edit on the fly. Many sections of the script could easily be shortened. For instance, the ghost need not go on at length about the agonies of his afterlife, but could jump right to his request for revenge. A few jokes between Hamlet and two gravediggers could be condensed to one wise crack directed at one gravedigger. Other scenes lent themselves equally well to this type of abbreviation without interrupting the thread. For a more detailed look at my editorial choices, I suggest a look at the published text of my 80-minute version of *One-Man Hamlet* (Arrand & Jevne, 2011, pp. 67-191) and compare it with Shakespeare's play.

Other opportunities presented themselves. Apart from festival tours and schools, I received invitations to perform my show at regional theatres both in Canada and the United States. More distant international invitations were offered, and *One-Man Hamlet* took to the air flying to Europe and Mexico.

The audience response to *One-Man Hamlet* remained consistently enthusiastic throughout the performance history of the show. There was a often a short period of adjustment while spectators let go of preconceptions, but I seemed to have found a method of presentation that superseded the need to shelter in the safety of the familiar. It was pointed out time and again in reviews that the show rendered *Hamlet* highly accessible and entertaining. Over the years many strangers have approached me to say that their high school experience of watching *One-Man Hamlet* had positively reshaped their attitude towards Shakespeare.

But while theatre audiences and students universally embraced the show, the critical response was not completely unanimous. About seventy-five percent of the reviews I received were extremely enthusiastic, while the other twenty-five per cent usually took the form of insults. There was little in between. Interestingly the positive reviews gave specific examples of what made the show work, while the negative reviews criticized my age, my looks, my lack of respect for Shakespeare, and my ignorance. Two reviewers in different cities (and continents) went so far as to insult the audience for giving the show a standing ovation. Such criticisms frustrated me. They demonstrated a defensive attitude that remained closed to new experience. I remain truly disappointed that news publishers continue to trust the guidance and education of the public, with respect to the arts, to individuals whose insecurities limit their observations to personal attacks.

One-Man Hamlet was more than an artistic exercise that either met with acceptance or refection. It was a large part of my, and life is a series of unpredictable incidents. While it is interesting to reflect on the "hows" and "whys" of this journey, at the time it was simply the experience in the moment. None of the impulses leading up to initial conception of the show, or contributing to its development, were anything but unconscious desires to set something in motion. A questioning of these impulses was secondary to living the experience, coping with the unexpected, and simply trying to survive as an artist with a rather unorthodox product. I invite you to humour me for a few more paragraphs as I step back a few years to give myself a few words of warning as to what I might be encountering.

First, with regard to the four-inch upholstery needle you will be keeping at the ready to snuff out the appropriate character at the appropriate moment: you will invariably find yourself playing on a stage floor made up of boards with spacing just the right size to catch and hold the dull end of the needle so that when you kneel down to finish off the duel scene your entire weight will very efficiently drive the needle deep into the flesh. But rest assured, there is an upside to this inevitability. Upon completion of the show an appreciative audience member will congratulate you upon the believability of your expression of pain while portraying the dying Hamlet.

When you find yourself in a multi-purpose performance space, where you will be required to set the speakers for your show under the pull-out bleachers, you will probably not notice that they are supported with razor sharp horizontal support metal slats placed at the exact height of the crown of your head. This will require a quick emergency trip to the hospital for the shaving of the top of your head and the application of a few inches of stitching just in time to return for the eight o'clock start time. But this too can be used to your advantage, as it will provide some interesting pre-show banter as you explain the circumstances behind your monk-like hairstyle with the red slash down the middle.

What you should be most wary of, though, is when you find yourself in the middle of a Mexican high school courtyard in the noonday sun. Lighting requirements will of course dictate that the students sit in the not-quite-so-sweltering shade of the overhang, while you will be made generously visible via the sun's rays in the forty-three Celsius degree mid-day temperature. Be ready for at least four balloon heads to expand and explode prior to their assigned demise, and be prepared to be astounded at the magical transformation your costume will go through, as your jeans and t-shirt turn from black to white with the salt deposits left from your evaporating sweat. Don't worry when people tell you later that you could have died. You won't have expired and the audience will have had a good time.

Oh, and at least once you will find yourself in a high school, in what you thought was a beautiful performance space set aside especially for shows like yours, when in actuality its sole proprietor is the music teacher who will become apoplectic over the fact that it is being debased by your presence, therefore forcing him to walk back and forth slamming the doors on either side of the stage behind you as you perform the show. This

too will have its positive effect, as it will suggest to you that any future plans of augmenting your university theatre degree with an educational extension might be ill-advised.

For the more professional engagements, you will sooner or later find yourself booked into a venue that will be plush, awesome, and oh-so-impressive! But there will also be two union technicians who will assure you they do not need to quickly go over the cues before the show as they have been doing shows such as yours for decades. No, their time will be much better spent enjoying those half dozen beer that have been cooling at their feet in the control room. Will it really matter if you have to instruct the audience to put their hands over their eyes to create the effect of a mid-scene blackout? Will it not also be much more engaging later in the show, when you have to improvise descriptions of actions you will be trying perform in the dark without falling off the stage during the unexpected blackouts?

But also be prepared to meet the most endearing wonder-eyed children (and adults) who will line up for your autograph; the inspiring fellow artists sharing the festival tour circuit with you; and the Orlando media contact who will decide he should spend his entire day driving you about this strange city to shop for costume replacements, and treat you to lunch.

Not to mention the chivalrous bus driver who will transport you from Glasgow to Aberdeen, and who—half an hour into his trip—will shout his supervisor down over his CB radio, stating that he cannot possibly arrive on time as he has just turned around to head back to his point of departure. He has a duty to his passengers! It will certainly not have been the shy Canadian's fault that he couldn't understand a word of the driver's Scottish brogue, resulting in the Canadian's trunks being left on the pavement back at the Glasgow terminal. Don't worry at all when this will happen, since your fellow commuters will applaud the diver's bravado, and will laugh good-naturedly at the funny Canadian traveler.

What relief it will be when, after an hour of confused broken English deliberations, your Mexican booking agent and yourself will—at the exact same instant—

realize that you've both been trying to imply that you'd prefer the whole transaction take place "under the table"? The camaraderie and handshake will be well worth the confusion.

Many such memories came flooding back when I remounted *One-Man Hamlet* in June of 2011 for a twentieth anniversary run. I had not done the show for over three years, but it felt like slipping back into a favorite pair of sandals. As a prelude to the show, I performed, with my writer/actor wife Ellen, *Bear Me Stiffly Up* (this title being a quote from Hamlet as he asks his body not to fail him after confronting his father's ghost), a one-act play she wrote "fictionalizing" the experiences of wife and husband traveling together during an international five-month long *One-Man Hamlet* tour.

These two shows, presented together, brought home so clearly the joys and challenges that artists face when charting their own course. One is always living on the edge, with the result that the highs and lows are exaggerated beyond normal reasonable expectations. When all goes well, such a life becomes an exceptionally privileged experience. When things aren't lining up as hoped, the regrets emerge, and dark periods threaten. *One-Man Hamlet* has at times touched upon the latter, but overall it has helped to shape my life in a way that I greatly appreciate.

Ever since my first impulse to do *Hamlet* "all by myself", I have felt a spark of energy associated with the project that has existed quite apart from the more conscious reasons for my perseverance. It is this spark has allowed me to maintain my energy throughout the years in this ludicrous choice of profession, and I believe the quality of this spark is what has allowed audiences to so graciously accept my work. This is the same spark that allowed the child in me to jump at the chance to entrust the role of Claudius to Bert.

The very first review I received for *One-Man Hamlet*, as well as the most recent, remind me that there is, at the core of the creative process, an inspiration that has its origins in the playfulness of the child.

"Really, the production form is like a peek-a-boo into the fantastical imagination of a creative child at play with whatever object can be found at hand." *Inside Entertainment, Victoria, BC, February 1991*.

(Photo 1991 just before opening performance, photo taken by Henry Aho for Theatre Inconnu)

"The show feels a lot like spying on a shy, bookish child prodigy, locked in his attic with bric-a-brac and a copy of *Hamlet*, challenging himself to do the show faster and bigger and louder and better—it's play, but the kind of dead-serious play that only kids and Jevne can consistently pull off." *Culture Vulture, Victoria, BC, June 2011.*

We can deconstruct, reconstruct, reflect and revisit; but if we're not having fun at play, why bother?

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Author Bio

A professional actor and director, Clayton Jevne has been at the helm of Theatre Inconnu—Victoria's longest surviving alternative theatre company—for over 30 years, where he has participated in over 80 productions as either actor, director or designer. His solo work has been seen across Canada and the U.S., as well as in Europe and Mexico. Clayton also teaches as a sessional instructor in the University of Victoria Theatre Department. During his time with Theatre Inconnu, he spent years developing an approach to actor training grounded in behavioral science and skill development research. This work formed the basis of his doctoral dissertation. As well, Clayton holds an MFA in directing, and a BFA in acting (all degrees from the University of Victoria).