

Sojourn Theatre's
Transition
By Michael Rohd

Created in collaboration with Sojourn artists
Jono Eiland, Bobby Bermea, Kimberly Howard, Sona Nankani, Jeff Rose, Hannah
Treuhaft, & Dawn Young

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www.sojourntheatre.org

Preshow
Black Out
Slide One and Music Up (2 phrases)
Lights Up with Slide 2
Slide 3 (Visual)
Slide 4 (Visual)
Slide 5-12 (visual)
Sound Out and Light Q

Chair gesture piece

Jono: What I'm doing now is a bit of a departure from my schooling.

Kimberly: I wish I had more advising and career planning before I left. I really do.

Sona: That's a successful program- where students learn to be self-sufficient, and the ones who don't are weeded out.

Hannah: I never had any illusions.

Sona: In every other field, job placement is part of the school's responsibility. Job fairs, job fairs, job fairs. People are employed before school ends.

Hannah: Jobs, jobs, jobs. My program was too vocational. We should be taught to enhance our critical thinking skills, to pull from different areas, so you don't just think, "How do I get a job." That crushes creativity.

Jono: I wasn't ready to hit the streets of NYC right out of high school. College was learning to balance the social with work, to get to classes on time through the snow,

having to learn to do laundry, and get to voice and movement, how to work with nobody to motivate me but me.

Kimberly: This is harsh, but I don't think arts teachers should be tenured. They get bored and complacent, and uninterested.

Sona: I always tried to do things outside of school. That stuff prepares you more. But it was consistently discouraged.

Jono: If they required English classes linked to your major, I don't know, grant writing or a press release, instead of silly papers that the instructor chooses for us to write- that would have been helpful.

Hannah: Most people don't realize the breadth of their field- I mean, someone has to run the galleries, someone curates at museums. The actual workings of the field offer so many opportunities. I would have liked to understand that better before I left school.

Kimberly: When you go to some school that U.S. New and World Reports mentions, you think- the world is just gonna open up to me now.

Hannah: I remember a film professor saying- I bring them in here, then I throw them back into the desert.

Sona: The dance department really broke me down. I knew that when I left, I was going to be broke.

Jono: You get out of it what you put into it. I think the curriculum is there to help you but if you don't use it. .a raft won't blow itself up, know what I'm saying?

Hannah: I think it should be required from day one that you're learning the history of your chosen art form-- or any trade that you choose. That should be a given. Not all programs value that.

Sona: What school did provide me with was a group of artists that I knew I wanted to work with once I left school. That's useful.

Kimberly: I was forty years old. Its different at that age. I was close friends with the instructors. I'd been around long enough to know- you get this time, you gotta focus.

Hannah: You're not learning math. I mean, they could at least teach you to use a cash register. God knows that would be helpful when you graduate.

Jono: There needed to be a stronger internship component, we needed more real world experience. My internship was at the Columbus symphony. It was 3 months long. That's nothing.

Kimberley: They taught us how to put together a portfolio – they didn't teach us what to do with that portfolio.

Hannah: The bad part about that time is that you're looking to someone else for validation instead of looking within yourself.

Sona: On Saturdays if I was going past my teacher's office and his door was open, I'd go in and he'd stop what he was doing and we'd talk. Just by having that, and knowing that's there. Listening to people is a much better asset sometimes than telling them something.

Jono: The reason I didn't do a class in Marketing or business was because by the time I realized I could, that I should, it was too late to fit it in.

Hannah: My undergrad degree prepared me to apply for graduate school.

Kimberly: The film industry is hell to get into.

Jono: I'll marry rich-- that's my long-term economic plan.

Sona: Fresh out of college-- art student or not-- you're always going to be lost. You're always going to flounder. That's what you're supposed to do fresh out of college

LQ
Slide 13

Jeff:

You know what colleges and administrators could do? They could tell you honestly that nobody in the "real world" could give a fuck less where you went to school or what you learned there. They could tell you that, after having all kinds of license to be creative and autonomous, you would have to start over and act like a monkey dancing for peanuts and do that for years until you could convince someone that you had enough experience to upgrade your repertoire of tricks. And even then you will probably never feel as free as you did when you lived in a sheltered bubble and thought that writing (or dancing or painting or piano) was the most important thing in the world.

Sorry.

Listen, there aren't enough publishing companies in America to publish everyone who comes out of a creative writing program. But no one ever told me that. My teachers weren't honest. As far as I'm concerned, it's their responsibility to paint an honest picture of what the publishing world looks like. They never even told me what could be done with a creative writing degree. 'You are trained to write. Good luck.' "

I'm a bad salesman. Or, more accurately, I hate to sell myself.

My- how should I say, lack of professional success is largely due, I believe, to the fact that I have been up until now unwilling to play the game. But poverty grows old. And I am learning new tricks. Like how to jump through hoops.

SQ

LQ

Slide Sequence A (Photo Images)

LQ

SQ (Sound Out)

Slide

Duo

Jennifer

You know, photography is expensive. So I work a day job; but I'm also working to get people to see my photos. You gotta get someone to see your work, somehow. So you just do it.

Travis

I don't think those things can be taught. You have to self-motivate. It's something you have or something you don't, you know?

Jennifer

Sure, its clear cut- if its easy for you, like him.

Travis

That part's never been hard for me. I had teachers asking me to introduce them to so and so. And I'm thinking- you're the teacher, you should be introducing me.

Jennifer

Yeah, but there's this competitive edge, you see it a lot in the visual arts. It's like someone is young and talented – I had a photographer that I was assisting in class tell me once, don't share your ideas with me because I'll take them.

Travis

In design it's all about the party. It's all about who you know.

Jennifer

That's true, but-

Travis

But it's about confidence too. It's about valuing your own work. In school, they can tell you how to price things out in the world, but until you're out there doing it, you just don't know. If someone says I'll give you \$1800 for that painting and you say that's okay, I'll take \$1000,

Jennifer

I would completely do that.

Travis

You're basically telling that person that your work is not valuable. Nobody taught me that in school.

Jennifer

My problem has always been that I second-guess my own abilities.- so when I should be learning to look out for myself, I undercut my own stuff. You, you're a tradesman, you went to school to learn an artistic trade. Photography -

Travis

-- is more a fine art. That's true.

Jennifer

You went to school to learn interior design, so they taught you the business of things, you know.

Travis

But I still had trouble telling someone what my rates were at first. I couldn't do it. Now I try to keep them on the phone for an extra fifteen minutes, you know. Hourly rate and all. I'm like a lawyer.

Jennifer

The problem with school is that you put someone who's eighteen or nineteen years old in there, and they don't know what they want to be. They don't even know who they are, for god's sake. It's ridiculous.

Travis

I still say it's mostly you taking what you learned. Teachers can't hand hold the entire time.

Jennifer

But if there was just one class, something, maybe just a two hour thing where you met and talked about practical things. At school they just acted like all of us were supposed to show up at some big gallery and ask to be shown. That's not how it works. You have to start at a small gallery first, you know, if even that, and at the same time assist an established photographer.

Travis

There is this artist we know who has a lot of us work at the Memorial Trust Offices -

Jennifer

Uh huh. Yes.

Travis

You know, big fancy foundation – anyway, he has tons of pieces and he spends a lot of his day-

Jennifer

Every day-

Travis

Every day on the phone making connections. And it may take several years before those people buy a painting from him, but he's been contacting them everyday- and eventually, they buy 10 of them at \$1000 each, you know.

Jennifer

Yeah. That's a big deal. And he worked for that.

Travis

He did. I'd like to ask him if school helped him learn to do that.

Jennifer

Yeah. Me too.

SQ

LQ (Long shift)

Slide Sequence B (images into a text slide)

SQ (sound Out)

Bobby:

Who Am I?

Looking at me you get a very specific image of who I am

If I turn this way that image is changed

No matter where you're sitting you are now getting different information and a different picture still...black male, 5'8", 200 pounds, stocky, self deprecating.

If I turn this way, it changes again

And again

And again

College

University

Conservatory

School

I went to open myself up to all my infinite possibilities

And in some ways the school succeeded

But in other ways I spent four years being put into a box

That's where they put me

They taught me that black was less

They didn't mean to but that's what they taught me

They taught me that being an "artist" was about making money

They didn't mean to, but that's what they taught me

They taught me that euro centric, western-based theatre was the "best" theatre

They didn't mean to but that's what they taught me

They taught me to bow to authority

They didn't mean to but that's what they taught me

I know now

That I am responsible for who I am

as an artist

and as a person

My response to their box

Was to break it

They taught me that too.

SQ

LQ

Slide Sequence C

LQ

SQ (Sound out)

Music Stands

Jeff: I never really considered it as a career- I wasn't even majoring in it- then one day, this teacher pulls me aside, and says

Kim: hey- you're pretty good at this. You should think about a career.'

Jeff: And I was like- really? I switched majors the next day. No looking back.

clap

Sona: I would say that school prepared me for being an intelligent and informed artist working in the real world. The scholarly aspects of the arts are fascinating, and an understanding how to approach my discipline from an analytical perspective prepared me to have a more critical eye and to understand art in the context of our popular culture and history. I expected to leave school and to eventually have a significant influence in my field. I found that being an artist is a difficult thing, moreso than I expected.

clap

Jono: Do I have choices?

Bobby: Can I choose projects that are meaningful?

Hannah: Or, is the balance of making a life in the arts disconnected from my beliefs, my passions...?

Jeff: I didn't ask those questions in school. Neither did my teachers.

clap

Hannah: I don't believe that it is up to a University to give their honest assessment of a student's ability to succeed and compete. I actually feel that could have a detrimental impact! I think what the University program should prepare them for is what to expect and how to take care of themselves in the process.

Kim: For my final project I had to produce one and a half minutes of animation. It took a year and a half to make. It was probably one of the most intense and grueling experiences of my life. The last 4 months I had my sleeping bag in there. I got about 4 hours of sleep at night. That's just the nature of the field. Everybody slept in there and we got really close.

Clap

Jono: When I moved to Chicago I started looking in the newspapers- I wanted to move to some place that had opportunities for artists, but, I wasn't ready for New York. OK, so when I first got here I put feelers out. I got work doing grant writing, PR stuff, creating forms and programs. . .I didn't really do any of that in school. What I'm realizing now is

that I'm working in the non-profit sector, it's what I like, it's what I'm interested in – working for an arts organization. But not necessarily as an artist... I guess I'm not really working as an artist.

clap

Bobby: Both Carnegie and SUNY Purchase dropped kids every year -weeding them out, letting them know they weren't good enough -talented enough. It seemed humane -but there are so many other things besides talent that help create a successful artist in this business . Those are the things it seems to me that a program might try to help a kid focus on.

Jeff: discipline,

Hannah: humor,

Kim: generosity,

Jono: kindness,

Sona: work ethic,

Bobby: How you focus on them, though- that's a tough question.

Hannah: I made sure that I did professional work during summers while I was in college because it was clear to me from the beginning that they weren't going to be helpful in finding me gainful employment when I graduated. Since working in the arts is largely about networking, and since my school didn't help me with that AT ALL, I mean, at all, I worked.

clap

jono: My dad wanted me to go to college. So I went to school with the mind set that I was going to do something practical. And the more I tried to find what I liked, the more I kept coming back to music. I went to my dad and said,

Sona: hey, I think I'm going to major in music.

Jono: He was like,

Kim: how are you going to use it ?

Jono: and

Kim: you better find those answers now as a freshman.

Jono: So I took what I needed to take to leave school and feel prepared.

Jeff: This girl in the apprentice program at Actor's Theatre of Louisville gave me really good advice once. She told me to find a day job where you're totally indispensable. Where the people totally need you there. Then, you work really hard for them for a year or so and pile up a stack of favors. After that, you can cash in when you need time off for an audition. Noone at school ever mentioned anything like that.

clap

Kim: After I got an MFA, I taught undergrad acting classes. I used to tell my students, all of them, not to major in theatre. I told them to get a strong liberal arts degree. Because when I got to graduate school, the people I was in school with that were the most interesting, well, they majored in Religion and History- even economics. The ones who majored in theatre – and I don't want to insult anybody – were not as interesting. They weren't as well-rounded. I told my students that it was important to be well-rounded. That having a strong liberal arts background meant that they were learning to be critical thinkers. They were learning how to problem solve. You should leave college knowing the philosophers, the politicians, you've studied physics and calculus. That's the single most important thing for an artist- a developed, curious intellect. I know it's different, it's just what I think.

Bobby: The difference between dance and theatre is fame. There is no fame in dance. In dance you are excited about the work for the work. Never for fame.

Hannah: Lots of women who graduated with me don't do it anymore. I mean, you work 50 to 60 hours a week. You can't have kids and do that.

clap

Sona: So I go in to meet with the career services guy, winter my senior year. He looks at my resume, and listens to me talk about how much I love acting. He says-

Jono: my brother has a restaurant on the west side- he needs help- I'm happy to call him for you."

Sona: It was incredibly depressing.

clap

Jeff: I think, to a certain degree I'm the pride of my undergrad school - because I'm still working in the arts. I still have a dream that goes that way and I'm willing to sacrifice, basically dollars, to pursue that dream. I guess money has never been a huge factor for me. I'm not really sure why.

Bobby: I know three or four artists who came out with me and we're good. We're putting out strong work. But- three or four years after we get out of school we're just getting web sites up. There was this attitude in school that if you're training to be a web designer, you have to understand computers. If you're a painter, don't worry about it. Like it's a secondary medium. Oh, man, was that wrong. Its frustrating. Because the teachers weren't hip to whats happening in the real world, I was already severely behind just stepping out of the gate. Truth is, soon there will be no difference between visual artists working in web based mediums and those of us in- lets say 'non-virtual disciplines'. And in terms of the market, forget it. I loved my teachers, and my program, but I was prepared to enter a professional world that may as well have been 19th century France.

clap
clap

Kim: People ask me- how do you go about being successful in this business?
I say,

Hannah: Number 1. Be related to a powerful person in the business.

Jeff: Number 2. Be incredibly good-looking.

Number 3. Be the luckiest person in the world.

clap

Soan: I talk to my friends that went to Conservatory and it's like, they are afraid of what they can't do because somebody was always saying-

Jono: You can't do that

Hannah: You can't do that

Bobby: You can't do that

Kim: You can't do that

Jeff: You can't do that

Sona: Like they were always falling short. At my school, a liberal arts school, we did anything and everything because no one said no. No one even thought we couldn't do it because everyone knew we didn't know what we were doing in the first place. That worked out ok.

clap

Jono: To a certain degree, rural schools like mine are at a disadvantage. They have to get students, they have to pad numbers, or they lose their programs. Talking about who to keep and who to let go is a luxury, you know? In a rural area, everyone is welcome in the theatre program- stay as long as you like! We need students.

Jeff: So once you reach your goals you start looking around, you say

All: what am I going to do next?

Jeff: Actors, dancers -- if you want to have a family, a house, you might as well join the navy – but pursuing those sorts of things as a performing artist- the reasons why I was doing it became less important than the reasons why I couldn't do it. And that was a very sad realization.

clap

Sona: Teach students how to write a grant,

Bobby: who to ask for money,

Hannah: how to book a space.

Jono: So many graduates are doing all of that anyway.

Kim: They might as well learn how to do it at school rather than learning it on the fly.

clap

All: How does anyone without a wealthy parent survive?

Clap

Clap

Bobby: There are ways to do the work I do out in the community; you know, in classes, and centers, and with people who aren't necessarily artists. Its not just a fall back- I took a class about people who do this kind of community-engaged work by choice. They make a living practicing their art. It seemed pretty cool. And, it seemed better than temping.

Jeff: I am very lucky, very lucky to be working in the field that I studied for. I live in Louisville, Kentucky. I do a lot of professional development for teachers, teaching them how to integrate arts into their classrooms. I tour the state. That's what I do. I get paid to do that. Did I mention the fact that I feel very lucky?

Hannah: The very first day of freshman year. Remember that?

She brought us all into that big thrust theatre-- we were all so naive and fresh-faced, all going to be Broadway stars. She looked across all our faces for about a minute of silence and said to us (in her hyper-dramatic way, dude, that woman is crazy...) she said,

Kim: If there is anything else that you can think to do, ANYTHING else that would interest you for the next four years as much as being in this building will, GO DO THAT. This life is difficult and it really stinks."

Hannah: And of course, none of us left.

clap

Jono: In one of my first performance classes we were given an exercise to think of the animal that we thought most resembled us. We then had to perform that animal. Now, this is new to me, but as I'm looking around the room everyone seems to understand. Like they've done this before. Like most of college- someone asking me to do something that they never explain or try to help me understand. But I want to be a good student so I do it. I come up with my animal. And I have to say I did it pretty well. I am awesome at my animal. I kicked that animal assignment's ass. Only thing is, ever since then, no one's asked me to do my animal. Doing the animal has never gotten me a part or got my foot in any door. I can't even put it on my resume. And to this day, I still don't understand what the hell that assignment was all about. So, is that my fault, or the school's?

clap

Sona: Most undergraduate arts professors are realistic with folks – they tell people that 95% won't get a job in their chosen field. And I think that's okay; the things that you learn in the arts translate to more success in other fields.

clap

All: Stop watching American Idol.

All: Stop reading magazines.

All: Give up trying to be famous.

clap

clap

Bobby: We were taught form, technique- skills. And I've found that useful. But sometimes, if technique is all you've been trained in, if that's what you're relying on, you're empty- art cannot be empty. Its spiritual. Artist should be curious- passionate- they should have a large world view. And all that needs to start in school.

Hannah: Every day that I've spent as a 'professional artist'-- everyday is asking yourself "do I still really want to do this?" That can be exhausting. I believe this field needs people like me. I love what I do. I'm just not sure I came out of school with enough strategies to fight that exhaustion. But I'm trying. Every day, I'm trying.

LQ (Black out)

SQ (Curtain)

LQ (Curtain)

LQ (Fade to Preshow)

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