

BALLPLAYER, AN ADDICTION STORY: A PRODUCTION THESIS OF A SOLO PERFORMANCE PIECE

A Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE TASK AT HAND.....	2
3. SOMETHING TO SAY.....	4
4. EARLY VERSIONS.....	6
5. STUMBLING UPON INSPIRATION.....	8
6. ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS.....	9
7. THE FINAL SCRIPT.....	10
8. FUTURE VERSIONS.....	28
9. CONCLUSION.....	29
REFERENCES.....	30
VITA.....	31

ABSTRACT

The thesis assignment was to create a stand-alone solo performance piece of no less than 30 minutes in length. The absence of any further guidelines provided the opportunity to focus on a subject (or subject matter) of my choosing. Researching symptoms and tendencies of addictive personality disorder as a basis for a class-based performance assignment led me to Eric Show, a pitcher who played professional baseball in the 1980s and early 1990s. Eric's life was both heartbreaking and compelling. This thesis follows the adaptation of a number of stories and interviews about Show into a performance piece that seeks to bring an audience into the daily struggle of a real-life person while posing questions about what can be done to help people who struggle with addiction. Limiting the characters I would play to a select few who had significant impact on Show's life, rather than portraying Show himself, my goal was to provide many perspectives on one person's battles with addiction. The performance piece incorporates mixed- and multi-media elements into the performance to further the dramatic action while providing a template for narrative by serving as transitional interludes. Focusing on my work as an actor by limiting costume changes or other distinguishing differences between characters, the challenge was to be very attentive to other distinguishing details. The thesis represents the inspiration, research, evolution, and final performance draft of my solo performance script as a foundation for further expansion of the piece into a full-length performance text.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Like most other graduate degrees, completion of the Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre performance requires the submission of a written thesis paper. Previous degree candidates have taken this as an opportunity to chronicle the process of performing a primary role during their time in the program. This was presented as one option for the subject of the thesis. At the same time, George Judy, associate professor and head of our program presented an alternative. He challenged us to consider creating a solo performance piece and use that process as a basis for the thesis. Doing so would provide us with the opportunity to leave the program with not only the degree, but also with a solo performance piece for use in the professional world. Feeling that such an option spoke both to my sensibilities and strengths, I chose to generate a performance piece. As a result, this paper focuses on the generation, expansion, and future intentions of my solo performance piece: **Ballplayer, An Addiction Story**.

While no specific guidelines for format or narrative style of the piece were imposed on me, I did consider how the piece might live on after completion of the degree and re-entrance into the workplace. I wanted to create something that could be performed in a number of markets, something that was not limited to a university setting or to a particular region, to speak to audiences everywhere while remaining intensely personal. I wanted to SAY something about subjects about which I care deeply. I sought to use the performance piece to shed new light on subjects not often considered the stuff of drama. It was important that my piece to be able to be performed in a number of spaces with different configurations and dimensions; I also wanted to pay close attention to the rapidly evolving live theatre audience.

Often theatres struggle to find an audience for all but the “chestnut” plays. Competition from other media sources is intense. When films, television shows, and games are available at the touch of a button from virtually anywhere in the world, attention spans shorten. Live theatre also is often considered a staid dinosaur by younger persons, or simply the land of splashy musicals by others. I intended to create something that would speak to a wide audience while making use of the technological advancements of recent years.

I also wanted to play to my strengths as a performer. Versatility is a valuable trait in an actor; however, the performer’s individual personality is widely valued in the entertainment industry. Some actors ply their trade by inhabiting the skin of a wide range of characters, doing their best to disappear into a role. Other actors bring themselves to every role they play, drawing on different aspects of their personalities in different degrees to tell a character’s story. My strengths lie somewhere in the middle, and so with this piece I wanted to have a baseline character that was very similar to me, then populate the rest of the piece with small doses of other, broader characters. Doing so would allow me use myself to the best advantage.

While I have a wealth of experience as an actor, I have a very little as a generator of new material. My previous attempts at playwriting were minimal at best. I typically have found plays about which I am passionate and sought out playing primary roles in them. Creating this piece would require me to find a subject about which I was equally passionate and create a new play around it.

So, with trepidation about a new endeavor and excitement about a new opportunity, I began the process of creating my solo performance piece.

CHAPTER 2: THE TASK AT HAND

When I have seen solo performances in the past, the unsuccessful ones have one thing in common: they are “about” the performer. One has to be pretty interesting to ask an audience to sit in a theatre and listen to one talk about oneself for a half-hour or more. Most people wouldn’t sit in a café or pub and listen to someone talk about him- or herself for that long. Yet all too often, solo performers seek to put their own experiences in the hands of the audience. Aside from being egotistic, these performances usually strike me as masturbatory. I don’t want to watch that for a half-hour or more either.

The solo pieces I have seen that have been successful have been so because the performer and/or writer sought to relate the experiences of others to a new audience, or to shed a new light on a story the audience is familiar with, or to chronicle the life of an iconic figure. The performance is not about the performer him- or herself but about the character or characters being portrayed HAVING an experience with the audience.

Several years ago, I performed a solo piece originally written and performed by Eric Bogosian entitled Drinking in America. This play consists of fourteen monologues and interludes, each by a different character. Those who populate this play are of various ages, genders, ethnicities, and histories. The only real link between them is that they are all in America. The piece was about the experience of others, not the writer or performer; in that way it was a success. Bogosian has followed this format and narrative style for a number of performances. In fact, he made light of his own performance history when, in the introduction to his later piece Pounding Nails in the Floor with my Forehead, he referenced the first appearance of “a new character—‘Eric Bogosian,’ a hyperaggressive standup comic.”¹ At the same time, Bogosian exhibits some of the same fears I do: that no audience wants to hear what I think for a half-hour and that I would be a fool to expect them to do so.

It is interesting that Bogosian here refers to himself as a stand-up comic. Most of the theatre elite would refer to him as a performance artist or a solo performer; I have done so myself. This raises an interesting question: what is the difference between the two? Thinking about this led me to another conclusion about what I didn’t want the piece to be. Another aspect of the challenges presented in solo performance is that the actor, trained to communicate and affect the other person or persons onstage, must now imagine that person is present. So must the audience. Part of what people respond to in watching live performance is the interplay between actors/characters. Actors are at their best when removing their attention from themselves and placing their attention on the other actor. Dramatic tension results as the audience sees characters striving to get something from the other characters. We take actions in life in order to get what we want; characters onstage must do the same, or the performance fails.

Actors take risks in revealing their and their characters’ vulnerabilities, desires, wants, and needs. The theatre strives to be a safe place to do dangerous things in this manner. That is what separates theatre from standup comedy. The standup performer works in a dangerous place, with really just one objective—to get a laugh. Not doing so equals failure. In this way, the comic pursues one objective to get what he or she needs, but from the audience, not another performer.

I did not want to fall into the potential pitfall of being unable to enact change in another character by not having another character onstage, nor did I want to simply pursue a reaction from the

¹ Bogosian xi

audience. Actors love getting laughs, too, especially when actually performing in a comedy! But in order to do the piece I envisioned, I needed to be able to affect the audience in a variety of ways. I needed a more diverse set of objectives to pursue, like an actor in a non-solo performance. Furthermore, I had to imbue the audience with the responsibility of being, in effect, my scene partner.

Having determined what I did NOT want the piece to be, it was then time to focus on what I did want it to be. As mentioned previously, the success of some solo performances depends on a muscular performance from an actor shifting into a variety of roles. What these performances often lack is a unifying theme; in short, they don't strive to tell a story. I knew I wanted to tell one story, from many perspectives, unified by a baseline character through who the audience could view the progression of the story. The next task was to determine what story I wanted to tell.

CHAPTER 3: SOMETHING TO SAY

Once I had developed an idea of HOW I wanted to present my piece, the next task was to determine WHAT I wanted to express. I firmly believe that artists are at their best when exploring a subject about which they feel genuine passion. Actors can succeed in any performance and enjoy the experience of performing almost any piece. But the greatest impact for both artist and audience occurs when the actor is deeply moved by the piece he or she is performing. As people, we have many “favorites.” We enjoy certain music, or films, or food, or plays more than others; this is an inevitability. I know many actors who take many jobs in plays that pay well and receive popular and critical acclaim; however, those actors often speak about the shows they would “love to do.” This thesis and its accompanying performance presented me with the opportunity to create something entirely of my own passions. I relished this aspect of the performance.

Like many actors, I have a large number of interests beyond the theatre and performing. I set out to unify some of those interests with what I do as vocation and expression. I asked myself, what were some of the things about which I am constantly talking with friends and colleagues? There were a number of options.

Could I make a show about food? Maybe, but what would I be sending the audience away with other than a hearty appetite? There is also only so much one can express about golf to an audience of non-golfers. I felt this would violate the previously expressed tenet of creating a piece that would speak to a variety of audiences. One of the things we all share is the experience of childhood and familial interactions, but with only my particular experience to draw from, the piece would inevitably have become about ME—another violation of the intents set forth before. Addressing matters of patriotism or what it means to live in our country seemed both too broad and too inaccessible for people of other cultures. But ideas about America and Americana led to another deeply rooted passion of mine: baseball. Everyone I know knows a little something about baseball. It has long been considered the American game. It is played by people of all genders and a variety of ethnicities in a wide array of countries. I was on to something.

I also knew I wanted to give my audience something to think about after leaving the theatre. I believe the arts can be a catalyst for social change; indeed, we have seen them serve such a purpose many times before. In order to do so, I felt it necessary to find a subject (or subjects) that touches the lives of many people.

I had recently been told by a medical professional that I exhibited signs of Addictive Personality Disorder, a common disorder that affects millions of individuals. Numbers of individuals with the disorder are hard to track, because the disorder manifests itself in variety of ways.² Persons with this issue are usually identified via specific addictions—alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, gambling, and sex being the most widely recognized. However, the disorder may also manifest in ways that the afflicted individual, along with his or her friends and family, may not recognize. Addiction can occur with regard to “food, work, exercise, even relationships with others.”³ Persons with the disorder often engage in compulsive behavior with regard to virtually anything; this is part of what makes the disorder so nefarious.

At the same time, I found it fascinating that virtually anything could be the target of such compulsive behavior. In my own life, I had on many occasions discovered a new activity or, admittedly,

² Nilsen par. 2

³ “Addiction” par. 1

substance and become consumed with pursuing that activity as frequently as possible. It was often referred to as a “phase” or a “kick” by those around me. I can remember my mother saying to a family friend that I was on a “tennis kick” during a summer in high school when I must have played tennis no less than five times a week. Similar obsessions had taken place with golf, basketball, working out, cooking, and reading. I also had previously found myself fighting more traditional addictive behaviors with regard to alcohol and gambling. Considering that alcohol addiction alone affects roughly 20 million Americans⁴, I felt that addressing this issue might give my audience a new perspective on addiction or help them to recognize potential for the disorder in themselves and those close to them.

Mitch Hedberg, ironically a standup comic himself, once said, “They say that alcoholism is a disease. That may be true, but it’s the only disease you get yelled at for having. Nobody ever says, ‘Dammit, Mitch, you’ve got lupus.’”⁵ I laughed when I first heard that but soon found myself shaking my head at the simple truth of it. Most of us have no means of reference for how to help an addict, nor do addicts usually have the tools to help themselves. People with addictions are typically treated by removal from their friends and family in search of treatment in a rehab center or support group. Support groups exist for the families and friends of addicts, yet rarely are friends and family involved in the addict’s treatment.

I am not a health professional, mental or otherwise, nor do I aspire to be one. But as a person who has seen the effects of addictive behavior on my own life and the lives of those close to me, I hope a new means of treating and supporting addicts comes to the forefront. One thing I do know is that the intervention model is often counterproductive. Without wanting to do an “issue” show, I DID want to simply provide an audience with a new way of looking at the people who fight these battles.

So, having found two passions I felt could create a viable piece and a message I was comfortable delivering to an audience, I began to look for a way to combine those passions into a solo performance piece.

⁴ Benedict-Mason par. 2

⁵ Hedberg, “The Pipe”

CHAPTER 4: EARLY VERSIONS

In preparation for the thesis project, our class took a Performance Theory course during which we examined a variety of non-traditional performances. There was great variety in these performances; solo pieces, ensemble-driven pieces, dance, spoken word, combinations of all of the above, and experimental theatre. The course sought to give us examples of new and generated performances from which to draw as we moved toward the development of our own piece. The culminating project of this course was a ten-minute solo presentation meant to serve as a primer of sorts for the longer thesis presentation.

By this point, I had strong inclinations about building my piece around baseball and addiction, but ten minutes seemed too short a time to link the subjects in the manner I envisioned. For this project, I chose to focus on addiction in several forms as a means of communicating the number of ways it can manifest itself. I knew I needed a through-line to connect the sections of the piece, as I would be playing different characters who struggled with different addictions. I chose to have a baseline character who would be engaged in preparing to inject himself with heroin that the audience would see at different stages of that process. I would then step out of that character into a different one and address someone unseen by the audience for each section.

I knew I wanted three separate pieces within this performance, linked by the addict about to inject. Unfortunately, like many artists, I carried with me a fear that anything I wrote would be uninteresting. I resisted writing anything from “scratch,” choosing instead to look for existing short pieces that could fit what I wanted to communicate. I planned to adapt these pieces to fit my purpose and focus the rest of my attention on the wordless action carried out by the character I identified as the “junkie.”

The piece opened with the junkie entering the performance space, which featured a couch and coffee table upstage center, a small table and chair with an ashtray downstage left, and an empty pool of light downstage left. He began the process of prepping a needing and cooking the heroin, then broke away to ask members of the audience for a cigarette.

One of my strengths as a performer is improvisation. Wanting to incorporate this into the performance, I chose to improvise with the audience on cigarettes and quitting. When I reached a pre-planned concluding sentence, a light shift occurred and the junkie reappeared, further into the process of shooting up. I then again broke away from that character and after a light shift performed a piece from David Cale’s Deep in a Dream of You entitled “Swimming in the Dark.”⁶ I adapted this piece to portray a man who is addicted to the idea of romantic love enough to pursue it relentlessly (and, unfortunately for him, repeatedly).

At the conclusion of this piece, I again stepped back into the junkie’s environment and finished the process of preparing the shot. Before doing so, I had the junkie lift his head to take in the audience and began the final piece, an adaptation of a long monologue from Sam Shepard’s Hawk Moon. The monologue was titled “The Curse of the Raven’s Black Feather.” Its speaker is a self-professed drug addict who, in times of strife, likes to get in his car and go on long drives. He tells the listener—in this case the audience—of a time when while doing so he struck a raven with his car. After plucking a feather from the corpse, he continues driving only to begin to hear the voice of the raven speaking to him. As the speaker’s mania intensifies, he finds his car inexplicably drawn in directions he did not intend to drive. He switches on the radio in an attempt to silence the voice, only to discover that “...all

⁶ Cale 199

that came out was the voice of the Crow. The voice of the Raven's black feather urging me on. Softly flying me South."⁷ He then finds himself led to a small town in Louisiana where he leaves the black feather in a different car's glove compartment in an attempt to rid himself of it. He continues to hear the voice, and is unable to find a way to drive himself home. As the piece concluded, I returned to the junkie's couch and proceeded to inject the heroin. The junkie then laid back on the couch as closed his eyes as a section from William S. Burroughs' novel Naked Lunch played in voiceover.⁸ As the voiceover concluded, the lights faded to black and the show ended.

The piece was largely successful, but most of the positive comments I received addressed sections of piece that I had written or adapted. This gave me the confidence to generate more material of my own when time came to present the thesis project. I knew I would want to find a lengthy story to tell; however, that presented another set of challenges.

The nature of telling a story is inherently narrative. Using this as a dramatic device can be dangerous, as it can be difficult to make the telling of the story an active endeavor. The speaker must have a powerful need to tell this story to another person or group of people. In traditional performance, actors are often challenged by the director to make active choices, to actively pursue an objective. A character may choose to tell a story; in fact, most monologues are just that—a character telling another character a story to illustrate a point or try to relate to him or her. The question often asked is, "Why is this character saying this? What do they hope to achieve by sharing this story?" I knew I would need to find not just a compelling story, but a baseline character or narrator with a powerful need to tell it.

My first attempt at incorporating all these ideas was a piece in which a character would tell the story of his brother, an avid baseball fan who becomes obsessed with analyzing and dissecting the statistics that populate baseball. Searching for a pattern in the numbers, he slowly descends into a kind of madness, compulsively memorizing and reciting statistics to anyone who will listen. This idea would allow me to portray both the narrator and his brother, the addict. I began work on this piece and it remains partially completed. I happened across an article while doing research for that piece, and that coincidence dramatically changed the nature of my thesis.

⁷ Shepard 49

⁸ Burroughs 4

CHAPTER 5: STUMBLING UPON INSPIRATION

It was while researching statistics in baseball that I discovered an article about Eric Show, a pitcher for the San Diego Padres who gave up Pete Rose's 4,192nd hit, a hit that broke a long-standing record for most career hits. The article appeared on espn.com just before the 25th anniversary of the night Rose broke the record. Detailing "The tortured life of Eric Show,"⁹ the article was a biographical sketch of the man who allowed that hit.

Show's story affected me deeply. In the days after reading it, I found my thoughts turning again and again to the article I had read. Its author, Tom Friend, spoke in the article about how he himself was moved by what he discovered when he began to research Eric Show's life. Not long after, I chose to shift my thesis to adapting elements of Friend's article into a solo performance piece.

My intention was to tell Show's story to an audience who likely had never heard of him. Even for avid baseball fans, he was not a terribly memorable figure in the sport. Playing in an era before the advent of the internet and immediate news cycles, what happened during and after Show's playing career was largely unknown. I took an informal poll of friends who follow sports, and none of them had ever heard of Eric Show. While I considered this tragic, it also served my purpose ideally.

Show had grown up in an abusive home, seeking respite from his father's abuse by playing guitar. Unfortunately for him, he had a talent for baseball that his father recognized and relentlessly pushed him to pursue. While boys everywhere might dream of being able to play major league baseball as adults only to discover they lack the talent to do so, Eric Show had all the talent anyone could want but no real love for the game. He would play guitar constantly, interrupted only to go play ball or when forced into a game of catch with his father. Exhibiting signs of an addictive personality even at an early age, Eric's baseball and post-baseball life were ideal examples of how addiction can affect a person. The tragic end of his life and the effect his addiction had on those close to him were exactly the story I wanted to tell. It was also an ideal way to combine elements of what I considered to be a successful solo performance. I could relate a long story with a beginning, middle, and end. I could, in Tom Friend, have a narrator for the audience to see the story through who could be very similar to me. I could play a number of other broader characters who populate Eric's story. I cared deeply about the story, but it was not about me. I could see in most of the characters I envisioned a real need to tell the world about Eric Show, both to help themselves deal with his death and to prevent others from a similar fate.

The story was about a baseball player whose life was greatly affected by addiction. The stars had aligned, and I eagerly began adapting Eric's life story for my thesis.

⁹ Friend par. 1

CHAPTER 6: ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS

During the creation of the piece, I came across two major challenges. One, how would I shift from Tom Friend, my narrator, into the characters within the context of the story without bringing the show to a halt? Two, how would I make the story palatable to someone with no knowledge of or interest in baseball?

To address the first issue, I chose to incorporate elements in the show that would both allow me to transition from character to character and make use of increased technology. I accomplished this by using multi-media elements. This approach also afforded me the chance to play to a modern audience's need for more frequent and varied stimuli. Using music, voiceover, and video projections as transitional pieces, my intent was to keep the audience's eyes and minds moving. Frequent shifts of perspective gave me confidence that I was maintaining awareness of the audience's attention span.

To address the second issue, I chose to focus equal attention on Eric's life outside of baseball—his interactions with his family, his romantic life, his friendships, and his failures. I considered these to be experiences common to virtually everyone. I also feel that anyone can relate to Eric's experiences. The piece is more about a baseball player than it is about baseball, more about a human being than a game human beings play.

I also discovered that the women in Eric's life would need to have a powerful voice in the story. It is quite a task for a male actor to play a female without falling into the world of over-the-top comedy and caricature. Feeling that there was no room in the story for that kind of humor, I chose to cast two actresses in the piece. I would have Jenny Ballard, an M.F.A. candidate in theatre portray Eric's sister. I would then have Hannah Martin, a student in mass communications, portray Eric's wife. I would shoot and edit video of fictional interviews with these characters speaking about Eric and incorporate them into the transitions between characters and sections.

I also would shoot video of the images I envisioned to be passing through Eric's mind as he fell deeper and deeper into addiction. These sequences would be fast, cacophonous, and jarring to the audience—a visually representation of the compulsions felt by addicts.

Finally, I would record audio of fictional commentary of the games in which Eric played that the show revisits. This would create for the audience the experience of listening to a game on the radio or watching it on television and hearing what transpires. It would also further the story while leaving some questions unanswered and asking the audience to imagine the environment in which he was pitching.

Combining all these elements would successfully provide me as the performer the occasional respite while keeping the story moving for the audience. I would still be the only live performer and would play directly to the audience as each character, striving to communicate to them that there has to be a better way of helping people like Eric by telling them the story of his life.

Feeling I had successfully addressed all my major concerns about the piece, I set about the process of actually creating it.

CHAPTER 7: THE FINAL SCRIPT

What follows is the final script for my solo performance piece. Stage directions are outlined in parentheses, as are video projections and voiceovers. All characters except certain voiceovers and the characters of Cindi and Cara Mia are portrayed by one actor. Sections where others speak or appear on video are scripted, but pre-recorded and played during transitions. The stage contains five basic playing areas, each with their own lighting. As basic lighting wash is also present when Tom Friend is addressing the audience. The five areas are: a recliner with a small table next to it and a coat tree behind it upstage center; a small bank of standing lockers with a bench in front stage right; a small table with a candle on it and a pillow beside it downstage center; a desk and chair stage left; and a stool center stage. These areas are configured in the same basic orientation as the bases and pitcher's mound on the infield of a baseball diamond. Where applicable, footnotes indicate a specific quote from resource material used as dialogue in the context of the script.

Ballplayer, An Addiction Story

A solo performance piece written and performed by Nick Rhoton

PART ONE: CONVERGENCE

(In blackout, audience hears the following:)

VO: "With his second hit today, Pete Rose has tied Ty for his 4,191st career hit! Rose has tied a record that has stood for nearly 60 years. Somewhere, Ty Cobb is fidgeting..."

(Lights rise on a playing space with five primary areas. They are laid out like the bases and pitcher's mound on the infield of a baseball diamond. "Home Plate" is upstage center, a Lay-Z-Boy recliner, small table, and coat rack. Stage right, a small bank of lockers; downstage is a small table. Stage left, a small desk and chair. A projection screen hangs on the upstage wall.

As the actor enters the space, the screen projects a title:

SLIDE: PART ONE: Convergences)

TOM FRIEND: Back then, the news came in on Teletype, not over the Internet. Pete Rose had slapped two hits at Wrigley Field to tie one of the most revered records in all of sports. With one more hit, he would pass Ty Cobb and become the sport's all-time hits leader. Everyone in baseball wanted a birds-eye view, but one team was going to have a chance to see it up close and way too personal: the woebegone 1985 San Diego Padres.¹⁰

A year after reaching their first World Series, the Padres had fallen back to mediocrity. On September 8, the day Rose tied Cobb, the Padres sat in third place, 10 games out of first. They were, in short, toast. Playing out the season while making plans for the offseason. It's times like this that the grind of baseball, playing 162 games from early April to late September, feels like just that—a grind. So, the only good news was that they were likely going to get to see history. The bad news, of course, was that one of their own was going to have to serve of up the pitch that would make that history. One of their own would live on in highlight after highlight for years to come as the guy who threw that pitch.

¹⁰ Friend par. 2

So, who was it going to be? As the team dressed after its Sunday game, about to board a flight for Ohio for a three game series against Rose's Cincinnati Reds, all eyes—and press notebooks—turned to the team's next three starting pitchers. One was a lefty, Dave Dravecky, hair slicked back after a shower, his pulse strikingly calm.

(SLIDE: 1986 Topps baseball card for Dave Dravecky, LHP, San Diego Padres.)

Another was LaMarr Hoyt, former Cy Young award winner. He was already planning to jam Rose inside with fastballs.

(SLIDE: Photo of Hoyt on the mound about to release a pitch. Lights slowly rise on the bank of lockers throughout the following.)

But the third pitcher sat disconnected at his locker, eyes darting, frown palpable. On his locker shelf sat a book by Ayn Rand and a tape player loaded at the moment with French jazz. His clothes were black and purple, he carried a guitar; he looked out of place. His own catcher liked to call him "Angry Young Man," partly to get under his skin and partly because, as he said, "bad shit always seemed to follow him around."¹¹

So that's what the Padres were going to throw at Rose the next three games. And as they left old Jack Murphy Stadium in San Diego, the players on that pitcher's own team couldn't help but think of what they called Jack Murphy's Law: Anything that can go wrong will go wrong for Eric Show.

(SLIDE: Photo of Eric Show, RHP San Diego Padres, upon arriving in the majors in September, 1982.)

You see, last year, the Reds honored Rose on the 25th anniversary of his record-breaking hit. They carted out a man who ate, drank, slept, autographed (for 10 bucks a pop), and, unfortunately, gambled baseball 24/7. They showed a replay of the famous base hit and the touching ceremony that followed. Rose, who was banned from the game for breaking its cardinal rule—don't bet on games—had that ban lifted for a day to be there. But no mention was made of the pitcher who threw Rose a slider as big as a grapefruit. He was a pitcher who was the anti-Pete Rose. He was a pitcher who simply didn't want to be there that night, other than maybe to look at the moon. He was also a pitcher whose life reminds us of all that is cruel about the game of baseball and of life. This is Eric Show.

(Lights fade on stage as projection screen stays lit, shows two slides of Show, one in uniform, one playing guitar. Slides cross-fade into title "Baseball 102: Special Topics in Crazy Fucking Numbers." Lights up on stage. Actor has donned a lab coat and glasses.)

PROFESSOR: Welcome to fucking class. We have a lot to cover today, so let's get to it. Save your questions for later. Seriously. This sport and these numbers are NOT for the faint of heart. Try to follow along. Last week I had an entire class of fucking English majors. You're better than that. Keep up, for god's sake. That's all I'm saying. Here we go.

(SLIDE: 162)

Baseball plays 162 regular-season games a season. That's exactly twice what basketball and hockey play and more than 10 times the number of games in a pro football season. That's fucking difficult. Staying

¹¹ Friend par. 4

healthy enough to play and produce at an acceptable rate for even 150 games can make you millions of dollars. A star. Someone whose swings little fucking kids will imitate in their backyards.

(SLIDE: .300)

That number you see is a percentage. In this case it corresponds to batting average, a simple measure of a hitter's success while batting. It is determined by taking the number of a player's hits and dividing it by the total number of a player's at-bats ending in either a hit or an out. So, if you get 3 hits in your first 10 at-bats, your batting average is .300.

(SLIDE: 3 divided by 10 = .300)

So, if you get 134 hits in your first 468 at-bats, your batting average is .286324786...

(SLIDE: 134 divided by 468 = .286324786)

Yeah, we round up or down and call that a .286. Deal with it... For those of you who don't know, .286 isn't bad. You know how hard baseball is? So fucking hard that if you succeed in 35 percent of your at-bats, you're a fucking bad-ass. In order to hit .350 for an entire baseball season, you'd have to do all this:

(SLIDE: 35 divided by 100 = .350)

In a full baseball season, 162 games with occasional days off, you're gonna have 550 – 600 qualifying at-bats. To hit .350 over the course of a full season, you'd have to get 210 hits in 600 at-bats.

(SLIDE: 210 divided by 600 = .350 OR 1.4 hits per game (150 games))

Or, more simply, 1.4 hits per game for the 150 games you're likely to play. That's FUCKING hard. Last year, one guy, one fucking guy hit over .350 for the year with enough at-bats to constitute a full season. One guy.

Now to the number at hand: 4,191. That's the number of hits Pete Rose had to get to tie Ty Cobb. Pete Rose never hit .350 in a season, though he did hit .348 in 1969 while playing in 156 games. That year, he recorded 218 hits in 627 at bats. Rose was extremely durable, playing in at least 145 games a year for 19 of his first 21 years in the majors.¹² That is also fucking hard. And it STILL took him 22-and-a-half seasons to tie that record.

(SLIDE: 4191 + 1 = 4192)

He only needed one more to break that record going into the Padres series Tom was just telling you about. And he got it, and a few more. All this was before the dirty sonofabitch bet on his own team's games when he was a fucking MANAGER and got booted the hell out of the sport. And I hope the sonofabitch never gets in the Hall of Fame, but just the numbers alone...I mean, wow. For his career, Pete Rose played in 3,562 games, during which he recorded 14,053 official at-bats. When he retired from playing in 1986, he had recorded 4,256 hits—still the most in history. Lifetime batting average, .303.¹³

¹² espn.go.com/mlb/player/stats/_id/397/pete-rose

¹³ espn.go.com/mlb/player/stats/_id/397/pete-rose

(SLIDE: Games: 3,562; Abs: 14,053; Hits: 4,256; Lifetime BA: .303)

He was, hate to say, a fucking bad-ass. But as crazy as all those numbers are, what's fucking craziest, to me, is how much had to happen to get him on the cusp of that magic number: 4,192. How many pitches thrown by how many pitchers in how many games... And it all added up to that poor guy being the one in all the highlights. It's a shame...

(Lights down on stage)

VO: "...Rose digs back in, needing only one more hit to pass Cobb. He's 0 for 3 tonight against Hoyt, but McCullers is in now. The pitch...line drive...CAUGHT! He put a good swing on that one, but it's an out, and Rose will likely have to wait 'til tomorrow for another shot at history..."

PART TWO: A HISTORY

(Lights up on stage. Actor has shed lab coat and glasses sits at desk, again as Tom Friend.)

SLIDE: PART TWO: History of Illness)

TOM: They called 1968 the year of the pitcher. Scoring was down, pitching records were being set. Pete Rose was in the 6th year of his long career and was one of the few hitters having a solid year. He'd go on to hit .335 that year. But it was known of as the year of the pitcher. It was not, however, the year of a 12-year-old Pony League pitcher named Eric Show.

(SLIDE: 1968, May. Cross-fade to shot of beat-up Mercury Comet)

Eric's father, Les, was in a rage. He had just watched his son walk a batter, hit a batter, and have a generally mediocre day. That had triggered the scariest part of Les—his temper.

The entire game, as with most all Eric's games, Les couldn't relax. He'd stand, he'd sit, pace back and forth. He'd walk to the dugout to talk to Eric, stand behind backstop to yell to him. And time and again, Eric would finally be no longer able to internalize his emotions. He'd throw his bat after making an out or complain to the umpire. Les, in turn, became even more incensed. How dare his soon, who he worked so hard to mold, lose his cool? After this game, he walked silently to the family's Mercury Comet, followed by his wife, Yvonne, 11-year-old daughter Leslie, 10-year-old daughter Cindi, and Eric. He shut the car door and drove.

According to Cindi, her father listed Eric's transgressions, then—eyes bulging, veins engorged—he reached back and hit Eric in the ear with an open hand.

(Light shift, video projection of Cindi covers next transition)

CINDI: "My father was outright smacking Eric. Hittin' him with one hand and drivin' with the other. What was the worst was there was nothin' Eric could or would do. He just sat there takin' it. He wouldn't cry or fight back 'cause he knew that'd just make it worse. I was cryin' and my mom was cryin' and tellin' him to stop and tryin' to get her arms in between Daddy and Eric. He almost ran us off the road then stopped finally. When we got home, it was like everything with Eric was different. He'd just walked in to his room and shut the door. I could hear him playin' his guitar. He must've played for hours. That's how it'd be with him all the time after that. He'd get into something, get interested, and just do it all the time. All the time he wasn't playin' baseball at least."

(Projection ends as lights shift to reveal actor seated on pillow at table with candle. Actor speaks as Steve Augustin, childhood friend of Eric's)

STEVE: Yeah, his dad was tough, man. He'd grown up in Pittsburgh, in a rough part. Eric told me once that his dad always blamed his own mother cause his dad wasn't around. I know that can be pretty heavy for people, but...seemed to me like he just took out all his shit on Eric, riding him all the time. And what's really, like, out there, is that Eric fuckin' IDOLIZED him anyway, man. I always thought his old man was fulla shit but Eric loved that dude. He used to tell people around Eric's baseball friends that he played Triple-A ball for the Braves but no one ever found a record of that. I think he used it to make Eric think he should follow in his dad's footsteps. But, shit, Eric had a great arm, best around here when we were kids, so it made sense. Anyway, his dad, man...he'd come home from work and no matter what we were doing, he'd order Eric out back to play catch. Even when we were, like, 8. When Eric would do something wrong, his dad would take away his guitar or hide the record player for a while, but he NEVER took away that game of catch.

He didn't mind us playin' music together, really, he even bought Eric his second guitar and got him some lessons one winter, which I thought was pretty righteous. And Eric would play all the time, man, ALL the time. It was like it was the only thing he wanted to do. He got good, quick. His dad would even make him play "Hound Dog" like the King used to when he got drunk. I remember him saying it was a "man's song."¹⁴

But you just never knew when he was gonna get crazy about something. He'd say all kinds of racist shit about Martin Luther King, Jr., and throw people out of the house if they disagreed with him. I mean, outta nowhere. I remember one night we were out camping in Eric's yard, we were probably 13 or so. Eric was on a big kick then about astronomy—he'd get obsessed with something and it would be his only focus for a while. So we're out laying in the yard lookin' up at the sky and he's telling me all this stuff about the phases of the moon. He says, "Do you know what a waxing gibbous is?" I say, "No." He says, "More than half the moon is lit, and it'll be a full moon in a few days." I'm like, "Oh." He goes, "You know what a waning gibbous is?" I'm like, "No, man." Eric says, "Just the opposite, more than half the moon is lit up and it'll be less and less over the next few days." "Cool." Then, outta nowhere, Eric throws back his head and howled like a werewolf, and we cracked up. Laughing our asses off. Then we heard his dad from the house yell, "Shut up." And we were just kids laughing, and we laughed again. Next thing I know, his dad's outside, ordering him into the house...¹⁵

I could hear him hitting Eric, working him over pretty good. And yelling. About respect. Eric came back outside and tried to make light of it, like it didn't bother him. But I could tell he was troubled by the whole thing. It was a bad scene. But Eric just played guitar and kept on idolizing the old man.

By the time we were in high school and I was playin' the drums and we wanted to start a band, Mr. Show wasn't down with that at all. He wanted Eric playin' ball or studying. He said playing guitar all the time just meant hanging around smoking weed with losers, even though I only saw Eric try weed one time. All he wanted to do was play music, but he didn't dare quit playing ball. And even in high school, Les would stand behind the backstop and try to call Eric's pitches, and bitch at him. Then one day the catcher on the high school team stood up to Mr. Show and told him he was calling the game. I remember thinking that must've done something for the old man, having a 16-year-old kid stand up to him like that, cause he eased up on Eric some after that.

¹⁴ Friend par. 14

¹⁵ Friend par. 19

But after high school, Eric took a scholarship at Riverside, said he wanted to stay close to home. And his dad came to every game. I was there one day with a couple girls we were gonna go to a party with after the game. Eric was pitching, and he was struggling. Les got up and walked to the dugout between innings, and the whole stadium could hear him screaming at Eric. “What the hell’s wrong with you? Why can’t you do this? You piece of shit.” After that, Eric was just done. He yelled at his catcher after a bunt play went bad, stared down his coach for calling a pitch he gave up a dinger on.

He started doing crazy shit. He’d always show up late for practice, started riding an old Harley he bought off a guy. We’d go out to this old trainyard and he’d wait for a train to come by and see how close he could let it get to hitting him before he jumped out of the way. I was worried about him. One night we were at a party and I got into a tussle with a guy—this was before I found my peace—and he flashed a gun at me. Eric came over and grabbed me and tossed me in his car and we went back to our apartment. He pulled out a .22 his dad had given him when he was a kid and drove 80 back to the party. We got there and there were already all these cops there. Eric was pissed they got there before he did, but he tossed the gun under the front seat and we bailed.

(Lights fade)

VO1: “...Rose, still stuck on 4,191, will face Padres starter Eric Show as he tries to make history. Rose has faced Show before, to little success. He’s 2 for 12 in his career vs. Show. Show is having a fine year, especially after his disastrous performance in Game Four of last year’s World Series...”

VO2: “I hear he’s quite an accomplished guitar player, too, Jack. Even put out an album last year.”

VO1: “Is that right?”

VO2: “Padres’ media guide says he’s a big Beatles fan.”

VO1: “So, the musically inclined Mr. Show will try to avoid becoming a footnote in baseball history. We’ll be back with the rest of the starting lineups and the first pitch after a word from our sponsors. It’s a great night for baseball in Cincinnati!”

PART THREE: SEA CHANGE

(Lights up on actor again as Tom Friend, center stage.)

SLIDE: PART THREE: Sea Change)

TOM: Something finally went right for Eric Show when, in 1975, he went to play in a summer prospects league in Wichita, Kansas. Away from his father, he could get something of a fresh start. He had begun to draw the attention of major league scouts despite the constant pressure from Les. He would further increase his draft stock that summer in Wichita, and former teammates characterize him as intelligent and generous. He seemed as happy then as any 20-year-old kid full of potential and living away from home would. And, at a team dinner over that summer, he saw the most gorgeous girl he’d ever seen.

Eric said once that even the sound of her first name was poetry: Cara Mia. She was a petite blonde from nearby Nebraska who had just broken up with her high-school boyfriend and moved to Wichita to get a bit of distance herself. She was working as a nurse’s assistant. And when she saw Eric, she was just as taken as he was. Eric had his guitar with him and she asked him to play...”Stairway to Heaven.” This is 1975, remember. That was in Eric’s wheelhouse, and by the time he was done playing, they were a couple.

The next summer, Cara Mia moved to Riverside. Eric’s coaches there saw a new positive energy in Eric and his baseball career began to pick up steam. Riverside won the Division II College World Series in 1977 with Eric throwing the most electric stuff on the team, low 90s heat with an easy motion that pro

scouts loved. His mental game was the only thing in question. Still, in stressful situations with his father in the stands, Eric would try to be TOO perfect and innings would cave in; he'd then pout on the mound and glare at umpires. But he at least had Cara Mia, whom he would marry shortly after being drafted by the Padres in the 18th round of the 1978 draft. Les wouldn't be allowed anywhere near a pro dugout, even in the minor leagues. By September 1981, Eric had made it to the major leagues.

Les said to his wife when Eric made it to the bigs that "he had finally done it." Yvonne said, "I'm proud of him, too, Les." Les said, "I mean me. I done it. I raised a major leaguer."¹⁶

But Eric was ecstatic as well. Les couldn't get to him, he was in the majors, married to the love of his life, and the Padres had made it clear they had big plans for him. They told him he'd start the first home game of the year, a day game in April 1982. His wife and sister Leslie came to see him pitch. Les was stuck at work.

(Lights fade. Projection screen shows Cara Mia)

CARA MIA: "I remember after that game, he came out to meet us. Almost everybody had left the stadium, and Eric led us up to the very top row of the stadium. I remember it was so quiet, and seeing that place almost empty with the grass pristine. It was beautiful. Eric was just looking around; I could see him breathing it all in. He was so handsome when he smiled. I said, "Baby, you've got thousands of people coming to watch you, how does that feel?" He said, "It's pretty much awesome."

I know he loved me, I could tell by how he looked at me when we were alone together. When I looked at him that day, he was every bit as in love with baseball as he was with me. I just wish it had lasted. If it had, maybe things would have worked out different. But as that year went on, he just...I don't know. I think he knew he wasn't like the other players. He didn't fit in with them. Eric would try so hard to do well that he'd come apart when things went bad. On good days, he was fine, but on bad ones...You could see the air come out of him, and you could tell the other players couldn't stand how he reacted.

(Fade to Black)

PART FOUR: TEAM GAME

(Lights up on lockers. Actor sits on stool in front, in the manner of a post-game interview.)

SLIDE: PART FOUR: TEAM GAME. Slide cross-fades to then show 1985 Topps baseball card for Tim Flannery, former Padres infielder)

TIM FLANNERY: Baseball is a day-to-day game. It's a grind. You can't too up or too down. And you have to believe that you're the best out there. Eric never did. He'd give up a hit and slump his shoulders, and all of us playing behind him knew somebody would have to go to the mound to pump him up. It was never enough, though. If a liner was hit right at somebody, he'd be bumming. We'd have to say, "Hey, it's an out, come on!"¹⁷

(SLIDE: 1985 Topps baseball card for Goose Gossage, Padres relief pitcher)

GOOSE GOSSAGE: I tried with that kid. I came over here with experience and he had talent. Tried to take him under my wing a bit. We would talk about baseball and he's start to get real heavy. I'd say, "Eric, we're better off keeping it simple. There's a lot of things in baseball that are out of your control.

¹⁶ Friend par. 39

¹⁷ Friend par. 47

Like a ball barely falling in.” But there was no reasoning with that kid. He’d say, “No, that should have been caught,” or “Uh, I don’t wanna talk about it.” You’d come away from a conversation with him shaking your head. Pretty soon, I didn’t even talk to him.¹⁸

(SLIDE: 1985 Topps baseball card for Dave Dravecky, Padres pitcher)

DAVE DRAVECKY: Eric was an eccentric. I really think Mark and I were his only real friends in the game. Maybe because we pitched with him and spent time with him. But mostly because Mark and I accepted him for what he was. People don’t know how he would lock onto something and that’s all he wanted to talk about. He’d talk to us about religion, and politics, and the books he devoured. He had a big heart, too. On road trips, we’d go out to get dinner and on the way he would invite a homeless person to join us. Thurmond used to hate that. But Eric spoke to every beggar he saw. He’d try to talk them out of alcohol or walk them to a community shelter. He’d give random people \$50 bills.

(SLIDE: 1985 Topps baseball card for Mark Thurmond, Padres pitcher)

MARK THURMOND: I remember we were at spring training in Arizona in 1984 and he happened into a John Birch Society bookstore. He read a bunch of materials and, just like Eric, it was all he was about. Eric had always said he believed in less government and more responsibility, and him and me and Dravecky joined. We didn’t know some people thought they were anti-black, anti-Semitic. When it got out, all the critics piled on us. Eric was really hurt by that, I think, cause he wasn’t a racist. At all. None of us were, but he spoke out and said so, and next thing you know, he’s the villain. We were playing great, headed for the playoffs, but Eric just pulled into himself more and more. Fans were all over him on the road, and he just didn’t understand why. By the time the playoffs got there, he was a mess. I’ll never understand why Skip started him in Game 1. Thank god we were playing the Cubs.

(SLIDE: 1985 Topps baseball card for Dick Williams, Padres manager)

DICK WILLIAMS: I ran him out there ‘cause most of the time, he was our best arm. But with Show, you never knew what you were gonna get. He started getting lit up, then he’s out there with his hands on his hips, staring out at his own infielders and outfielders. You could see the energy go outta the team. So we lose the first two, but win the next two. I ran him out there again for Game 5—didn’t have nobody else to go to. By the 2nd inning, we’re down 3-0 on two dingers, and I went out and yanked him. We came back and won, and he was the only guy on the team who didn’t celebrate. We’re going to the World Series, and he’s got his head in a book. I tried to leave him off the roster for the series, but the damn owner wouldn’t let me.

(Lights fade)

VO: “...Show, who had a rough series against the Cubs, toes the rubber. He didn’t take a loss in the series, but gave up 8 runs in 7 innings, and he’s down 2 here in the third inning of Game 4 of the World Series. He’s ready now, and there’s the pitch...and Trammell connects! High drive, and...GONE! Trammell with his second homer of the game off Show, and Dick Williams is already out of the dugout. That will end the night for Eric Show, a good pitcher who’s having a miserable postseason...”

(Lights up on Tom Friend, seated on a stool center stage)

¹⁸ Friend par. 49

TOM: The Padres lost the World Series in five games. Les watched from afar. After the season, Eric refused to call Les. He didn't want to talk pitch selection, he didn't want to talk baseball. He didn't like baseball. All Eric seemed to care about was playing guitar.

The prospect of another season gnawed at Eric, but before the 1985 season began, the Padres acquired a new number one starter, LaMarr Hoyt, and Eric felt some of the pressure on him might dissipate. It seemed to help, as Eric got off to a good start and went on to pitch a career high 233 innings despite missing time with back soreness. On the road he'd play jazz in hotel lobbies with local bands. He'd tell teammates to pick a song, any song, and he'd perform it flawlessly.

He seemed happy, or at least at peace. But the closer Rose got to the record, the more Eric would check the schedule and fret. He knew the Padres had a series with the Reds scheduled in early September and watched Rose's hit total climb along with the rest of baseball. None of that year's good fortune seemed to matter on September 8, 1985, as the Padres flew to Cincinnati. None of it mattered with Rose tied with Cobb, and Eric already brooding.

Cara Mia and his friend Steve Augustin made the trip to Cincinnati, both secretly hoping some other pitcher would give up the record. Both knowing Eric would need them if he did. The first pitcher up was Eric's pal Dravecky, but Rose took the day off. Next was Hoyt, who had been the starter and MVP of that year's All-Star Game. His plan to bust Rose inside with fastballs worked as Rose popped out three times. A reliever named Lance McCullers got Rose to line out in his last at-bat, which brought about what seemed inevitable. Eric would step onto the mound for the last game of the series, 60 feet, six inches from Pete Rose and history.

His karma had been bad all week. When asked about the record, he answered, "I'm so disinterested in it, I don't know how to answer that question." He did say the record would be a "fantastic accomplishment," but he also said, "In the eternal scope of things, how much does this matter?"¹⁹ Reporters had a field day—Eric Show was the villain again.

Cara Mia says she knew what her husband was trying to do—deflect the horrible tension. He was trying to talk himself in believing that the record wouldn't matter, that the replays wouldn't haunt him, that Les wasn't figuratively standing behind the backstop. But, in some ways, he was talking himself into giving up that hit.

On Wednesday night, September 11 believe it or not, Rose stepped into the batter's box against Eric. Flashbulbs popped. The Padres backup catcher was calling the game. He knew Eric threw hard stuff, fastballs and sliders. He'd seen Hoyt get Rose out by pitching inside the night before. Eric got a quick strike one on a fastball. The catcher didn't think twice about calling for Eric's money pitch, a hard slider on the hands in an attempt to get strike two. But for whatever reason, shitty luck or decades of self-doubt, Eric tossed a meatball of a slider that had no sizzle on it. Rose slapped the pitch to left field for hit number 4,192.

For a split second, Eric shut his eyes. He and his teammates had been forewarned there would be a lengthy ceremony. Rose would be presented with a car. There would be a speech or three. The Padres were instructed to stay on the field throughout.

Eric ran over to shake Rose's hand. He then walked back to the mound and surveyed the scene around him. His fat pitch had done all this. Pete Rose, Jr. was working as a bat boy that day, and with Eric

¹⁹ Friend par. 65

watching ran to first to embrace his dad. Perhaps seeing that made Eric think of Les. He never said. But right about then, with his back beginning to tighten up, Eric sat down on the mound.

Thurmond later said, "Dave Dravecky and I were saying, 'What is he doing?'" Dravecky said, "We were pulling our hair out, going, 'Get up!'"²⁰

(Lights fade. Projection plays of Rose getting the hit off Show and the celebration that followed. Cross fades to still photo of Eric seated on the mound.

Lights up on locker area. Actor sits in front of locker as Bruce Bochy, the catcher in the Rose game)

BRUCE BOCHY: It was the first inning, so he wasn't tired. That pitch had nothing on it, though. We knew we had to stay out there, so I was watching the action around Rose. I look over and Show's sitting on the mound. I was saying, "Oh shit, don't do that, shit. That looks bad. It was like, all of a sudden, he was the center of it. I swear I don't think he was trying to show anybody up. He just didn't know what the hell to do. We don't stop games in the middle to have stuff like this very often, y'know? But he was a little counterculture, too. And it looked like a counterculture statement. Fuck you, I'm sitting down. You just don't do that, no matter what.

It was definitely a spectacle, looked like Mardi Gras out there. Looking back, I don't feel bad about the calling the pitch, but I should've gone out there to him. He was all by himself out there. And it was obvious he didn't want to be there. After that, it wasn't just him against the Reds or Rose. It was him against his own team. He gave up a little flare to left to let in a run in the third and stared down Martinez out in left field. Back in the dugout, he said it should've been caught and Martinez heard him. They got into a dust-up right there in the dugout. He didn't pitch all that bad the rest of the game, I think we lost 2-0, but in the clubhouse after, guys were lining up to rip him. Flannery thought he disrespected Rose; him and Eric 'bout came to blows. Gossage got in his face and said, "If you don't wanna be here, go do something else." Everybody in there told him his attitude stunk. I really think, looking back, that he didn't understand why people thought that. He just put his head down, grabbed his stuff and walked back to the hotel with his wife. I don't know that he said a word to anybody but Mark and Dave the rest of the year.

(Lights fade)

PART FIVE: AFTERMATHS

(SLIDE: Part Five: Aftermaths. Slide cross fades into video projection of Cara Mia)

CARA MIA: "He came out to meet me, and it was like the exact opposite of that day in San Diego three years before. I tried to talk to him, but he didn't want to talk. He was just very...reserved. Like he was shut off, I guess? I'm sure regretting that he sat on the mound. We went to bed early that night. I don't think he even picked up his guitar to play. I know he sent it back to San Diego with me, and they still had a few more games on the road. He'd never done that before.

The season ended and he was home with me most of the time, but he was just miserable. He said he felt like he was the most hated man in baseball. I tried and tried but couldn't get him to do anything. He didn't want to play guitar, he didn't want to go star-gazing. He finally came to me one day and asked if I would mind if he invited his daddy over to talk. He wanted me to be there. I thought it was a bad idea, but I wanted to support him so I said that would be fine.

²⁰ Friend par. 71

Eric just...he wasn't like his father. He was warm and affectionate and I think he would have been a good father. But his dad was like...a stone. Formal. Eric said he needed to confront his father on why he had been like that, even after he got to the majors.

Eric almost never drank, but he poured himself and his daddy a glass of wine when he got to the house. They sat down and Eric put everything on the table. He brought up the abuse on and off the ballfield. Right there in front of me. There were tears and they both did plenty of yelling. But in the end, his daddy took no responsibility. He said it was his own upbringing, then he blamed Eric for not working hard enough. I thought he was gonna hit his daddy right there in the kitchen. He just threw up his hands. Never solved anything."

(Projection ends, lights rise on Tom Friend seated at desk)

TOM: Eric had two years left on his Padres contract, and made it through 1986. He had a decent year but the Padres were mediocre. He felt largely unwelcome with the team but thankful that he had Dravecky and Thurmond in his corner. In 1987, the Padres were even worse. They started trading players away in June in an effort to rebuild. But, no one in baseball wanted anything to do with Eric or his contract. They did, however, see veteran presence in Thurmond and Dravecky. Thurmond was traded to the Tigers in June, and on the 4th of July, 1987, Dravecky was dealt to the Giants. Goose Gossage says he remembered wondering what Eric was going to do now, with his boys playing elsewhere.

On July 7, Eric pitched for the first time after the trades, against the Cubs in Chicago. Andre Dawson, who would win the MVP that year, greeted him in the first inning with a long home run.

(SLIDE: 1987 Topps baseball card for Andre Dawson, Cubs outfielder)

Dawson had been killing Padres pitching all year. He'd gone yard off Eric in May of that year. Dawson was streaky, and after he hit that first bomb he came up again in the third. He was all over the plate, ready for another fat pitch he could drive.

Eric later told Steve Augustin that he had just meant to brush Dawson back, to move him off the plate. But the same pitch that didn't run inside enough against Rose two years before ran too far inside to Dawson. It hit him flush in the face. Dawson was down on the ground with blood turning the dirt around home plate red. Cubs pitcher Rick Sutcliffe charged onto the field after Eric, followed by the rest of the Cubs. Dawson was writhing on the ground for what seemed like forever. Then he slowly got up.

Flannery, still with the Padres, said, "I thought Dawson was gonna kill him. He had blood all over. He looked scary." Dawson chased him all over the infield, and Eric had to be escorted off the field with Dawson still after him. Goose Gossage was quoted as saying, "I think there was even a point where I kind of would have liked to have seen Andre get ahold of him."²¹ This is not how baseball players react to their teammates being threatened.

In the clubhouse, Eric was devastated. He sat and wrote a letter to Dawson apologizing and delivered it after the game. But Dawson wouldn't accept the apology. Then, a Chicago writer brought up the Birch Society fallout again and insinuated the beaming was racially motivated. Eric received a death threat and changed hotels, staying at a location different from the rest of his team. His friends were gone, he was sinking. And he didn't love the game enough to stomach things like this.

²¹ Friend par. 87

(Lights fade. SLIDE: Series of still photos of aftermath of Dawson beaming plays as transition. Lights up on downstage table. Actor appears again as Steve Augustin)

STEVE: He was really done after that. The rest of that year, he just went through the motions. I remember, man, me and Cara, were listening to that Dawson game. She was doing the dishes and she stopped right then and made me take her to the airport. She flew straight out to meet Eric. Hell, she had to. Not one of his teammates was ready to stand up for him. They knew, man, just like I did—Eric was no racist. He wasn't trying to hit him. But he becomes a pariah anyway. And brother, back when Drysdale and Gibson pitched they came in on guys all the time. People knew they were headhunters. Eric had a pitch slip, just trying to do the same thing, and now he's like Charles Manson or something. It's a bummer, man. And Eric just wasn't cut out for dealing with that stuff.²²

Eric would have been better off as a musician. Playing baseball, trying to live up to what his dad wanted for him, that robbed him of something that was inherently him. I remember I read a poem once by James Cavanaugh called, "There are men too gentle to run with wolves" that always made me think of Eric. I know that day with Dawson was the worst day of his baseball life. And that's saying something. I knew after that game that Eric just wanted OUT, man. But he didn't know what else to do with himself. So, he just kept on truckin', man. Consequences be damned.

(Lights fade)

PART SIX: DEMON IN MY VIEW

(SLIDE: Part Six: Demon in my View. Slide crossfades into cacophonous series of sounds and image:, alcohol and drug imagery, baseball hitting a mitt, guitar playing, Cara Mia in home videos, Show family photos, gargoyles, wooden bat breaking in half, pills falling down a sink drain. Near the end, we hear Cara Mia's voice:)

CARA MIA: "...I could tell he was hurting, but he tried so hard to keep me worrying. I just didn't know how to help him..."

(Lights up on Tom Friend. He paces the stage throughout the following)

TOM: Sometime in 1988, as best as anyone can guess, Eric Show tried his first amphetamine. The theories of his wife and friends are threefold: Eric was bored with baseball and needed a new obsession. Eric's back was constantly aching and he needed a boost to pitch. Eric just wanted to escape.²³

This was in the days before baseball had a strict drug-testing program. Players were only tested in the event they were caught in possession of illegal drugs by police. Some drugs were not only overlooked but readily available in clubhouses. Prescription amphetamines were a part of baseball, known widely as "greenies" because, well, the pills were green. Players used them to get through the grind of the season. For years, Eric had resisted them. He rarely drank, had tried pot once in his life, and still clung to his father's ideas about "clean living." After the Dawson game, all his willpower was exhausted. On greenies, Eric's back pain dissipated. He felt sharp.

The results were undeniable, as 1988 was a career year for Eric in both wins and complete games. But he was staying up all hours of the night, unable to come down from the high of both amphetamines and

²² Friend par. 92-93

²³ Friend par. 96

adrenaline. Eric had a new addiction, this one far different from baseball or the guitar or the stars or his wife. Teammates would be returning to the hotel around 2 a.m. on road trips and pass Eric just heading out, in search of somewhere to expend his energy.

By 1989, the using was backfiring. Eric had become unreliable. He was supposed to start a 1 p.m. game in St. Louis in May of that year. By 12:30 he had yet to show his face in the clubhouse. Eric rolled in fifteen minutes before the start time, gave up five runs, and was pulled after two innings. As it turned out, all the greenies had masked his back pain and allowed him to pitch, but pitching had damaged the discs in his lower back. He needed surgery to keep going. After the surgery, he knew pitching was implausible if not impossible without some kind of upper. He phoned the only addict he knew. His sister, Cindi. She had grown up in Les Show's house, too, and had been using speed for years.

(Lights fade on Tom. Projection plays interview with Cindi)

CINDI: "Eric asked me to lunch one day and wanted to know if I could get him Desoxin or Fastin. He knew all the amphetamines cause he had them when he was playing, but he couldn't get back to playing without them. I told him he didn't want to mess with that stuff. Hell, you couldn't get that shit without a prescription anyway. He had a hell of a lot better chance of getting a scrip that I did, y'know? And I told him they'd catch him when they drug-tested him. He said, "Nah, nah, they don't drug test." I couldn't believe that shit. Makes me wish I had played baseball! He said he wouldn't get caught, that "you had to really be blowing it for they to test you." So I told him, I couldn't get him pills either way, but I could get him something like it on the street.

Crystal meth. Methamphetamine. Back then...it was just another something to help get you outta bed in the morning. I knew people who used it and seemed fine. So I started getting it for him. I was afraid he'd get arrested if he went to get it, so I bought it for him.²⁴

He just got hooked so damn fast...."

(Projection ends, crossfades into the previous image of Goose Gossage. Lights up on actor seated at lockers)

GOSSAGE: I'd always see him in shitty areas. By himself. One time in Pittsburgh, I came around the corner, and bam! We're nose to nose, me and Show. I just happened to be traveling through, and he was like a deer in headlights. I'd felt bad about how I didn't keep up with him for years by then. He hurried away from me. There was a good guy inside of Eric, I think. I really wanted to sit there and talk to him and see what was going on with him. But he was, "I gotta go, gotta go." My buddy who was with me was like, "What the hell was that all about?"²⁵ I didn't have an answer, but it made me worry.

(Lights fade. Projection screen again plays video of Cindi)

CINDI: "Eric was using huge amounts right from the start. No lie, I would go get him a month's worth and he'd call back the next week and go, "I accidentally flushed it down the toilet, it slipped down the drain." I was scared for him, but I was a goddamn mess myself back then. He'd say, "I really, really need it. Swear to God, just to get back to pitching, then I'll be fine." So, I'd go get him some more. (She pauses, having trouble continuing.) I'm sorry...

²⁴ Friend par. 103

²⁵ Friend par. 100

He pitched again in 1990, and when he was at home we'd use together. He'd stay up three nights at a time and lie to Cara and Steve on the phone that he was working on music projects while I sat in the room getting more hits ready for us. I tried to help, but, like I said, I didn't know how. I'd tell him he had to stop using by a certain time of day so he could get some sleep. I told him he had to eat, 'cause that shit will make you not want anything to do with food. I told him, 'You're an athlete, you need real energy.' But he'd go, 'Yeah, yeah' and wave me off. He'd just go out and pitch on it."²⁶

(Projection ends. Lights up on Tom Friend)

TOM: He was in so deep, paranoia began to set in. Eric's doggedly obsessive personality had made him a great guitarist, a good husband, a good ballplayer. He spent years trying to be a good son, and researching the world's religions in search of meaning. Now, that same addictive personality was driving him mad. His old high school catcher, the guy who had stood up to Les all those years ago, came to see a game. After, Eric told him he was being tormented regularly by demons that would hiss and scream at him from the stands at games. He was pitching terribly, and the Padres privately had decided to cut him loose as soon as possible.

Cara stood by him, even then. During homestands, he'd play guitar all day until she had to remind him to get to the ballpark. Otherwise he might have forgotten to show up altogether. She'd go to games and sit alone, writing letters and listening to music on her headphones. The games were too hard to watch, mostly. He lost eight in a row at one point. A reporter asked him after a game how he was getting through. He sang a stanza from a Don Henley song while his teammates looked on, befuddled. Lights fade. Projection screen projects lyrics as Don Henley's "The Heart of the Matter" plays through transition.

(SLIDE: There are people in your life who've come and gone
They let you down, you know they hurt your pride
You better put it all behind you baby, cause life goes on
If you keep carrying that anger, it'll eat you up inside baby...
I've been trying to get down to the heart of the matter
But my will gets weak and my my thoughts seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness
Forgiveness
Even if, even if, you don't love me anymore²⁷)

Projection fades out)

PART SEVEN: STRETCHED

(SLIDE: 7th Inning Stretch. Lights up on Steve Augustin in his customary spot by downstage table)

STEVE: My buddy Eric. I still see him like that, y'know man? Hell, even when he was struggling, he was a damn good pitcher, too. He won the 100th game of his career on the last day of the 1990 season. That made him the Padres career leader in wins. He walked out of that clubhouse in his black leather jacket and didn't even know he'd set a record. Nobody bothered to tell him. I thought he'd hang it up then. But he latched on with the A's, Oakland, for '91. Pitched bad. Was all over the place; same thing off the field. But none of us knew how to help him.

²⁶ Friend par. 104

²⁷ Henley "Heart of the Matter"

I went to a game one day, man, and it was beautiful out there. Perfect day. We sat in the first row after the game and I said to Eric, “Can you smell that? Fresh-cut grass, pro ballpark. Nothing like it.” He said, “Why?” I said, “Cause this is your baseball career. One day it’s gonna be over. You’re not gonna be here to see this. Can you smell that? Appreciate that?”

He said, “Nah, let’s go get a beer.”²⁸

His dad...damn, when you say it out loud like this, it’s like the world just wouldn’t stop knocking Eric down. Anyway, his dad started doing weird things, and Eric was the one who went over and took him to the doctor. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Eric tried to talk to him about God—can you imagine that? Here he is, falling apart in front of us, and he’s trying to get his dad to find Jesus. Mr. Show just waved him off.

By then he was doing more coke than meth. The things he’d say... He told me one night after a game that a dragon was after him. Cara told me he swore to her one night on the phone that Marilyn Monroe was in the room with him. He had me check his neck every couple days for scars—he said someone was trying to implant a tracking device in him. I was packing a bag for him one day for a road trip and found that same .22 he had since he was a kid in his bag.

He disappeared for three days during spring training in ’92 and showed up with his hands bandaged. Police told the A’s he’d been acting weird near an adult bookstore and when they approached him, he tried to hop a barbed wire fence. There were rumors he’d been freebasing and had coke blow up in his hands. Either way, they cut him a few days later, and he was finally done with baseball.

(Lights fade. Projection screen again plays scattered and broken images. Discordant sound. Throughout all of this, flashes of Cara Mia. As projection ends, we again hear her voice)

CARA MIA: “...in my mind it was tough love. I just wanted my Eric back and didn’t know how else to help him. I’ve wondered ever since if it was the right thing, or...”

PART EIGHT: LAST DITCH

(SLIDE: PART EIGHT: Last Ditch. Lights up on Tom Friend. He stands center stage)

TOM: You can feel it, can’t you? Where we’re heading? I know I could when I went to write Eric’s story as part of a series of articles around the 25th anniversary of the Pete Rose hit. I wanted so much to see this story have a different ending. I wanted so much for Eric to find some sort of answer to his own demons, his own addictions. But all too often, that same feeling of inevitability that all of you have right now is similar to what the friends and families of addicts feel as their loved ones spiral down into some kind of oblivion. What, we should ask ourselves, must it feel like for the addict? Is there hope?

You might think you know where Eric’s story is heading, and you might be right. But we’ve come this far, and I think his struggle deserves sharing. So come a little farther, if you will.

Eric was released and soon after, Cara Mia kicked him out. He stayed with Steve and eventually entered rehab. While there he saw in the paper that Dave Dravecky, who himself lost his left arm to cancer, was speaking at a local school. Eric begged the treatment center to let him go, and they did, accompanied by two staffers. Dravecky saw him during the presentation and said from the stage, “Eric, whatever you

²⁸ Friend par. 110

do, don't leave until I talk to you."²⁹ They had barely seen each other since Dravecky was traded. Dave gave Eric his contact information and asked him to call. Eric lost the number.

He got out of the rehab center and moved back in with Steve, then started complaining that there were evil men in the attic. Cindi, who had gotten clean, went to see him and he claimed she was an imposter who worked for the police. Augustin and Cara Mia took him to another rehab center but a staffer there told him there were overbooked and recommended dropping him off at a detox center in San Diego. Eric used to walk people there himself when with the Padres.

He left the place that night and was found wandering the streets. Police sprayed him with pepper spray and put him in a car. He kicked out the back window and tried to climb out. The cops took him to a psychiatric hospital. Steve came to get him, and Eric told him he had asked the police to shoot him that night. They both began to cry. They went for a walk on the beach, and Eric promised to quit drugs. He told Steve about the night he had loaded a bowl with heroin and cocaine and lit up, then howled, "It's in your hands now, God!" The drugs hadn't killed him. He told Steve he was determined to get his life back.

He stayed clean for a few months, then went to see Les.

(Lights shift as Actor dons glasses and sits in the recliner upstage. Music from the 1940s plays underneath all this)

LES SHOW: Huh? (Pause) Who? (Pause) No, ain't never. He don't look like me. You don't look like me, do ya? This whole place is full of damn liars and goddamn cheats. I know what I got and don't got. Say what? (Pause) 1959. The hell it ain't. (Pause) What's that matter? (Pause) 'Course I know, but that don't... Fine, then goddammit. It's that sonofabitch Hoover, ya happy now?

No, I ain't. Boy, I ain't ever seen you in my life. I don't know who the hell put you up to this but... (Pause) You're one of them damn bible people, ain't ya? Yeah, ya are. (Pause) Boy, you're too damn old to be my son. Look at yourself! (He laughs) No sir, I don't think so. My son wouldn't be all scrawny like you are. When my boy grows up he's gonna be a goddamn major leaguer. I'll see to that. If you can throw a fastball, you can play for goddamn ever. Look at ole Satchel Paige. He's damn good for a Negro. (Pause) What? Forgive me for what? (Long pause) Why? Shit, boy, I don't care. Long as it gets you outta here so I can have a little peace. Well, get on with it, then.

(Sound of a flash photograph being taken. Lights fade on actor as projection screen shows a photo of Eric and Les Show. The Beatles' "Blackbird" plays as screen fades to black)

PART NINE: HOME SAFE

(SLIDE: PART NINE: Home Safe. Slide crossfades into video projection of Cara Mia)

CARA MIA: "...I think he made some kind of peace with his Dad. When I asked him about the visit, he just looked sad. He wanted some apology, some acceptance from his daddy. I think that's why he was always running, and he ran right back to the drugs.

He told me after he relapsed that he thought I'd be better off if he was dead. He wouldn't play the guitar anymore. That scared me most. I told him if he didn't quit then he'd chase that dragon right off

²⁹ Friend par. 114

the edge of the world.³⁰ And there was just this flatness. About everything. He was just flat. I got him into rehab one more time, and they—the people at the center—would tell me how he was doing when I called. But I couldn't talk to him..."

(Projection ends as lights rise on Tom Friend, seated center stage)

TOM: Eric told the counselors all the truth he knew. Baseball was the culprit, he said. He used it to please his father, it was easy money, he had a gift for it. But it always led him to the wrong place at the wrong time. A John Birch bookstore in spring training. Pete Rose and number 4,192. Andre Dawson and a pitch with a mind of its own. He asked on his 30th day at the center, "Why me?"

The next day, he called Steve and told him he had a premonition Les was dying. He asked Steve to come get him. Steve said he would, the next morning. But his car was stolen from the beach where he was surfing that day, so he sent a friend to get Eric. The friend, Bob Bell, had no idea Eric was leaving the rehab center against medical advice. Eric seemed sober and wistful, eager to see his father. He believed Les was not too far gone to accept Jesus before he died. He talked to Bell about a math equation he had been working on. He talked about patching things up with Cara Mia.

Then he told Bell he was going to stay with friends Bell didn't know. Bell begged him to stay with him, but Eric said he was fine. He looked at Bell and said, "I'm fine, don't worry."

He never went to see Les. He instead concocted a speedball. Augustin later learned Eric had ingested four \$10 bags of cocaine, felt unsettled, then ingested eight \$10 bags of heroin. He chased it with a six pack of beer.³¹

He vomited several times and then was up all night. He met Augustin the next day, haggard and refusing to eat. Augustin wanted to take him back to rehab, but Eric had written a love letter he wanted to personally deliver to Cara Mia. On the way to his and his wife's house, he used the last of his heroin. When she met with him that night, she had something to tell him. She wanted a divorce. She said she couldn't be dragged down anymore and he needed to get clean once and for all.

Eric Show looked at his wife and said, "I know. I'm just going to give it all to God now." She called the rehab center to come get him, and when the van arrived, she kissed him and said...

CARA MIA (VO): "You go get 'em, honey. You're going to be just fine."³²

TOM: That night, she called Eric's sisters to say he was safely back in treatment. There was relief. Until she called again the next morning in hysterics.

Eric Show was dead at 37. He'd been found unresponsive in his bed at 8:05 in the morning. The same .22 pistol was under his pillow. Cara Mia received a toxicology report that said he died of acute morphine and cocaine intoxication. She had no idea he'd done a speedball, again.

On his finger was his wedding ring.

³⁰ Friend par. 124

³¹ Friend par. 129

³² Friend par. 132

(Projection shows still photos of Eric as Pearl Jam’s “EWBTCLAST” plays. Music continues under the following speech)

TOM: They never told Les he was gone, there was no point. He couldn’t remember Eric. If he could, it would have been torture. Cindi, who had disowned her father years before, conceded that Les adored Eric, he just had zero control of himself.

It rained at the funeral. One player from Eric’s career showed up—Dravecky. There were stories of all the things Eric did to help people before the addiction took over. No one brought up Pete Rose. Cara Mia ordered an emerald green casket and placed a photo of herself in his pocket. Cindi put a letter in his other pocket that read, “I wish it had been me, not you.”

They also placed a baseball and a guitar in his casket—one passion, one penance.

Les died a year later. Steve Augustin made copies of every recording Eric ever made, including a collection of Christmas songs you can find on iTunes.

Cara Mia remarried, but she kept most of Eric’s trinkets. Among them was a baseball signed by Pete Rose that reads, “To Eric, A Great Competitor.” The first year after he died, she would occasionally slink into a Padres game and sit in the wives’ section. It was odd, because she was never much of a baseball fan. But she wanted to smell the fresh-cut grass that her husband couldn’t. She wanted to take one last look around for Eric. So she’d wait for the moon to come out.

(Lights fade onstage as projection screen shows a still of the marker on Eric’s grave. It is the only light in the room as we hear Cara Mia)

CARA MIA (VO): “If he’d been a musician, he’d still be alive today. With gray hair.³³ We just, we never knew how to help him.”

(Projection slowly fades to black as Don Henley’s “The Heart of the Matter” plays)

THE END

³³ Friend par. 130

CHAPTER 8: FUTURE VERSIONS

After completing the working text of the piece, several potential changes are possible. There are primary issues to be addressed in future versions.

First, questions abound about the value of having Eric Show appear as a character within the piece. My initial instinct was to attempt to present the piece without attempting to portray Show himself. I think there is merit to this approach as a dramatic advice, but the impact of having him appear at least once has undeniable potential. I have already included in the multi-media sections of the play sequences that I view as insights into Eric's mind as his condition deteriorates. It is possible that these sections could be better communicated if he is a presence as a character in the moments before and/or after they occur. I expect to consider this question during further workshop sessions on the text.

Secondly, if Eric Show does indeed appear as a character, does it not then make sense to use his appearances as a framing device for the entire piece? There are several critical points in the text that revolve around his actual experiences pitching in games. Pitchers climb a short hill over and over during the course of a game; this is a metaphor for Eric's life that could serve as a ritual occurrence throughout the piece. In conjunction with the previous question, confronting the audience with a flesh-and-blood representation of him could further personalize the play for an audience while also eliciting an emotional response that may be lacking as the piece currently exists. Obviously, the answers to these concerns depend largely on how I proceed with regard to the previous question.

Finally, and most significantly, the piece as currently constructed may still be too narrative. While I believe the characters within the text share a need to tell Eric's story, I am concerned that the narrative overpowers the characters' objectives. Seeking out a way to make the piece more active will be the primary focus of further workshops on the text. This issue is intertwined in many ways with the previous two, as including Eric Show as a character engaged in fighting his addiction could serve as a catalyst for addressing issues of "narrative vs. active." This issue could also be addressed via other characters in that there may be a place in the piece for a stronger call for action or contemplation on the part of the audience. I feel strongly that this question in particular can only be addressed via workshops on the play with other theatre artists focused on narrative structure.

The next step in the development of the piece is to open the process to colleagues and collaborators whose opinions I trust and value. I anticipate work on the play to continue using the workshop model.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

I approached the creation of a long-form solo performance with eagerness. Having performed more than sixty plays over the course of my academic and professional careers, I considered an opportunity to tell a story of my own choosing a stroke of good fortune. I had performed a solo piece before and counted it as one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my artistic life. I had performed in several new plays that were still evolving and being developed during the rehearsal process. I considered myself well-suited for the task at hand.

I learned during the generation of the piece that such an endeavor is an even more demanding one than I had previously thought. I agonized over particular turns of phrase. I second-guessed myself countless times. I had countless conversations with colleagues and friends about what this story meant to me and my desire to do it justice. I cut things I truly loved and included sections I was reticent to include.

Throughout this experience, however, I never lost my passion for story or my own powerful need to share it with an audience. I also still look forward to further investigation of the piece and how to make it a stronger, more viable performance. The most positive result of generating the text has been a renewed passion for telling the stories I want audiences to hear and consider.

I come away from this process as a stronger artist with a more varied skill set. Having spent much of my life as an actor as a conduit for the stories others feel passionate about, I have discovered an unexpected facility for the creation of performance material. My creative juices are flowing; several other ideas for solo and ensemble pieces are beginning to gestate in my mind.

I think there is great value to the modern-day actor generating work of his or her own. Actors cannot depend on someone else to hire them to perform; the marketplace is very competitive. It is vitally important for a performer to have a piece that can be marketed to and performed in a number of venues for diverse audience. A self-contained, fully developed performance piece serves as means of continuing to WORK while evolving as a theatre artist. While I feel this piece can benefit from further development, it is another step in becoming a more complete professional performer. This was an invaluable experience that will continue serve me moving forward. I can only hope that future audiences who see the piece will come away from it with the same passion I feel for its message.

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VITA

Nick Rhoton's theatre career began when he was 19 years old. After having accepted a scholarship to study journalism at the University of Kentucky, he enrolled in a theatre class to satisfy a university requirement during his freshman year. He was encouraged by his professor to audition for a play being produced by the university. He was cast in A Midsummer Night's Dream and was immediately in love with performing live. He transferred to Virginia Tech University, became a theatre major, and was afforded a number of opportunities to perform in university productions. He completed his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre at Virginia Tech in 1999.

Nick then worked as an actor at venues in Orlando, New York, Vermont, and Oregon, before settling briefly in Wilmington, North Carolina. While there, he continued to perform live while also gaining valuable experience on film. He served as Artistic Director of Big Dawg Productions, a producing theatre company while performing both scripted and improvisational theatre in number of venues on the Cape Fear coast. He also won an award as Best Newcomer for his performance in Eric Bogosian's Drinking in America and a Best Actor award for his work in Same Time, Next Year.

Nick then relocated to Atlanta where he carved out a career as a working actor in a larger market, working with such theatres as The Alliance Theatre, Theatre in the Square, Actor's Express, ART Station, Theatre Gael, Aurora Theatre, Georgia Shakespeare, Georgia Ensemble Theatre, and PushPush Theatre. He also was a founding ensemble member of both VisionQuest Theatre and Atlanta Theatre Laboratory. He collaborated on the development of nine new plays and originated roles in each of them. He received particular critical acclaim for his performance in Tracy Letts' Killer Joe at Actor's Express. Also while in Atlanta, he had the opportunity to perform in five Sam Shepard plays, exploring the work of his favorite playwright.

Seeking to deepen his work as an actor and begin to share his experience as an instructor, Nick accepted an invitation to work toward the Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre at Louisiana State University. During his time at LSU, he has continued to evolve as an artist, refining his technique and discovering new ways of approaching dramatic literature. He has performed, directed, and designed lighting for a number of productions. He has also relished the opportunity to teach performance and improvisation techniques. He developed a solo piece entitled **Ballplayer, An Addiction Story** as part of his degree.