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**MOBILE ENCHANTMENT:
THE VIRGINIA THEATER MACHINE LLC,
A NEW TWIST ON DRIVE-IN THEATER**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

Mark Jonas Lerman
MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

Director: David S. Leong
Professor
Department of Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
April 27, 2018

Acknowledgement

I probably would not have returned to graduate school were it not for a kick, encouragement from my wife Kay Jenkins, so all thanks start with her. And there would be no Virginia Theatre Machine to write about were it not for my association with longtime friend and collaborator, Jeremy Woodward. The success of the ten year run of *Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol* is the result of the core group of artists who have been there since day one, in addition to Jeremy and Kay this includes: Ed Whitacre, Bart Fasbender and Janea Whitacre. Central to all of this work was the support of my biggest fans, who were often also unpaid tech support, Jackie Lerman, Kathryn Lerman, and Marty Katzoff. Getting back to the actual writing and research of the thesis, I want to thank the following faculty at VCU for their support and guidance (in alphabetical order): Aaron Anderson, Noreen Barnes, Keith Kirk, David Leong and Jesse Njus. David Eliet needs to be mentioned for his key mentorship early in my career. I wish my mom was around as this would have made her happy, although not as happy as me finally getting a haircut. And lastly I return to where I started with a big thank you to Kay, who continued to ~~kick~~ encourage throughout the entire thesis writing process.

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Abstract

MOBILE ENCHANTMENT: THE VIRGINIA THEATRE MACHINE LLC, A NEW TWIST ON DRIVE-IN THEATRE.

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Director: David S. Leong, Professor, Department of Theatre.

A disassembling of the Virginia Theatre Machine (VTM), LLC and its annual restaging of an adaptation of Charles Dickens' novella, *A Christmas Carol*. The VTM is a custom-built trailer theater that combines the performance energy of street theater with the magic and wonder of a fully designed theatrical production. I provide a historical context for this 21st century revising of mobile theater that switches the paradigm of the traditional theater experience by bringing the stage to audiences, for free. I draw from critical social and cultural theory to make sense of the audience impact in public and private outdoor spaces. I examine how each new performance environment brings its own resonance to bear on the wonder of the presentation at hand. I present the VTM as an alternative business model and form of theater outreach to inspire a new generation of theater-makers to rethink the traditional constraints of producing theatre.

Introduction: *Taking Apart the Machine*

A mobile machine that unfolds and surprises.

“This magical trailer...there’s so much crammed into that thing it amazes me every single year.” Lou

Location, location, location: The environment that frames the embedded machine.

“It’s just the beauty of Merchants Square, all the lights. It’s like you’ve got this gorgeous Set. It’s just the cobblestones and the brick and all the lights and decorations and the crisp air.” Veronica

It’s all about the timing: Holiday season in America, and the expectations that come with that.

“And being outside, yeah, it’s good...we just bundle up with hot chocolate and it’s good because that feels Christmas-y too.” Kate & Joel

The power of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*.

“We love *A Christmas Carol* and Dickens, so that was kinda like a moth to a flame.” Hal

Creating new family traditions.

“We have kind of a routine where we eat at the same restaurants [in Merchants Square] and we do pretty much the same thing, the Virginia Theatre Machine event is always something we work into our annual weekend.” Michael

A creation story.

“At first it was going to be called *Bubba Moshe’s Gourmet Ice Cream and Puppet Theatre!*” Mark Lerman, Proprietor and Director, Virginia Theatre Machine, LLC.

The Virginia Theater Machine (VTM) is a contemporary and relatively novel model of theater outreach, even though its design and purpose are rooted in ideas that have been around for hundreds of years. The quotes on the previous page, all but the last taken from interviews with longtime VTM audience members, represent the machine's core parts as manifested through VTM's production of *Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol (MTACC)*, an adaptation of the Charles Dickens's classic, *A Christmas Carol (ACC)*. Ten different versions of *MTACC* were performed during ten consecutive holiday seasons in the center of historical Colonial Williamsburg's (CW) commercial center, Merchants Square. In this thesis, I deconstruct the machine through a close reading of the various methods, engagements, and performance outcomes that have bolstered the projects' growth over a ten-year period.

The story of the VTM is one of a possible alternative for theatre-makers in the 21st century; students and seasoned theater professionals who want to chart their own course. It is a narrative of confronting the obstacles of mainstream theater models and embracing a different path. Theater artists who are motivated and inspired to form their own company and/or performance venue in the US too often default to the institutional model of the 501(c)3 not-for-profit. I detail here the conception and construction of a mobile performance machine that can unfold and surprise in various spaces (Appendix 2a). I show how the performance of the VTM in Merchants Square, a predictable place of consumption embedded in a living history museum, became an enchanted theatrical experience for many audience members. I demonstrate how, as well, the particular impact of staging performances on this mobile stage during a season where expectations of family togetherness and other values are in the forefront of audiences' expectations of engaging in holiday rituals. Central to my analysis of the success and appeal of VTM's holiday production is the role of the original twenty minute serial script written in 2008,

MTACC and its various adaptations written and designed in new form from 2008 to 2017. Dickens' novella, in any form or adaptation, has a long and complex history of supporting regional theaters in the United States, and likewise played a critical role in the creation and continued success of VTM's production.

Exposing and analyzing the parts at work in VTM's adaptation of *ACC* is more than one case study of a production history and structure of mobile theater, it makes clear the components of a contemporary form of a creative mobile machine that has the potential to bring a taste of mystery and awe to otherwise privileged spaces, even when consumption is at center stage. *ACC* itself is a financial juggernaut paradoxically presented, hailed, and loved as an antidote to the commercialization that consumes the holiday season, especially in the United States. VTM's serialized story, told anew each year through script and puppets, and the VMT's mysterious creative mobile machine structure, brought an enchanting experience to audiences in CW, many of whom were invested in the role of contemporary participant in CW's historical reenactments celebrating the values at work in the birth of a nation. In the conclusion of my thesis, I suggest that the lessons learned by using this lionized *ACC* text might be applied to other texts with seemingly similar cultural weight, and that future creative theatrical endeavors (mobile or stationary) may potentially disrupt, if only for 30 minutes, the very wheels of consumption that offer its financial support.

In the first chapter, *What is, the Virginia Theater Machine*, I outline the history of VTM and include an overview of how the history of the regional theater movement in the United States, in conjunction with Federal tax codes, impacted both the current state of institutional theater in America and my ultimate response to take a different approach. I detail the birth of the machine as an idea, the construction of the mobile theater, the process of securing funding and

space in the heart of CW, and examine the performance methods embraced by this hybridized form of street theater, with an emphasis on the use of puppetry. As described on the VTM's website "The Virginia Theatre Machine is a custom-built trailer theatre with lighting, sound and special effect capabilities that presents original theatre to audiences in an outdoor environment, anywhere a 2,000lb eleven and a half ft. high by eight ft. wide trailer can be embedded" (Lerman "What We Do"). The VTM operates under a core value that all artists should be compensated with a competitive professional wage, and that audiences should be able to attend, in public or private spaces, free of charge. The VTM is incorporated as an LLC and bookings are contracted with paying clients who have a financial, teaching, political, entertainment, and/or community interest in bringing free theater to audiences.

The primary VTM production for the past ten years has been the serial *MTACC*, a two or three actor play re-written and re-designed every year for performance on the VTM. In addition to several years of touring to schools and libraries (it was on the Virginia Commission for the Arts Touring Roster for four years, from 2010-2014: Appendix 2b & 2c), and the occasional private party or business booking, the show has performed for all ten years in roughly the same location in Merchants Square, Williamsburg Virginia, and has been paid for by the Merchants Square Business Association. *MTACC* routinely opens on Thanksgiving weekend and runs each weekend, two to three shows each day, through the last Sunday before Christmas Eve, for a total of 28-32 shows per year and an annual attendance of 4,000-5,000. Christmas Eve (December 24) 2017, the fitting last date of the most recent run, marked the 301st performance of the ten versions that were created over the decade long performance history and presented to an approximate total audience of 45,000.

In addition, the VTM was commissioned by the College of William & Mary to develop a theme specific show on the element Mercury for a college sponsored international expo on the effects of Mercury to the planet and its inhabitants. The sponsor required the show, *A Mercurial Roadshow*, to be an educational outreach tool suitable for students from middle school through college age, as well as serving as entertainment for the scientists, from around the world, attending the Expo; a daunting task. In *A Mercurial Roadshow* audiences were entertained and informed as three actors presented what started as a staged radio re-interpretation of the famed *War of the Worlds* (adapted from the HG Wells story...and yes, it is no coincidence that Hg is the periodic symbol for the element mercury) radio broadcast performed by the other famous Welles, Orson Welles, and his Mercury Theatre. In this version though, the Martian invasion is halted by the toxic effects of mercury on the invading aliens, leading to a series of tangential stories, told by live actors and puppets, of the spread and dangers of mercury. While this commissioned educational performance was well received and demonstrated the power of the mobile machine to bring theater to varied audiences and public spaces, the machine's tenure in Merchant Square producing *ACC* is by far its most influential endeavor.

Whether the well-known Dickens ghost story or the vaudevillian pastiche of an original script on the seemingly inert subject matter of mercury, it is important to visualize the performance style of the VTM. Outdoor street theatre does not have the luxury of confining its audiences in a fixed space, assigned seating and sightlines, or the traditional tool of lighting to help focus the audiences' gaze. Street theatre must compete, visually and aurally, with the day to day hustle and bustle of wherever it sets up to perform – the smells of a nearby bakery, restaurant and/or street food vendor, or the occasional loud public exchanges of those who pass by the performance. In CW's Merchants Square, distractions can include costumed 17th century

characters, horses, and oxen, in addition to the many adorable and at times barking dogs walking with their owners on the famed DOG street (Duke of Gloucester). This constant street activity necessitates actor focus, energy, commitment, and specificity as fewer rules of social etiquette keep audience members from leaving for a more interesting destination. In our contemporary society, these norms of etiquette associated with traditional indoor theater spaces now include the sacrosanct request of “please turn off your cell or mobile device before the show.” In street theatre, however, this is less of an option as audiences continue to gather even after such an entreaty might be made, and so competing moments of dialogue from phone conversations in the audience at times occur while actors are performing.

VTM shows could be described as elevated street theatre. The VTM, unlike traditional street theatre, has added many of the production and design elements associated with the expectations of seeing a play in a theater building to help not just tell the story, but to also aid in maintaining the attention of the audience through visual and auditory marvel and surprise. An elevated stage, framed by a light and sound system, give audiences the impression that they are at a theater, if not inside a traditional building. Add to this an array of special effects that can include fog or snow machines, trap doors, transformative scenery, as well as a miniaturized fly system (to name a few), and the machine is then not just street theater, but a material theater on the street. After one installs a set and allows space for a backstage area for entrances, exits, technical staff and prop and equipment storage, there is usually only an eight-foot wide by three-foot deep playing space left on which the performers may work. This small footprint and limited stage space fuels creativity for all the theater-makers involved, especially the director, actors and puppeteers, as well as the scenic, puppet, and sound designers. The ultimate glue for all of these artists is the underlying importance of specificity needed to execute the story. The need for

precision (safety is always a consideration as the stage is three feet off the ground without railings) lends itself to seeking specificity in the actor's performance, gestures, and blocking, as well as conditioning the designers to pay attention to minute detail in all of their work.

Puppetry, especially the use of puppetry interacting with live actor performance, is one of the most important design and storytelling tools of the VTM and its 'abrevidation' (my word for describing my many abbreviated adaptations) of *ACC*. The puppets serve to attract and retain the audience's gaze, in addition to fulfilling their primary function of helping to tell what is, essentially, a ghost story. In chapter one I provide detailed descriptions and images of the puppets as they evolved in each version of *ACC*.

In Chapter Two, *A Christmas Carol: A vehicle for the creation of the VTM, LLC*, I explore the cultural weight and reverence of Charles Dickens' story in the United States, assess possible explanations for its perceived financial and moral value, and examine my relationship with the story as a theatre artist. The VTM and Merchants Square are not the first to capitalize on Dickens' story. I examine the creation of the story in 1843 and how Dickens himself sought financial gain from a story that challenged his readers to question their values related to wealth and consumption, their disregard for the poor, and responsibilities for their fellow citizens who might be less fortunate and in need. Why did this story, a response to an ever more industrializing England, have such a resounding response in the United States in the 19th, 20th and still in the 21st century. I address how it has it been appropriated across time and used across the United States for commercial and spiritual gain.

Is *ACC* a type of antidote to the heightened commercialism that defines the holiday season in the United States, where shopping for gifts and holiday trinkets and lights starts earlier and earlier every year? I suggest in this chapter that perhaps the need for stories like *ACC* grow

in their ability to counteract the emptiness and lack of purpose that can accompany shopping for shopping's sake alone. In addition, I consider how the audience's pre-existing familiarity and knowledge of the story and its message allow for its easier appropriation as a strategy to bring audiences further into places of consumption like Merchant Square in *CW*. In this chapter I also underscore the messages in *ACC* and in *VTM*'s 'abrevidations' that worked to counter the forces that drive heightened consumption, especially during the holiday season; an examination of how Dickens' magical ghost story provides the textual skeleton for infusing malls and shops with the idea that there are more important things in life than shopping and deeper ways of connecting with family and other people.

Were audiences drawn initially to the known quantity of *ACC*, returning each year to re-experience the familiar story? Or was it more of a draw to this one of a kind outdoor spectacle? Were they captured by surprise when they encountered the "iPod inspired version of an airstream trailer" (Jeremy Woodward, longtime collaborator and the designer/fabricator of the *VTM*) and then induced to stay through the age-old magic of *ACC*'s message of peace, love, and turning away greed and wealth as keys to happiness? Were the successes of the *VTM* dependent on the time of year that it performed in Merchants Square, more specifically the audience's expectations that a holiday experience should make one feel something more than the excitement of holding a new specialized kitchen gadget in a William Sonoma bag?

In Chapter Three, *Creative Mobile Enchantment*, I examine how the *VTM*'s novel way of presenting theater has historical precedents and point to other contemporary efforts that bring theater to the streets and into other everyday spaces. I highlight the cultural resonance of these efforts in each instance, highlighting the larger values and beliefs that are lifted up through audience participation in these performances. I examine the creative mobile enchantment that is

‘a la mode’ in pop culture as evidenced by the rise of the gourmet food truck industry and other mobile enterprises, and briefly note the history of other types of trailers, trucks and mobile goods and services vehicles in the US – including class-based creative mobile ventures. I suggest that the retail truck revolution strives to reach new customers (audiences), surprise new customers (audience), and bring their wares and services to geographically isolated patrons. These mobile retailers identify as having an independent and enterprising spirit that defines and differentiates them from the big retailers, however they are, at the same time, reinforcing cultural spaces where consumption is at the center of the creation of a creative consumer identity. Whether gourmet food, books and clothing, or theater and opera, they are magical vehicles re-enchanting their desired audience’s experience of commerce and art.

To think about these creative mobile efforts that reflect the VTM’s production of *ACC* in Merchants Square, I turn to sociologist George Ritzer’s (2005) work *Enchanting A Disenchanted World*, and literary studies and cultural critic Stephen Greenblatt’s *Resonance and Wonder*. Ritzer focuses on how businesses, and other organizations attempt to “revolutionize the means of consumption” (Ritzer 48) by making them more emotional, mystical, enchanted experiences to counter the predictability, lack of human connection, and sameness of rationalized spaces. His work helps me set the stage for audience’s expectations of Merchants Square and CW as a “cathedral of consumption” (7), a space where they might experience some sense of enchantment, or magical setting, while at the same time perform their identity as consumers buying unique, seemingly special products at boutique stores like The Craft House or The Cheese Shop (or even, as contradictory as it may seem, in chain stores re-visioned as one of a kind boutiques in CW like William Sonoma or Barnes and Noble). Greenblatt’s work allows me to unpack the work of the production, the performance itself as an event that has the potential

to move audiences from creative consumers in a living museum, to audience members engaged fully, transported through the script, puppets, and other theatrical moments in *MTACC* to feel its message of charity and family.

Throughout this thesis, I weave in some of the experiences of repeat audience members. Part of the annual ritual for repeat audiences, as they gather in front of the trailer/theater to get a good “seat” (standing position) for the show, would be for them to engage myself or the other primary actor/character “Master Thespian Ed Whitacre” in conversation that would identify themselves as returning audience members. This could also happen after the performance as well. The length of their history with the show would often inform how casual or familiar their greetings to us. Many would address us with the attitude of old friends they had not seen in a year. Ed and I would acknowledge and reciprocate in kind, even though it was rare we would remember a particular person given the numbers of audiences we interact with year after year. During these brief exchanges they would often ask what was new this year, to which we would give the traditional cryptic reply of “we shall see!” If the repeat viewers included parents with children, these pleasantries would usually include the mandatory reference to how much their children had grown since they started seeing our show their first year. The familiarity would grow even more, if they or their children had been one of the three volunteers asked to participate in the show for 9 of the past 10 years. It is important to note that these volunteers would be rewarded at the end of every show, not just with the traditional applause of appreciation, but with a custom designed 3-inch button that would proclaim them to be a “Virginia Theatre Machine Junior Thespian” (Appendix 2d). After nine years of requesting three volunteers for approximately 30+ shows/year, we are approximating that there are over 800 such “Junior Thespians” out in the world! These proud “Junior Thespians” would approach us with

an even more intimate sense of connection, with some of them even wearing their previous year's badges for the occasion.

In November and December of 2017, I took the extra step of engaging more deeply with those audience members who would greet us before or after the show. Once I had determined they had seen the show for at least five years, I would ask them if they might be interested in participating in an interview with me as part of my thesis work for the completion of my Masters degree this year. I made it clear that I would contact them in the winter of 2018, should they be interested and willing to provide me with their email address (having to wait for the 'expedited' IRB approval that would take nearly 8 weeks). The act of requesting an email was not a surprise request for any of these individuals, as they had almost all already provided it to me by signing a guest book that would be placed on the stage at the end of every show "to help the VTM keep you informed of our next production." The only difference is that this time I kept their information in a separate journal with their name clearly spelled out and with quick notations of any pertinent identifiers they might have casually mentioned to me when they approached so I could more clearly remember my conversations. Several examples of these notations include: 1) how "bradleysmom" (this is how the woman self-identified and even signed the mailing list, but with a pseudonym used) proudly relayed to me how her son had refused to be the volunteer turkey when younger, but did this time as he was now older and had pursued drama training; 2) how a man with three kids noted that he had been seeing it long enough to realize that it evolved from a 15 minute presentation to the more current 30 minute version; 3) how one person leaned in to confide with me how most everyone else in the audience thinks that "Master Thespian Ed Whitacre is the guy in charge", when he really knows it is Bob; 4) how another had all of the DVD's we had produced years ago and why weren't we selling those anymore? (I sold DVD's of

previous years shows for 3 years, before giving up on the cost and time involved to make sure they were shot by professional videographers with appropriate editing skills); and 5) being given a card a daughter had drawn to give me from her memory of last year's show.

I have woven sections from these interviews into each chapter to provide specific examples of how this relatively random selection of viewers support and shape my arguments as to the success and resonance of the VTM and our 'abrevidation' of Charles Dickens' classic *ACC*. As noted earlier, the only similarities among the participants is a willingness to greet the performers either before or after the show to comment on this year's experience and the fact they have seen the production more than five times over the past ten years (most having seen it for close to all ten years). The interviews were conducted either in person or on the phone, recorded, and then transcribed and coded to help pick up recurring themes and identify appropriate quotes. I used more open-ended questions to help generate a conversation rather than a question and answer format. My goal was to have the participants not just address specific themes of my choosing but to create an environment where the participants could share unexpected insights as well. Examples of these types of questions from my interview guide included:

- Do you make plans to come see the show or is it more spontaneous?
- Do you talk about the show after you leave?
- Do you do anything else down here or do you just come to see the show?
- How would you describe the experience of being in MS?
- If someone asked you about the show, how would you describe it?
- How important is the story of *ACC* for you?
- When you knew I was interested in talking with you about this is there anything else about your experience as an audience member that you wanted to share that we have not covered?

In the *Conclusion* of my thesis, I explore the lessons that can be learned from this one attempt to redefine the structure of presenting theatre and engaging new audiences. I turn to the question of whether these elements – parts that made up the success of VTM's *ACC*- could be

applied to the adaptation of other culturally known/familiar texts that may also carry messages and values that counter individual interests and recognize social problems. How might future creative mobile theatrical endeavors potentially disrupt and enchant cathedrals of consumption like outdoor shopping malls and sites of historical and cultural tourism? My hope is that by taking apart the VTM to reveal the components detailed in each of my chapters, other theater artists will be able to think outside of the traditional box of theatre, artistically and fiscally.

WHAT IS, THE VIRGINIA THEATRE MACHINE.

Depending on how one contextualizes it, the VTM can be defined in many ways. It is a visually distinctive custom built trailer theatre with lighting, sound and special effect capabilities that presents live theatre anywhere a two thousand pound, eleven and a half foot tall by eight and a half foot wide trailer can be embedded (Appendix 2e). It is a concept that hybridizes a street theater performance style with a fully realized and designed theatrical production. It is a producing entity that operates under the core value that all artists should be compensated with the minimum of a living wage equivalent. It is a community outreach vehicle for the performing arts that believes audiences need not always be the primary source of revenue for a production. It is a theatre operating under a for profit business model as a fully incorporated LLC. All of these aforementioned definitions are ultimately a response to my experiences as a theatre-maker and artistic director who began his entrance into the world of professional theatre in the mid 1980's and who temporarily left that world twenty years later in 2005. I must address some history, both of the profession and personal, to fully answer the question of "What is the VTM?"

An important component of early to mid-twentieth century US theater history revolves around a cyclical rally for "professional decentralization" from the mecca of New York City and Broadway. What started, and what many would say failed, as the Little Theatre movement of the 1920's, helped fuel at least two other significant attempts at what Joseph Zeigler, in his 1973 book Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage, labeled as non-commercial theater

alternatives: The Federal Theatre and the Group Theatre. While the Federal Theatre was important for its massive decentralization effort, the Group Theatre was noted for “paving the way for regional theatres in its orientation toward group effort,” and as “proof that communal effort could create a more advanced theatre” (Zeigler 10). Zeigler, and others he quotes, continually reference the “failures” of all these aforementioned efforts and other smaller ones along the way. One of the few exceptions being the Cleveland Play House, which started in 1916 as part of the Little Theatre movement, but survived as a result of its growth into a large institution that Zeigler heralds as the first successful permanent American regional theatre.

An important message in Zeigler’s book is that success and failure in the American theatre has long been defined by terms of institutionalization, which necessitates a commercial success to maintain longevity and institutional scale. It is somewhat ironic that one of the major values and measures of the success of theatre in the US, a perishable and ephemeral art form, is rooted in its financial success, growth and sustainability as an institution. While the full history of the regional theatre movement is a complex one, the success stories are primarily all linked to their success as institutions. These institutions ultimately all grew as not-for-profit organizations, but regardless of the for-profit or not-for-profit designation, they still required (require) significant amounts of capital to sustain their institutional status. And because this is a country where bigger is often conflated with better, so too have these institutions grown, along with their demands for increased capital and revenue.

While it may seem I am getting far off topic, I find it is worth placing the birth and rise of these artistic institutions in context with the laws of the US government defining the structure of these not-for-profit institutions. This is not to imply causation, but to underscore the complexity of the economics of professional theatre in the US. As outlined in the Statistics of Income

Bulletin's *A History of the Tax-Exempt Sector*, the establishment of a government regulated system that encouraged philanthropy started in 1894 with the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act that excluded “corporations, companies, or associations organized and conducted solely for charitable, religious, or educational purposes” from a two percent tax on corporate income (Arnsberger 106). The Revenue Act of 1913 finally established what is referred to as the modern income tax system, with the Revenue Act of 1917 introducing individual income tax deductions for charitable donations. Over the next one hundred years, Congress added or deleted to the code almost twenty times through a series of revenue acts. The most relevant of these for this discussion is the Revenue Act of 1954. “The Revenue Code of 1954 introduced a number of changes to the tax-exempt organization tax law. Most notably, the current structure of the Internal Revenue Code was developed, with section 501(c) describing tax-exempt organizations” (124). The 501(c) designation that almost all arts organizations would have to use, should they desire the benefits of tax exemption, was (and still is) the 501(c)3 that listed the following types of organizations that could be exempt from the Internal Revenue Code: “Religious, educational, charitable, scientific, or literary organizations; organizations that test for public safety. Also, organizations that prevent cruelty to children or animals, or foster national or international amateur sports competition” (123). For any theatrical organization, or arts organization for that matter, to be considered for tax-exempt status, they had to make a case for their educational service to the community as the only way to qualify. Yes, the arts are educational, but is that always a theatre’s primary mission?

I briefly allude to this complex history of the tax code to note the confluence of the dates of the formation of the Little Theatre movement in the 1920’s (Revenue Act of 1917) and the birth and growth of the regional theatre movement in the 1950’s and 1960’s (Revenue Act of

1954). I am not suggesting that the US government was responding to the needs of the arts, but rather that perhaps the arts were reacting to the opportunities that presented themselves. Private and public philanthropy played a significant role in the building and growth of these regional theatres, the models that shaped several generations of theatre-makers.

Another important consequence of the Tax Code of 1954, known as the Johnson Amendment, was the addition that “charities were not allowed to participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), a political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office” (124). While the power of allegory in the theatre can still allow organizations to be political without directly advocating by name for any one candidate, theatres to this day have to be wary of how to navigate their often left leaning politics with the tax code. As the New York Times just reported, however, on November 26, 2017, this sixty year old law might now be repealed as it is now the centerpiece of a major political battle being played out by the religious right in their attempt to exert more political power. The New York Times traces the origins of the Johnson Amendment and its name, “to Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and his 1954 re-election campaign. Concerned that his electoral prospects could be diminished by attacks from a pair of conservative nonprofit groups, he slipped a provision into a tax code overhaul to bar certain nonprofit groups from participating in political campaigns” (Vogel). The potential consequences of the repeal are great, as noted in the Times “a move that is championed by the religious right, but opposed by thousands of religious and nonprofit leaders, who warn that it could blur the line between charity and politics” (Vogel). While the current President of the United States continues to advocate for the Johnson Amendments repeal, it has yet to be enacted by Congress (as of March 22, 2018 as reported on by all major national news media on the passing of the 1.3 trillion dollar budget by the House). If the repeal were ever passed, it will

certainly be a tool of the right to potentially fabricate churches to divert money directly into political campaigns, and might, in theory, free up theatres and other arts organizations to directly advocate for candidates as well. The problem, especially for larger arts institutions however, is that the board of trustees for these larger institutions is often composed of individuals across party lines, so the institution's freedom to endorse might offend a generous trustee or donor.

Through the support of these evolving tax codes, the doors to philanthropy were opened to allow a passionate group of theatre artists to follow their dream for a decentralized and regional professional theatre movement. Eventually, an organization to “promote professional non-profit theatres in the United States” (“Our Mission”) would be established in 1961 also as a 501(c)3: Theatre Communications Group (TCG). Its membership grew from 15 member organizations to what is now listed on TCG's website as 500 member theatres representing forty-eight states and territories. Institutional financial stability for larger regional theatres, let alone growth, has not been an easy road as many institutions are now being forced to respond to the power dynamics that that are the result of 501(c)3 organizational structures, based on a corporate model, that requires a board of directors. While the 501(c)3 board of director is a non-compensated position, board members still serve as the fiduciary oversight of the organization as well as carrying responsibility for the hiring and firing of the leaders of these institutions. As economic disparity has grown radically over the past few decades and government funding has stagnated or decreased, this once heralded organizational structure has evolved into a system where the financial power of the organization can often rest with just a handful of volunteers with deep pockets who have no theatrical experience other than a passion for seeing theatre and/or a passion for being known for seeing theatre. A brief examination of Theatre Facts 2015, an annual report on the “finances, attendances and operations” (Voss) of the U.S. professional

not-for-profit theatres produced by TCG, clearly highlights this growing dependency on the very rich as board members, and opens the door to the discussion of the role of Dickens' *ACC* and its overly prominent presence on stages throughout the US, a discussion that has significant repercussions for the VTM and one that I will address in greater detail in a subsequent chapter.

While TCG boasts approximately 500 member theaters in 2015, only 198 responded to its annual fiscal survey. As the former artistic director of the smallest possible member budget sized group represented in the survey, I can attest that the completion of the survey is a very time consuming and onerous task. It is a survey that excludes many of the smaller member organizations with annual budgets of under \$1 million dollars as they literally do not have the time or resources to adapt their record keeping methodology to that requested by TCG as part of the survey. A little over 80% of the 198 responding theatres in 2015 had budgets over \$1 million, 46% had budgets over \$3 million. TCG then went a step further and pulled 125 of the 198 theatres and labeled them as "Trend" Theatres if they responded to the survey for the past five years, and of this number 91% had budgets over 1\$ million and 60% had budgets over \$3 million. It is safe to assume that many of the smaller theatres (budgets under \$1 million) are either new, have closed during these five years, or simply found no immediate gain to warrant continued input. The number of this smallest subset of member theaters however, theatres with budgets of under \$1million, represents a majority (nearly 55%) of all the member theaters of TCG. These are the small organizations that have not entered the realm of institutional status, and while they are the least able to adequately compensate their artists financially; they are often the most artistically daring and risk taking, and the least susceptible to the whims of a few board members.

The numbers from the larger "Trend" organizations, however, tell a different picture. Over the past five years the amount of all government (federal, state and local) and corporate

funding has declined, as has all revenue earned by ticket sales, while the amount of money donated by these institutions' trustees has grown, and it is safe to say not by choice: \$10,000-\$40,000 /trustee for the larger organizations as compared to \$1,500-\$2,100/ trustee for the smaller ones. The larger "Trend" theatres are also more reliant on ticket income. While this does imply a healthier financial mix as viewed through a purely economic lens, it also means that they are more reliant on ticket generated income and must therefore make sure their work appeals to, and draws in, a large audience. Ticket income represents 32-42% of all expenses for the larger "Trend" institutions over \$1million, while only 25-28% for the smaller organizations. As the trustees of the larger institutions attempt to bridge the financial gap between revenue and expenses through personal philanthropy, with true heartfelt gratitude from the staff and artists I am sure, it increases the potential for these trustees to desire a greater say in choices beyond the financial, including artistic choices, as they are all interconnected. Trustee decisions include not only programing choices, but also other important artistic choices, especially as the trustees are responsible for the search and hiring of new leaders whose job it is to shape and drive the mission of the institution. This is currently relevant, as TCG has reported the largest leadership turnover in years in theatres throughout the country.

I created the Virginia Theatre Machine as a for-profit LLC (Limited Liability Company) as an alternative response to my fifteen years as the Artistic Director of a 501(c) 3 governed, as required by tax exempt law, by a volunteer board of directors. I left Providence for Williamsburg to support my wife's career with her offer of a tenure track professorship at the College of William & Mary. I would now need to be the primary care giver of our children. While I was aware of a growing sense of burn out from being the Artistic Director of Perishable Theatre for fifteen years, the magnitude of the burn out would not hit me until midway through

the first year in Williamsburg. I had time to reflect at my new home in Williamsburg, at the end of our cul-de-sac, during the school hours when the kids were away. I realized that most of my tension and stress revolved around the financial pressures and my endless work over the years with the board of directors, for what was never the return on investment I hoped it would be. I was answerable to the board of directors and yet I still bore the financial responsibility of the organization in a way the board never fully understood. Why then were they there, other than as a requirement for philanthropy? True they did provide added outreach to the community, but ultimately there could be other ways to engage individuals for that capacity without serving on a board. Granted, my experience is based solely on running what TCG would term a small budget size 1 or 2 organization, but remember that these type of organizations make up more than half the TCG membership, and that most new theatre companies start at this scale. But must every theatre start as a 501(c)3? More importantly, how would I be able to continue to be a theatre-maker in a community with hardly any professional theatre within a fifty mile radius?

At that time of my life, with young children and my wife needing to prioritize her pursuit of tenure, the ability to seek work in Richmond or Norfolk, both one hour plus drives from our house, was not an option: I need to start a theatre, but not one with a 501(c)3. At this time organizations like Fractured Atlas, that provide fiscal sponsorship for funding opportunities and other sorts of traditional not-for-profit fundraising, were beginning to be a viable option, but I still wanted to consider the for-profit possibilities. Since then, Fractured Atlas has grown to be a wonderful and significant option for emerging artists in the U.S. today, as they not only offer fiscal sponsorship support, but other shared resources like access to insurance, box office and marketing software, online rental marketplaces and even assistance with international collaborations and developing business skills. My solution, however, was to enter the relatively

simple world of starting an LLC, set up to accommodate an American dream of being your own boss. Aside from a degree of artistic independence, which I always knew is never that simple, my goals were to be able to pay professional artists on a professional scale, without having to charge the audience for admission. I wanted others to pay for the work, but not simply out of philanthropy or a sense of believing in the power of the arts as a critical part of the quality of life in a community (as I knew these were not sustainable motivators in our capitalist system), but also because it would help them financially.

My BA degree with a major in theatre had introduced me, albeit briefly, to the advent of the theatrical pageant wagon in what I remembered as the Middle Ages. The food truck craze was beginning to gain momentum in the US, but still had very isolated areas of exposure. Were these direct influences on the VTM? Were they in my subconscious? It is hard to pinpoint the sources of creative inspiration, and ultimately the idea of the VTM was shaped by these factors as well as experiences during my tenure as the Artistic Director of the Perishable Theatre and by major life changes associated with my move from Providence RI to Williamsburg VA. The only other link in the creative chain of events not discussed yet was the need to mow my lawn one hot fall day in September of 2007. Theatre-makers tell stories to communicate their ideas, and so I ask that you follow me on what may seem like a digression, but what was actually an equally valid (albeit less academic) moment in my process of creating the VTM:

The story of a disgruntled northerner mowing the lawn on a very hot day in Williamsburg, VA

As I mowed the lawn, in what I remember was an intense heat, I let my mind drift and for obvious reasons started to wish an ice cream truck would drive by while I was mowing. These trucks would drive through my former urban neighborhood in Providence RI. Their bells would ring through our house walls to provoke my

young daughters to ask if an ice cream was in their immediate future. No such truck drove through my new neighborhood in Williamsburg VA. Why? I was not sure but suspected that the suburban layout was too spread out to make it financially worth their while to drive around looking for isolated customers. I let myself fixate on this as I mowed what I considered to be our too large lawn of mainly crabgrass. I imagined the lack of mobile frozen confection might also have to do with a more isolated way of living in the suburbs, and the distrust of such a foreign incursion into the private worlds of Williamsburg residents. This train of thought naturally led to a desire for a good ice cream, not just an ice cream truck mass produced item, but a really good home-made ice cream cone. It was hot. I was using my loud self-propelled push mower, knowing it would take about an hour to cut the front lawn as it was approximately a half-acre situated on a double slope. Even with the self-propelled feature, it needed physical exertion to navigate the inclines and obstacles. As I mowed and grew hotter, my craving for a good ice cream increased; so did my annoyance at the lack of such a reward in my future given the dearth of any local homemade ice cream establishment in the area. It was hot in Williamsburg for many months out of the year and yet there were no locally owned, gourmet, homemade ice cream parlors. As the heat and labor soured my mood, this one outrage led me to identify others about my new found home. There was also no professional theater company within a 50-mile radius. True, there was a community theater nearby, and the local college theater, and while I was grateful that the community of Williamsburg had these resources, it was not the same as having a professional company or venue

producing and presenting works on a year round basis. It was hot. There was no great ice cream to be had. There was no professional theatre to be had without a long drive. Clearly the answer was to solve these problems directly myself. My wife made great ice cream, she could teach me and I would buy a used ice cream truck and sell it to the good people of Williamsburg. At that moment of inspiration, I also realized that the side of the classic American ice cream truck resembled a puppetry stage. I would now do both. I would buy a used ice cream truck and redesign and outfit it to serve several flavors of gourmet ice cream and present Puppet Theater. It was “genius.” I would first sell ice cream and then perform a show while my happy audiences devoured both of my offerings. While I did not identify as a puppeteer at that time, I was a theater director with years of experience in the world of puppetry. I had directed works with puppets, I had presented puppetry companies in the former theater I had run in Providence RI, and some of my best friends were puppeteers. What more did I need? As I finished mowing the lawn that fateful day, as sweat dripped from me by what seemed the bucketful’s, I had had a revelation. I would be the proud owner and director of “Bubba Moshe’s Gourmet Ice Cream Truck and Puppet Theatre.”

The End.

Whether motivated by the state of the not-for-profit theatre industry in the US, A desire to re-create the pageant wagon for the 21st century, frustrating tax laws, or simply one very hot day of lawn mowing, I reached out to Jeremy Woodward, the scenic designer with whom I had collaborated for many years in Rhode Island who was also a puppeteer and self described

“fabricator,” and ran the idea of a ice cream / puppet theatre truck by him. He too was excited by the possibilities, but immediately pointed out that I did not know anything about making and selling prepared food in a legally authorized way and that I really didn’t know anything about making gourmet ice cream (it was my wife Kay who made it after all). He also asked if I wanted to be limited by only producing Puppet Theatre? As we talked, we realized that what I/we wanted was a total theatre truck or trailer. Jeremy would ultimately design the VTM with two inspirations in mind, what was then the fashionable and high tech white iPod that was all the rage for playing music and the elegantly designed and constantly in style Airstream trailer. He “mashed those together” as he told me one day while discussing the original design (Appendix 2f). Jeremy would eventually build the VTM from the ground up in his driveway over the summer of 2008. This would include welding a custom trailer frame to meet the exact specifications of the desired footprint for the stage. While he fine tuned the design and fabrication plans, I went to work naming it, defining the business model and looking for that all important first show.

While there was a decision not to be limited to puppet theatre on this stage, puppets would become one of the key markers of a VTM experience (Appendix 2g-2i). The use of puppets not only allowed for a wide breadth of stories to be told, but they also worked well with the small footprint of this stage as well as being a great tool for capturing and maintaining audiences attention on a street theatre modeled machine. A theatre-maker must always ask the question “Why Puppet” before using a form of puppetry to tell a story. What follows next is an examination of the design and implementation of the puppetry for the first year’s 2008 incarnation and past year’s 2017 re-visioning of *MTACC*. It not only provides insight into the process, but also into this theatrical form that is such a critical part of the VTM experience. As

stated by John Bell in his article on the influential Bread and Puppet Theatre Co., puppetry adds “the frisson of ambiguity, a certain lack of precision about what exactly an object represents, that allows the political theatre of Bread and Puppet its possibilities of subtlety, of inexactness, of open-ended interpretation,” or as he more eloquently states a few lines later, puppetry “encourages contemplation” (Bell 206).

In the late summer of 2008 as I was writing what would become the inaugural version of Master Thespians’ A Christmas Carol, I began the puppet design deliberations with my collaborator Jeremy Woodward. Jeremy was also responsible for the design and build of the Virginia Theatre Machine and the two versions of the set that we have used over the past ten years. Our conversation started with what every director/puppet artist should ask as their first question: Why puppet? This time the answer was easy: all the ghosts and any of the characters Scrooge meets through his travels with the ghosts. This question can often be overlooked as one becomes enamored of the playfulness, craftsmanship, and/or beauty of the puppet as an artifact, and forgets about why a particular character or element of the story needs to be told with a puppet. What can the puppet do that an actor cannot? The very first ghost that Scrooge encounters, and that is introduced to the audiences of the VTM, is that of Scrooge’s dead business partner, “and sole friend”, Marley. As we began to explore the wonderful limitations of the intimate stage of the VTM, we pushed ourselves in that first year to provide all the ghosts with a true element of surprise with their entrances.

The Marley puppet used in the tenth incarnation of *MTACC* is the only puppet that has remained constant, although his entrance has been modified once along the way. Originally the first version of the set, used for the first five years of the run, did not have a bedroom, but simply a period appropriate lounging chair next to a small side table where Scrooge would accidentally

fall asleep before his visitations (Appendix 2j). The Marley puppet was designed as a built-in table top of the side table so Scrooge could wake up to a startlingly magical appearance of Marley, seemingly out of nowhere. Even when we completely redesigned the set to allow for another five years worth of surprise and theatrical magic, we decided to keep the Marley puppet as one of the only constants. Returning audiences not only identify with the characters of Bob the Stage Manager and Master Thespian Ed Whitacre, but they can also have a connection to the Marley puppet and share in an ‘insider’s secret’ to this first ghostly appearance year after year. In 2008, every ghost had a surprise entrance: Marley from the table, Christmas past from Scrooge’s own bathrobe pocket, Christmas present from behind a painting of Dickens, and Christmas future as a giant arm that pushed out a gravestone of Scrooge through the fireplace. We would eventually outgrow the need, and possibility, of a continued surprise entrance for every ghost, but would focus on the surprise being how we would interpret and design every year’s ghostly visitations.

While I knew that Master Thespian and Bob needed to complete their quest on the tenth and last year, I did not know exactly what the premise would be when we started discussing puppet design. As part of the ‘farewell tour’ I did know, however, that I wanted to present a homage to what many western puppeteers would label the most common styles of puppets: hand, rod, marionette, Bunraku, shadow, performing object, and life-sized (or even over-life-sized) body puppet, as well as a nod to mask work. We had already explored a variation of almost all these forms over the years. The exceptions were no marionettes and no Bunraku form of puppetry. We never pursued marionettes, as I was very aware of my limitations as a puppeteer who had never had any formal training until only recently, and marionettes truly require a level of skill and training that I knew was not an option. The Bunraku form was never

pursued due to small size of the stage and the cast, as traditionally a Bunraku puppet needs three puppeteers. This year we actually started to design all the puppets before I even started writing the script, using the outline of the premise as our guide.

The character of Bob Cratchit has always been played by the actor depicting Bob the Stage Manager to help underline the symbolic connection between the two characters. This was even true the very first year when the character of Master Thespian insisted on speaking all the text, using Bob the Stage Manager as a type of human puppet who took tableaux positions for each line of text spoken by Master Thespian on his behalf. The visit to Bob Cratchit's family during the visitation of the ghost of Christmas present would always necessitate, however, the family being portrayed by puppets. This year, we decided to alter that paradigm. Bob Cratchit would be a puppet and then be a partial puppet later in the play. This opened the door for us to bring two extra styles of puppetry into our "homage" approach. By strapping the feet of the puppet onto my feet, we could play with a version of a Bunraku puppet and still maintain the scale of Bob Cratchit being a life sized human being with whom Scrooge must interact. It also allowed us to add a "Humanette", half puppet and half puppeteer/actor head, into the later family scene, both as a bridge into the world of the family and for the comic effect that this style of puppetry always provokes. The added benefit of the Bunraku Cratchit, was the ability to draw a big distinction between the sternness and dourness of Scrooge and the bubblyness of Cratchit, despite (or because of) their vastly different financial and cultural status.

We had attempted shadow puppets several years ago with our 2013 production, and even though we did everything we could to mitigate the difficulties of creating effective shadow puppets for our daytime presentations, we still felt that one could not have large portions of the script be dependent on this form with so many daytime performances. Shadow puppets depend

on a single point light source, to allow for a crisp and clearly defined shadow of intense brightness. Not only do we have only thirty inches of backstage space to separate the light source from the shadow puppet, but we have lots of flammable puppets, costumes and props stored in every nook and cranny and need to be very careful of the heat such an intense light source can generate. In addition, we had to be very cautious of not exceeding the total watts used in the production to 1800 watts, as we knew that we could only ever count on one fifteen amp circuit being available to run the entire production (lights, sound, computer, fog machine, etc...). In 2013 we tackled this problem by finding someone online who custom built high-powered flashlights and had him fabricate for us a single chip LED encased in a heat sink to allow us to attempt our shadow puppetry in a way that was energy efficient and not a fire hazard. That year the shadow puppetry was used for the entire street scene of Scrooge interacting with beggars, businessmen and caroling children as well as the final ghost of Christmas future. This year, we focused on attempting the brief foreshadowing of Marley as a doorknocker, something we had never included as a puppet in years past. Technology has improved significantly with LED chips over the past few years, and this year we were able to simply purchase a 1,000 lumen 'Mag Lite' with a single LED chip (with lens cap removed) to create the effect.

The ghostly occurrences that foreshadow Marley's entrance have mainly been constant over the years and blur the line between puppetry, object manipulation and simple theatrical special effects or spectacle. In past years the blanket was simply blown off Scrooge by a mysterious gust of wind, so this year we reworked this moment to allow for more of a puppet interpretation of the blanket floating and dancing before being blown away. This moment is followed by what are purposely extremely simple and 'old school' methods of introducing the arrival of a ghost: door shaking, lights flashing, loud knocking and the arm reaching out from

the jacket, all basic forms of object manipulation or puppetry. In many ways, all of our solutions have their roots in being grounded in a theatrical frame that embraces the mechanical versus the digital as means to achieve our ends. We have discussed the possible use of video projections over the years, but each time set that aside for another solution that does not try to hide the strings.

For the last year we knew we wanted the three ghosts to incorporate: a type of transformation mask, be it built into the puppet as is found in some Bunraku puppets, or a mask itself; a reference to performing objects; and a giant larger than life ghost of Christmas future. I have often viewed the ghost of Christmas past as being rather emotionally manipulative and connected the idea of a transformation mask to this character. While the final version was technically much simpler than a full transformation mask, the ability to manipulate each eyebrow separately hopefully provides the audience with a range of facial expressions and emotions that are more complex than what a traditional mask or transformation mask allows. This scene also necessitates meeting many characters for extremely brief periods; so all the puppets introduced must be built to effectively communicate more as an art object than through their manipulation/animation as a puppet. While technically puppets, both the little boy version of Scrooge and his sister fan are crafted to immediately evoke specific emotions in the audience to facilitate the storytelling. We also decide that we could not ignore the world of marionettes any longer and felt that Fezziwig's dance would provide the perfect moment for a very simple version of this puppet that even a novice marionette operator could pull off.

While object puppetry has been used in our past productions for brief character work (one year the entire Cratchit family came out of a Christmas stocking as three oranges, one gift mug and a mini candy-cane for Tiny Tim) we had never attempted to sustain an entire scripted scene

through object puppetry. Dickens' describes the ghost of Christmas present's entrance with words like "glistening", "glowing" and filled with "light", and has the ghost of Christmas present tell Scrooge how his "life upon this globe is very brief." A candle that would seem to melt over the course of the scene was the idea that lighted our fancy and one that would allow the evolving script to satisfy our need to carry a torch for puns of all shapes and sizes (!). As luck (and the internet) would have it, we would be able to find a set of three LED candles that came in three different sizes, so that only a large candle holder and some wax drippings would need to be fabricated to allow us to implement this design idea.

I was determined that the last ghost puppet for our tenth year run would finally address my long term desire for a larger than life pageant sized figure that would interact on the street level, as it would be too large to have a presence on the stage. Given the complexity of the puppetry work being designed this year, in combination with over fifty sound, light and special effect cues in the thirty minutes of performance, I realized we would need to hire a third person to assist with the technical cueing and prop/puppet backstage positioning. This opened the door for an over-life-sized ghost of Christmas future puppet to emanate from somewhere other than the limited backstage confines of the Virginia Theatre Machine. The final puppet of the ghost of Christmas future was built to be stored in the car behind the VTM. The sound cue of heavy giant-like footsteps forebodes the arrival of this large spectral figure.

The role of the sound design in this, and any puppet theatre production, must be noted. As a theatre director I find sound design to be as important as any of the other theatrical design elements. The power of a strong sound design is especially heightened in puppetry work. It not only sets the tone or mood for a character's entrance, but also becomes an equally expressive component of the puppetry and character work. In addition to working with the same production

designer for all ten years, I have also worked with the same professional New York based sound designer for the past ten years as well, Bart Fasbender. Bart's combination of artistry and technical proficiency has enabled us to execute a vast array of complex sound cues and vocal manipulation in a very simple method of execution that, until this year, was always operated by myself either backstage or with a remote control dongle onstage while I was performing.

In past years the puppetry design was based on the pretense of how the characters of Bob the Stage Manager and Master Thespian Ed Whitacre would reinvigorate their annual attempt to perform the show in less than twenty minutes. For the tenth year it was truly a response to the other nine years of performance and our attempt to thank all the styles of puppets that helped Ed and I perform our story year after year. At the heart of the VTM success story, however, is the role of *ACC*. Audiences return year after year to see how the beloved characters of Bob the Stage Manager and Master Thespian (initially, mirror images of Bob Cratchit and Scrooge) adapt to their quest, as well as revisiting their beloved story of *ACC*. Audiences would bond on cold days with their family, friends and fellow audience members for a distinctive experience of this world known tale.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A vehicle for the creation of the VTM, LLC.

The artistic and financial success of countless adaptations of Charles Dickens's novella, *A Christmas Carol*, on the American stage is linked to its seasonal presentation and its message that serves as an antidote to consumption, an ever-present force driving the holiday season in our society. Every year TCG lists the most produced plays in the country and notes that "The top play of the country is...Christmas Carol! Again!" ("The Top 10 Most Produced Plays"). The financial pressure on the larger institutions to have at least one or two of a season's offerings draw large audiences is undeniable, and Dickens's *ACC* has grown to answer that need. In this chapter I examine the many dynamics motivating countless theaters in the United States to produce an adaptation of *ACC*, and the forces driving theatregoers to attend year after year, which for many, is their only exposure to the theatre. I explore how Dickens' story, and Dickens' himself, was rooted in the consciousness of America since the time of his first reading tour in 1867, to the recent opening on November 22, 2017 of the holiday movie adaptation of Dickens' biography, *The Man Who Invented Christmas* (2008).

The author's own story is very much an American story of rags to riches, of individual success from working long hard days as a child to support himself while his father (family) was in debtor's prison, to his success as an author. Dickens' journey from poverty to wealth was not initially known to American audiences, given that Dickens' did not routinely share this part of his history with others. Nevertheless, his overcoming of hardship and success speaks to the

American Dream that still holds sway on popular consciousness, a belief that individuals have the power to better themselves and that the United States provides opportunities for those with motivation to move from poverty to wealth.

Without pretending to be a “Yule scholar” (Standiford 94), to borrow a term from Standiford who authored, The Man Who Invented Christmas (How Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol rescued his career and revived our holiday spirits), it is important to note that in the first two centuries of American history, Christmas was barely celebrated. Standiford points to a twenty-year law “from 1659-1681...on the books in the Massachusetts Colony that forbade the practice (of Christmas) and levied a fine of five shillings upon anyone caught in the act” (95). The holiday is rooted in paganism, a fact that greatly disturbed early Anglicans and Puritans who warned that, “Christmas was a ‘pretense for drunkenness, and rioting, and wantonness” (98). Standiford succinctly connects the major points of the history of Christmas to underscore that it was a minor holiday at the time of Dickens’ writing of *ACC*. Standiford also notes that, “The number of academic books, dissertations, monographs, and articles devoted to Dickens...is, practically speaking, beyond counting” (5). My point here is not to survey the academic and literary conversation regarding why and how this story took hold on the English, and then the American, consciousness. Rather, I focus on forces that help capture the journey of *ACC* from written story to theatrical adaptation.

The speed with which American publishers issued their own editions of Dickens’ book, without illustrations, gilt edging and on cheap paper, for a fraction of the cost of Dickens’ own self-published volume, helped bring the story to a large audience. As Standiford notes: “It was not that Americans were altogether heedless of the concept of copyright ... (but) ... anything published by anyone living elsewhere (not American citizens) was simply fair game for

reprinting in the United States” (127). Reciprocal agreements on intellectual property were not introduced into the legal system until the 1870’s. Publishing freedom allowed for an affordable copy of the text to be available in the US in less than two months after the first copy was published in England. This cheaper “six-cent” version was followed by even more affordable newspaper and magazine serializations in the US.

The most important factor for *ACC*’s success and appeal is the story itself, the essence of its writing, and its brevity at only 30,000 words. Standiford hypothesizes how Dickens “could will into existences a world of universal charity, empathy, and family harmony that he had not experienced in his life” (113). Regardless of how true a motivator/muse this was for Dickens, I believe readers, and later audiences, took to the story for this very reason. For example, Michael told me in our interview regarding *ACC*: “It happens to be one of my favorite stories...about redemption and humanity, so I love that story.” In another interview, Frank pointed out how he was drawn to the message of *ACC* and that it reminded him that “one can in fact be more giving, benevolent, and caring.” An additional appeal of *ACC* is the tone of Dickens’ pen: “It is the sort of wit that creeps in throughout, allowing the cynical reader to proceed contentedly through the story along the sentimentalist” (92). The result is a story that has broad appeal on the page and on the stage. Standiford notes that the readership of *ACC*, at the “turn of the century to be second only to the Bible’s” (5). This mix of humor and sentimentality, in the frame of a ghost story (who doesn’t love a good ghost story?), was and still is a perfect storm of lowbrow and highbrow cultural appeal.

As the playwright of all the “abrevidations” over the past ten years, I have worked hard to embrace Dickens humor while not losing sight of the reasons many are drawn to this story and how closely audiences connect Dickens’ story to their experience of the Christmas season.

Almost all of my interviewee's mentioned their connection to the humanitarian themes, like Michael's heartfelt "There is a lot of bad stuff going around in the world, but it's a time of year when we pause and try to at least to be good to each other and celebrate family and help others." Many related to the significance the story holds in their childhood memories: Hal's "When I was a kid with my mom we watched it every year...then I was married for 13 years before we had kids and we would watch it...then when our kids were growing up they started watching it, and I think its just more of a tradition and memories and just part of Christmas"; or Frank's "It's a childhood favorite, its kind of stayed with me...you guys are the outlet to re-experiencing the whole story." Another recurring theme was the importance of sharing Dickens' work with each new generation of children, as Michael noted, "new kids being exposed who might not even know the story, so I think its great you're bringing it to these families every year, that you are introducing *ACC* to a new generation of American children." All of which were summed up succinctly by Veronica when she discussed *ACC*, and how she "loved its value, the lessons that it gives our children. I will never tire of it."

I also strove, as playwright and director, to make sure the additional story I created to frame Dickens' *ACC* was also in the same vein. I specifically crafted the ongoing relationship of Master Thespian and Bob the stage manager to parallel that of the Scrooge and Bob Cratchit. Not only did all the earliest versions of *MTACC* have moments of self awareness by Master Thespian of his mistreatment of his assistant, but the actual 10 year story (for those who came each year and followed the serial), also had a trajectory that followed Master Thespian and Bob learning to prioritize their relationship over the quest of what was presented as an outside measure of fame, "performing all of Dickens classic in under 20 minutes." As the couple of Kate and Joel each individually noted as they recollected their 10 years of attendance, "I

remember coming out of the first couple (years) of shows going I kinda feel sorry for Bob, he needs a bigger part. I like Bob's whole journey, first from just being a stage manager to a Jr. Thespian to a Jr. Thespian First Class to your graduation this year (becoming a Master Thespian)" said Kate to which Joel added how he enjoyed the way I "weaved the two together, you know, with Ed and all his emotions as the character of Ed, its kind of a synopsis or metaphor for the whole show, for the story of *ACC*." Or as Lou summed up "We've become attached to the actors", with the important distinction being that Lou was referencing the characters of Master Thespian and Bob the stage manager who are actors attempting to perform *ACC* in under 20 minutes.

Humor and sentimentality are also firmly present in the many film adaptations that have appeared over the past one hundred years. A media form that reached a far larger audience and brought the story even further into American Christmas culture. A brief cinematic overview includes musical adaptations, animations, puppets (Muppets), and many star turns by noted comic and serious actors alike. One of the most unusual filmed adaptations, *Carol for Another Christmas*, written by Rod Sterling noted author of *The Twilight Zone*, was produced by the Telsun Foundation (Television Series for the United Nations). This organization was founded in 1963 to show "the importance of global cooperation" (**Jones**) and to tackle growing hostility towards the United Nations amongst the American people: "Paul Hoffman, Managing Director of the United Nations Special Fund, felt that a lack of understanding as to what his organization actually did was at the root of the hostility, and so the Telsun Foundation was formed, with the express intention of educating the public about the activities of the UN" (Jones). Rod Sterling opens the story with the following updating of the well-known introductory scene between Scrooge and his nephew Fred (for a 1964 audience):

"Mind your own business...and let everyone else mind theirs. Your responsibility happens to be your classroom. Not classrooms in Krakow, Poland; Butte, Montana [he's having a go at Butte, Montana now], or Johannesburg South Africa. Do you insist upon making it a better World? Wont you die happy until you do? Do you insist upon helping the needy and the oppressed? Is that some kind of an itch that you can't stop scratching? Then tell them to help themselves. Let them know the cash draw is closed and make them believe it. You'll be surprised how much less needy and oppressed the needy and oppressed turn out to be." (Jones)

This was the first of four movies produced by the UN in what would be a failed public relations campaign. It is telling that the first project chosen by the UN to woo the American people would be an adaptation of Dicken's *ACC*. Most recently, I even discovered a 1910 silent movie version that condensed the entire story to 10 minutes and 59 seconds, a surprising discovery given my history of adapting the story to first eight and then fifteen and ultimately twenty-minute versions.

Bah Humbug. That was my response to *ACC* as a young theatre director who interned with the Wooster Group and Mabou Mines his first year out of college. This feeling would only grow when I became the Artistic Director of Perishable Theatre (Perishable), a small theatre in Providence, RI that started with annual budget of \$100,000 and was mainly known for touring children's theatre. While continuing Perishable's children's theatre, I slowly started expanding Perishable's mission in a direction that would ultimately lead to a collaboration with another alternative arts center, AS220 (an un-juried center for the arts), to create a new home in a three building long arts complex in the heart of downtown Providence.

Half a block away from Perishable was the Trinity Rep Company (Trinity), one of the major regional theatres Zeigler discusses in his book, put on the map by its founder Adrian Hall. I knew Trinity well as I had transferred from the MFA program at the University of California San Diego to the certificate conservatory program at Trinity in 1988. Adrian Hall was almost completely out of the picture once I arrived, working simultaneously as the Artistic Director of

both Trinity and the Dallas Theatre Center (DTC), a position he somehow managed to juggle for six years before resigning from Trinity in March 1989 and being fired two months later from DTC. Adrian Hall's presence and legacy was still very much present in Providence for years to come. One component of his impact was the production of *ACC* that Trinity produced annually starting in 1977. As one looks for the motivation to produce *ACC* in theatres across the US, it is worth noting that for Trinity this first production came four years after it moved into its current, and significantly large space, and it coincided with the year that the conservatory started at Trinity, clearly providing a stable of young unpaid actors to help fill the stage.

At Perishable I was leading an organization whose budget would grow to a high of \$500,000 annually and ultimately stable off at approximately \$350,000 annually. The organization could boast a season of new works, an international women's playwriting festival of one-act plays, a multi-media and performance art festival (MA & PA), a 10-minute play festival, a late-night puppet monthly puppet salon, community classes, and the touring children's theatre company, to highlight those programs with a longer history. It is not surprising that we would sneer, in disbelief and some envy, at the cash cow of *ACC* that Trinity would produce every year. This sneer would grow to full disdain as Oskar Eustis would eventually take over the helm of Trinity and expand the production and run of *ACC* to include two full professional casts (and four casts of children actors) for a 16 show/week run that would begin around Thanksgiving. Under Oskar Eustis's brilliant leadership as a producer, *ACC* would truly earn the title of a cash cow as it would sell nearly 50,000 tickets and bring in over one million dollars. While I do not know the exact numbers, I can safely relay these numbers as Oskar Eustis approached me in the early spring of 1999 to direct *ACC* for the end of millennium production in the fall of 1999. These were the numbers he would run by me as I considered his offer. From conversations with

both Oskar Eustis and the then Managing Director of Trinity, Bill Wingate, I learned that a significant number of those 50,000 audience members only ever come to see *ACC*. Despite many attempts to build them into returning audiences, most only wanted the *ACC* experience during the holiday season. Anecdotally, I have heard this is true for many, if not all, of the theatres that produce *ACC* annually. This does not stop any of these theatres, including Trinity, of guising their annual offering in the form of audience development. Remember, one of the justifications of the 501(c)3 status is that the organization is not pursuing purely commercial work. This is clearly not the case with *ACC*, but no one dares to be ‘Scrooge’ enough to call out these theatres and give voice to the fact that the emperor’s clothes are not really there, to mix literary metaphors.

Back at Perishable our sneers and disdain eventually led three of us (one of Perishable’s mainstay actors, Gary Potvin, resident designer Jeremy Woodward and myself as director) to create a spoof of the production with our own eight minute version, performed by what Gary termed a Master Thespian (I remember Gary’s inspiration being John Lovitz in his frequent portrayals as Master Thespian during his time as a regular on Saturday Night Live). Gary strapped on a miniature version of the Trinity stage, designed and built by Jeremy, and proceeded to play all the roles as an actor or with the use of small action figures as a puppets. This eight-minute version was presented as part of an alternative cabaret evening of holiday theatre. The cabaret would not be a cash cow, or anything close to it, but this one part of the evening was clearly the highlight and delighted artists and audience alike. Being a small town, it would not take long for the spoof to be known by the artists at Trinity, and before long Gary was being asked to perform at the closing night party of Trinity’s production of *ACC*. Our attempt at subversion was completely subsumed by the eight hundred pound gorilla across the street.

Oskar Eustis was offering me an opportunity to direct my first production for a major LORT theatre with a production budget equal to nearly two thirds of my theatre's annual operating budget and a director's fee nearly one half of my annual salary at Perishable Theatre. I too could not resist the power of Dickens' tale. To Oskar Eustis' credit he gave me free reign to envision my own interpretation of the staging as long as I used the Adrian Hall text that was rooted in the community's consciousness. To my credit, I sought to truly re-invent the production, while staying true to the story, the humor, the sentiment and the function of this production in the Trinity season. The design for this adaptation included reconfiguring the larger upstairs theatre at Trinity, known for its thrust configuration by a generation of Rhode Island audiences, into an 19th century proscenium space. To fully appreciate the impact of this decision one must step back to emphasize the small size and familiar feel of Providence and the intimacy found in the State of Rhode Island. One of the truly amazing accomplishments of Adrian Hall was the creation of a sense of ownership in the people of Rhode Island for Trinity. Everyone is almost one or two degrees of separation in Rhode Island and audiences would see the resident company members in the grocery store or on the street and discuss a current or past show. This phenomenon is truly rooted in the small intimate scale of our country's smallest state geographically (population of the entire state hovers at 1 million people). As the headline for the State's major daily newspaper would state in the review of my production "What's old is new in Trinity's fine *Carol*" (Gale 1999). To truly appreciate the degree to which Trinity's performance space was associated with how theatre was presented in Providence, I must quote the opening lines of the review:

"As you follow the crowds into Trinity Rep's upstairs theater for *A Christmas Carol*, the old auditorium seems to glow as it should with golds and reds. But then what do our wondering eyes perceive? A proscenium arch? At Trinity's *A Christmas Carol*? As a production generally known, over the past 22 years, for tumbling all

over the vast upstairs space? Yes. So it's a new world after all at the last *A Christmas Carol* of the century...under the nearly revolutionary direction of Mark J. Lerman" (Gale).

The review will go on to reference "fantastical lighting filled with post modern touches ...medieval devils ala Hieronymus Bosch...a long scene in which *Waiting for Godot* seems to meet the painter Magritte..." and "Oh, yes, Scrooge. Thank goodness that the director's love of images to transmit ideas does not obscure the central figure here...allows us to easily note the turning points in Scrooge's redemption" (Gale). As the then Managing Director of Trinity would note to me, Trinity was very happy with the production and the final box office. I knew I had to honor the financial goals of this production for Trinity and be certain the story was not lost and the production appealed to many, yet I still attempted to be "revolutionary" for this audience. This lesson of how I could be "revolutionary" with a production of *ACC* (truly an oxymoron), and that revolutionary must always be viewed in response to what is accepted as the norm, stayed with me as I moved to the stayed town of Williamsburg, VA, known for its depiction of American life at the time of our country's revolutionary times.

I had lived in Williamsburg for 2 years and now had a specific vision for the VTM. I needed the first show to be one that could easily sell itself months in advance to help defray the initial start up costs of the LLC, not only the build of the trailer itself, but also some legal and licensing fees, as well as the creation of a logo and other critical marketing materials. I had to presell the idea of the trailer theatre and a specific show before I had built the trailer theatre, let alone staged something on it. I immediately thought of *ACC*, as it was not only a known and beloved story, but because the timing of the annual presentation of the story was clearly associated with the busiest and most lucrative time of the year for business owners. This was the time of the year that businesses had to make the most money and they were therefore,

potentially, willing to spend money to achieve this goal. I had decided that my pitch must be to one of several business districts/associations in Williamsburg looking for reasons to attract and retain customers during the holiday season. I approached the Merchants Square Business Association (independent business owners renting from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation) and the managers of what was then a relatively new retail and living development on the other side of Williamsburg, New Town. My proposal to New Town was screened by a management firm, responsible for all leasing and marketing, while my proposal to Merchants Square went to a marketing firm whose sole concern was the marketing of the experience of shopping at Merchants Square in Colonial Williamsburg. Merchants Square was more receptive to my initial inquiry. Many audiences would comment on the setting of Merchants Square for the VTM and especially for our production of *MTACC*. The business owners count on people coming to Williamsburg to explore CW, or as Michael would note “we don’t use it as a shopping trip to buy presents, its more about experiencing Williamsburg.” Yet once there, many would still visit the stores that seemed to represent an alternative to the traditional stores they would find everywhere else. As veronica, mother of 3 remember, presented it “Williamsburg has much more, not just the tempo but the ambience, because everything is period related you know, so there is no emphasis on Best Buy...Apple stores...you can kind of relax a bit” and how “it’s a breather from consumerism...the entire month of December is just very heavy energy that I don’t enjoy, but I like Williamsburg very much.” Many would echo her words, but then relate other indirect shopping as part of their experiences.

I was also a relative newcomer to the Williamsburg area, having only lived here for two years. While I had directed one production that was an adaptation of *Gift of the Magi* for a local (now defunct) small professional theatre company, I did not have many local resources or

connections. *ACC* was the only known in what was otherwise a sea of great unknown. I could also use my previous experience of directing *ACC*, both as a full production at a major regional theatre and in a short eight minute version to help in my sales presentation. To aid in the presentation, I had my collaborator, designer Jeremy Woodward, create a computer mock up of the trailer drawn in place in Merchants Square. We also included a representation of an actor playing Scrooge, to provide both a scale of the trailer's size and to subtly reinforce the power and recognition of *ACC* in the U.S. by using what we thought would be the most recognizable of all the cinematic Scrooges, George C. Scott. Given that we were selling our idea to a group of white middle aged business owners and marketing professionals, we picked a Scrooge we felt would be part of their history and connection to the story (Appendix 2k).

Standiford relays how Dickens was "placing his hopes for a resuscitation of his own finances upon a cautionary tale that he had written about money" and quotes Dickens "I hope to get a great deal of money out of the idea" (Standiford 115). Many others would have this same financial hope. So did I. My goal was to use *ACC* to fund the build of the Virginia Theatre Machine. I am attaching a portion of my final proposal to the Merchants Square Business Association for that first year (Appendix 2l). The Merchants Square Business Association agreed to that first year contract in the spring of 2008 for a fall 2008 run, time enough for me to commit to my designer to build, from scratch, the Virginia Theatre Machine. The maiden road trip of the Virginia Theatre Machine would be in October of 2008, from Providence to Williamsburg, a white knuckled drive down Interstate 95.

CREATIVE MOBILE ENCHANTMENT

In this chapter, I begin with a brief exploration of some historical and contemporary examples of mobile performance: English pageant wagons associated with the Medieval Mystery Plays; wild west medicine-show wagons in the U.S.; the post-world war II Chicago Railroad's Fair production of the *Wheels-A-Rolling Railroad* pageant; and the more contemporary Italian OperaCamion. I then turn focus to the recent rise in the 21st century of the mobile food/retail truck phenomena, emphasizing the creative experience and performance aspects of food and creative retail mobile efforts. This sampling of creative mobile efforts offers context for thinking about the success of the VTM, its appeal to "creative" audiences and, in particular, the nature and contemporary value of introducing the mystical and unexpected into highly predictable spaces.

Historical Mobile Performances

The application of a wheeled vehicle being used for the staging of a play or story is easily over 600 years old, and that's just referencing western traditions of theater and the use of pageant wagons in English cycle or mystery plays. One could even go back at least another 400 years if one were to exchange the fixed frame of a wagon or wheeled stage with a small portable stage, as one might find associated with the history of puppetry throughout the world. References exist as early 960ce where puppet performances/storytellers were evidenced in China's Song dynasty playing "for all social classes-in designated entertainment districts and along roadsides" (Blumenthal 22). Back in Medieval England, the mystery plays would be sponsored and

presented by trade or craft guilds, staged on moving pageant wagons and paraded through the streets to various predetermined stations. These guilds, associations of craftsmen or merchants, “were in charge of regulating and teaching their trade; they were often wealthy and wielded considerable power. The mystery plays gave guilds the opportunity to advertise and show off their wares” (Howes). These plays were community-oriented events that “encouraged their audiences to lead Christian lives” (Howes), performed by amateurs for their fellow townspeople. As such, they were often irreverent and filled with humor.

While the rich history of theater in Europe, and later in the US, demonstrates a complex evolution of staging in a variety of spaces and environs, the aforementioned “wagon staging seems to have disappeared with the cessation of the biblical plays” (Oakshott 367). It would not be until approximately 400 years after the last known processional production occurred however, 1569 to 1575 depending on the source, that there would be an attempt to professionally rediscover this staging system in England with the revival of the York Mystery Plays (one of the few surviving complete medieval play cycles). In 1994 scholar and theatre artist Jane Oakshott (who would later be granted the title of MBE for her work in this revival and restaging: Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) directed “the first processional performance of the plays (Mystery Plays) in modern times in York”, having “approached the Guilds in York to bring their attention (to) the heritage of the Mystery Plays and their mobile staging” (“Guardians of the Mystery Plays-York Festival Trust”). I was especially taken by the degree of success this revival encountered, so successful in fact that it has evolved into a major local community driven, tourist attended, quadrennial event for the city of York with the September 2018 event already being planned and publicized.

In the United States the iconic old west medicine show, forms of which traveled the country from 1800 to as late as 1940, is one of the earliest forms of mobile theater to capitalize on a performance on wheels, with the primary aim being the selling of a product. In her book *Snake Oil, Hustlers and Hambones*, Anderson notes how “In the history of marketing, medicine shows were the link between the medieval European mountebank (literally ‘he who jumps on a bench’) who told stories and sold potions in the village square, and today’s television commercial” and how the primary principle of the medicine show was “Give folks free entertainment and they’ll buy anything you’ve got” (Anderson 1). Clearly this principle was proven to still be valid based on the annual rehiring of the VTM to perform in Merchants Square by the business owners, even as the VTM increased its fee to the Merchants Square Business Association every two to three years.

While “Medicine shows spanned a wide spectrum of sizes and production values” (103), and ultimately grew in scale to encompass the wild west show (notably Buffalo Bill Cody), carnivals and freak shows, and of course Barnum’s legendary circuses, it is the smaller and more easily transportable forms that served as inspiration for the VTM. Even the simple “street pitchmen” or “T&K men” who used as their presenting vehicle “a suitcase mounted on a tripod called a tripe and keister” or the street workers who used a “folding table and gasoline torch on a pole...which came apart for easy transport (and) facilitated evening shows where street lights were absent”(103) are clearly early precursors for the VTM. These “T&K men” even went on to place their tripod and suitcase on a “truck bed or car tailgate” creating a “high pitch” to gain visibility by their audience versus the “T&K men” who were on the ground or a “low pitch” (103). And of course, a central component to all of these performances/sales pitches was a performer who drew the crowd in with a monologue, which is how many, like Chris, first

discovered the VTM, “We were waiting to get coffee and start our walk and Ed came out like a carnival barker and I was wondering what he was doing” (Appendix 2m).

In the late 1940’s, the Chicago Railroad’s Fair produced the *Wheels-A-Rolling Railroad* pageant, primarily a propaganda performance, whose mission was to sell the American populace with the train and generate ridership. After the Federal Highway Act of 1944, “the railroad companies were ‘hard hit by the competition from cars and planes and burdened with an inventory of equipment all but worn out by hard use during the war.’” (Barnette 56) Additionally “In the postwar worldview the locomotive was seen by many as a ‘dehumanizing conveyor belt that carried millions to concentration camps” (56) necessitating a campaign to combat this perception and celebrate the 100 yr + history of train service. Massive in scale, the *Wheels-A-Rolling* pageant featured 4 shows daily with nearly 150 performers. As noted by the Chicago Railroad Fair’s president “by dramatizing instead of preaching, by making every exhibit a novelty in entertainment as well as in education, the railroads have graphically driven home a realization of how much they mean to our national economy” (59).

In all three of the aforementioned historical sources, the primary objective of the moving performance was not an artistic one; the idea of using a mobile performance to pull in their intended audience was central to their formula for economic gain alongside the furthering of investment in existing systems of beliefs. The mystery plays were promoting a set of Christian values and, perhaps, reinforcing the trade of the guild who sponsored each site. The Medicine Show wagon was directly connected to the sale of elixirs. The railroad shows were focused on increasing ridership on trains, which legitimated technology as a friend to economic prosperity and through performance held up an American spirit of constant change and motion. The

strategies and effects of these disparate historical mobile performances, whether 60 years ago or 600, have relevance today in the historical context of the VTM.

OperaCamion, an Italian opera project based in Rome, is a close equivalent to the VTM, as described in the July 2017 NYT article “Putting Don Giovanni on a Truck, and Returning Opera to Its Roots” (Povoledo). Unlike the VTM, however, OperaCamion (Camion is Italian for truck) is financed by a major opera company in Rome called the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, a large performance institution with a 1600 seat auditorium that was opened in 1880. While OperaCamion is, fiscally, a very different entity than the VTM, the similarities in some of the goals of both are significant.

Many large institutions in the US and Europe have a traveling arm that is created for community outreach, but these programs or projects are almost always mobile only in the sense that they arrive and set up their performance in another venue. OperaCamion shares with the VTM an outdoor street theater style, in that the vehicle is part of the stage and not just a transport system for a production. A visit to their web site clearly shows that it is the physical equivalent of the VTM on steroids. Like many mobile enterprises, accessibility is certainly highlighted. The director of the OperaCamion states their desire to “bring opera to what he described as ‘non-elitist’ audiences in far flung Rome neighborhoods”, noting how it hopes to “create a new public for the future” (Povoledo). It is important to highlight that like VTM, all of the performances by OperaCamion are free. Having another funding source other than the actual audience member is critical as it breaks down the geographic barriers and the socially constructed barriers of accessibility. Socially constructed barriers have included architectural cultural monoliths that the dominant art world has created for the arts over the centuries, museum buildings and exhibitions reachable to only a segment of the population. Even those opposite architectural extremes of the

funky alternative urban performance venue in the downtown warehouse space or basement are constructed with a particular audience in mind and available only to those who can approach them. Both of these cultural extremes have kept those in the middle, who would otherwise not seek out the creative event and/or those without means, from these events and spaces.

The government is a major sponsor of OperaCamion, as this is Italy where “culture is a fundamental right, and it’s the duty of the municipality to give people access to it, said Luca Bergamo, Rome’s deputy mayor” (Povoledo). Like the VTM, and true for any form of street theater, OperaCamion has to perform for audiences who are “not acquainted with theater etiquette” as the article notes cellphones adding an “unscripted score”, children playing and dogs barking, all familiar occurrences at a production by the VTM. And like all street performance, both VTM and OperaCamion have to operate under the reality that there is also no barrier for an easy exit by their audiences should they grow tired or bored with the performance. In both cases, audiences choose to stay with the event, to place themselves in the story/exhibition, to be an audience member. This final outdoor reality between VTM and OperaCamion is the one that truly distinguishes them from most other traveling outreach programs of performing arts institutions in both Europe and the US. To quote one of the attendees at an OperaCamion performance, “If I stayed to the end it means I liked it” (Povoledo).

The 21st Century Mobile Truck Phenomenon

At first, I was somewhat surprised when Merchant Square embraced the concept of the VTM ten years ago, welcoming a metal trailer out of character with the Colonial architecture, a wandering “Old Saint Nick,” and carolers singing, into the heart of their retail center. But as the years went on, it became clear that they had hoped to appeal to a class of “creative” audiences

that were important to CW and the merchants who ran businesses there. Their efforts speak to a larger phenomenon of mobile trucks selling food and other items that have become popular in outdoor spaces.

In 2002, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, by American Urban Studies theorist Richard Florida, laid the groundwork for city leaders and urban planners from around the world to justify “promoting consumption spaces designed to appeal to ‘creative’ people” (Martin 1870). Florida promoted using ‘culture’ and the ‘arts’ as a route to economic growth, arguing that ‘creativity’ is the most important characteristic for urban success in the knowledge economy” (1871). The way many in power assimilated Florida’s use of the word “creative” is a central part of Nina Martin’s article *Food fight! Immigrant Street Vendors, Gourmet Food Trucks and the Differential Valuation of Creative Producers in Chicago*, a sociological study about why the city of Chicago opened their zoning doors to the gourmet food truck movement after years of rejecting similar requests from immigrant street vendors who were basically offering the same service. Whether mobile theater or cuisine, a boutique dress or financial counseling services, all of these wheeled enterprises share an independent spirit that has sent them on the road to find and/or surprise their clients by bringing a creative force/performance/product into everyday outdoor spaces. The “Dallas Food Truck Palooza”, “Truckeroo DC”, “Rochester Food Truck Rodeo”, and the “Food Truck Festivals of America” are just a few of the food truck events that are being presented across America this year. Even their names conjure feelings of fun, surprise, adventure and hipness, evoking images of a spectacle into otherwise mundane shopping and other outdoor public spaces.

Food trucks, if you count the horse drawn chuck wagons, have been around since the end of the 19th century. They were originally created as practical means to bring food to areas/people

that were geographically isolated, and later further evolved as a functional method of providing fast and convenient sustenance. The ever-popular ice cream trucks became widespread in the 1950's and the traveling construction site canteen, lovingly nicknamed "the roach coach" ("A brief history of the mobile food industry"), entered the food frame in the 1960's. And while the website moilecuisine.com curiously claims that the "first" taco truck (as opposed to a taco street vendor I assume) is thought to be found in Los Angeles in 1974, it would not be until the 21st century that the gourmet food truck would start to make its mark. In the last ten years, not only has the gourmet food truck industry grown, but so too has its national presence, flourishing in pop culture and social media. The surprise of encountering the unusual vehicle (often strikingly painted for spectacle and advertising) and experiencing its fares by chance has become a familiar pilgrimage. This recent growth of the mobile food truck industry has spawned other creative retail and service businesses truck phenomena.

In March of 2016, the New York Times had an article on the return of the bookmobile by a bookstore owner in Nashville (Alter), followed five days later by an article in Forbes on a financial planner who "takes tough-love money advice on the road" with her financial planning truck (Pofeldt). The motivations for all of these trucks (food, books and financial) share some similar roots. The New York Times notes how "It is a logical and efficient way for a small bookstore to expand its footprint especially as big chains have shuttered locations, leaving a vacuum for enterprising independent stores to fill" (Alter) and then quotes the owner "One of my hopes is that we'll be able to go into some of the outlying suburbs and cities that don't necessarily have a bookstore" (Alter). The financial planner tells how she "launched the mobile aspect of her practice (in an eye catching refurbished mint green school bus) in November of 2014 to help a broader pool of people than she could assist in a traditional office" (Pofeldt). Not

to be outdone, retail giant Amazon has recently appropriated the popularity of the mobile retail craze in an attempt to keep its brand fresh and enterprising. It has started a mobile truck component, their *Treasure Truck*, to spice up its connection to its consumers: “Amazon announced that select Treasure Trucks would start popping up at local Whole Foods stores, though they're keeping the mystery alive by not revealing too many other details” (Flager).

In an interesting twist of the wild west Medicine Show, TeachSpin, a manufacturer of laboratory instruments designed for higher-education teaching, has created the “Food Truck for the Physics Mind” (McClain). TeachSpin is slightly more sophisticated in its marketing than the hucksters of the old Medicine Shows, as it promotes its truck as a “traveling outreach initiative”, visiting college and universities that may or may not buy their products (McClain). A local digital newspaper serving Williamsburg and Yorktown highlighted the story in May of 2017 when the vehicle came to the campus of William & Mary with the headline “Imagine a food truck, only full of physics experiments” (McClain). Whether a gourmet Cubano sandwich, the latest bestseller of fiction, advice for those with budgeting problems, or college educated physicists needing equipment, the concept of bringing the product to the customer in a surprising and magical vehicle seems to be part of the current zeitgeist, with the aim of enchanting points of consumption. The VTM’s production of *ACC*, *MTACC*, was fulfilling a similar aim, but specific in its bringing of a creative performance and the unexpected into Merchants Square, a highly predictable shopping experience set in the middle of a living history museum that promises tourists and audiences they will experience the past with magical flare.

Mobile Enchantment

VTM’s production of *ACC* performed in Merchants Square in CW is an unique event, an

experience of Dickens' classic in the center of a "cathedral of consumption" (Ritzer 7) attached to a museum site. VTM brings the script's messages of caring for others and eschewing the capitalist drive for accumulating profit into an existing "contact zone," (Clifford 188) the living museum of Merchants Square in CW, that promises those who buy tickets an experience of traveling back in time to remember, learn, and be – physically - in the conflict and a rising call to war at the birth of a nation. As the "largest living history museum in the world...Every aspect of the capitol city (Williamsburg) was to serve as a 'theatre of culture and politics'" (Casey 86). VTM's MTACC creates a contact zone where audiences participate in an enchanting event filled with "wonder" in a space with great "resonance" (Greenblatt 42) that reinforces a number of shared cultural ideals: freedom, democracy, charity, family, and capitalism – all at once.

Sociologist George Ritzer, in his book, *Enchanting A Disenchanted World* (2005), uses classical theorist Max Weber's ideas about heightened rationalization to examine processes of consumption in the United States and Western nations. Rationalized systems in modernity are driven by an efficiency achieved through calculation, predictability, a reliance on non-human technology, and rules and regulations, all characteristics that discourage the unexpected, the emotional, and the mystical. Ritzer concentrates on large-scale attempts to "revolutionize the means of consumption" – by reenchanted these disenchanted spaces, making them more emotional and mystical, and providing experiences to counter the predictability, lack of human connection, and sameness of rationalized spaces. Shopping malls and Disney World exemplify the heart of this "new means of consumption" (Ritzer 6), the commercialization of "fun", with a focus on getting the consumer "to spend ever-increasing amounts of time and money on consumption" (7). One only need to glance briefly at the CW website to see similarities. From

the option of purchasing the opportunity to fire a Colonial musket to purchasing any number of CW upscale spa packages, CW is marketed as leisure, as well as historical tourism.

Ritzer suggests that contemporary “cathedrals of consumption” take on an “enchanted, sometimes even sacred, religious character”(7). CW advertises drawing its consumer tourists back in time, to the birth of the Nation: “Colonial Williamsburg is the only place that takes you back in time to the dawn of America...They’re happening, right now, here in the 18th century. We’re the place where the idea of our country is being born; the place where the ideals we stand for as Americans are being defined” (Colonial Williamsburg website). In essence, CW sets a stage of the birth of a nation, a place where tourists come together to learn and participate, through staged events and interactions with living history actors, the spirit and meaning of the birth of the United States.

While CW was created many years ago as a not-for-profit living history museum, it has recently been trying to modernize while struggling to stabilize after large financial losses experienced over the past five years. This fall the local Williamsburg weekly paper, The Virginia Gazette, noted a sixty-nine-million-dollar loss for CW in 2016 alone, explaining that the foundation had to use endowment funds yet again to compensate for this massive loss (Brauchle). Merchants Square, as the shopping center of CW, is somewhat the “different kind(s) of mall” that Ritzer argues is increasingly sought after by today’s consumer, yet stands apart in its unique setting of a living history museum site (Ritzer 12). The rental income from the merchants in Merchants Square only accounts for a small fraction of the revenues for CW, but there is clearly an advantage for CW to work with the merchants to assure their success, as they are sharing and cultivating the same consumer audiences/participants.

The VTM has helped both the Merchants Square Business Association and CW build an enchanted experience that draws in consumers. Ritzer argues that businesses today need to counter the predictability and lack of human connection growing daily in our culture, as well as the sameness of rationalized spaces, by making the places of consumption, “cathedrals of consumption,” more emotional and human experiences that serve to enchant the consumer. Ritzer refers to “Marxian theory in the sense that to be controlled and exploited, consumers must be attracted, and continually return, to the cathedrals,” (48) and to Weber’s notion “that as a result of rationalization the Western world has grown increasingly disenchanting” (57). Ritzer also notes that as businesses reinvent these more “enchanted” places for consumption, the novelty eventually wears off, requiring constant change to re-enchant. One can see how a rewritten and redesigned production of MTACC on a trailer that transforms into a stage (“like a Power Ranger” as one anonymous child once shared) could readily address this need for constant change and surprise, providing a fresh face each year to the holiday experience of Merchants Square.

As audiences of VTM’s ACC in Merchants Square returned each year to see a new production, they returned to a familiar consumption tourist space, to the shared cultural values at work in that space (family, freedom, capitalism, charity), a place of traditions, of rituals, that reflected these values. For example, one VTM audience member, Jim, talked about his discover of MTACC after finishing another holiday ritual at William and Mary, itself a symbolic point of American history and values: “It was cold, we were carrying our one and half year old. As we made the turn heading back to the van, we heard this singing, where is it coming from, where is it coming from? As we turn the corner there are these torches and there is a 1,000 people out there. This is exactly why we stayed in this area, because they have traditions. It’s a huge community of people who love that whole Williamsburg holiday thing.” For Jim,

CW, especially during the holiday season, represented connecting with family members, and the event of MTACC a strong piece of the experience:

We took my mother, when she was super sick, and lived with us. She was crazy about Christmas. As the sickness came on she would become more of an introvert. We got her out and did the whole thing, this was 2015- we took her to see the show, took her to the pizza place, Barnes and Nobel on the lower level for hot chocolate, the roaming Santa Claus was there she thought that was awesome, we get her back home and the fire is going and she is going on and on and on about how much she loved it – ‘I would live there I would have a small house right on the walkway!’

Michael told me: “I get a kick out of seeing the kids at the show, Williamsburg is a family town to me...it’s family and history.”

Other audience members noted the attraction of being a part of CW, of feeling like they were going “back in time to the dawn of America” as marketed. Ric said: “We feel like we’ve almost gotten to know George Washington [through living history actors] or Thomas Jefferson, or Patrick Henry, because they are friends! We have seen them so many times, we have talked to them, and [at the Tucker House] you get to be in the living room and be with them for an hour or more and they even come out of character.” Many repeat VTM audience members returned each holiday season to this familiar living history space, to hear a familiar Dickens’ holiday classic, but one that was able to surprise. The VTM was re-enchanting the consumers of Merchants Square and CW during a heightened holiday season of consumption.

Greenblatt notes of the Museum of Modern Art:

“MOMA is one of the great contemporary places not for the hearing of intertwining voices, not for historical memory, not for ethnographic thickness, but for intense, indeed enchanted looking. Looking may be called enchanted when the act of attention draws a circle around itself from which every thing but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, stills all murmuring voices. To be sure, the viewer may have purchased a catalogue, read an inscription on the wall, or switched on a cassette player, but in the moment of wonder all of this apparatus seems mere static” (Greenblatt 49).

VTM's MTACC production, as it shifted each year, brought audiences members anew into the mystical, enchanting them and their children, in novel ways. Jim talked about how nice it was to see the kids being pulled away from their video games and phones through the production: "It's a really nice moment, to be able to have a tradition nowadays that has to do with involvement or creativity...this year was the wackiest with the puppets...it pulls them [my boys] into it." Jim described the value of his children being drawn in, enchanted by the space: "They need things that draw them to something more creative." Veronica too noted the value, for her, of watching her children being drawn in: "Watching him enjoy it and giggle and his attention span, that you held his attention for that full 30 minutes means a lot to me because it invested into my son, it was the first experience where he happened to have a huge emotional response...sparking creativity in all of us and it's just a beautiful Christmas gift."

Audiences of VTM's *ACC* were transported from the surrounding shopping experience of William Sonoma, Barnes and Nobel, and the local Wythe Candy store into the unpredictable world of a familiar Charles Dickens' classic, as Greenblatt suggest of museum exhibits that provoke moving from resonance to wonder. Henry implied no irony when discussing he and his wife's shopping in Merchants Square and then later noted "the only problem I've ever had with Christmas is that it is over commercialized and Merchants Square is not doing that, they are bringing a nice message to people."

CONCLUSION

I have taken the machine apart with the purpose of providing a possible schematic that future theater artists might use to devise their own unconventional theater-making ventures, mobile or fixed. Some of this disassembling of the machine has been about the physical realities of engaging with audiences in outdoor public spaces. In addition, my analysis of the VTM's ten-year production of MTACC in Merchants Square speaks to the creation of a novel performance hybrid, an event of street theater in an existing consumer/living history museum with its own set of performances and beliefs at work. In particular, I suggest that a mobile theater event can have the power to enchant, to reach audiences by making certain beliefs and values resonate in alternate ways through familiar spaces.

The difficulties and limitations of outdoor theatre were anticipated but never fully appreciated until I was experiencing them in very tangible ways (heat, cold, wetness, the power of wind, parking on a significant incline, etc...). Another constraint of outdoor theatre that is fully open to the public is the degree to which the material is greatly restricted, especially in a conservative community like Williamsburg. Content, language and images have to be carefully considered to be acceptable by any possible passerby, regardless of the intended audience. Yet there are great advantages to how street theatre "interrupts normal life" too, as noted in John Bell's Book *American Puppet Modernism*: "Street theatre involves an appropriation of everyday public space for performance. The interruption of normal life created by a stationary street show

or a moving parade is an obvious (and usually welcome) “misuse” of that street’s public space. But street performance is in fact a perfectly appropriate use of the thoroughfare, because of the formal attention it pays to the public nature of the street: its celebration of the street and, inevitably, those who happen to be walking on it.” (Bell 216) One of the interview participants offered a similar insight, “I think the fact that you bring a production out to a people in the streets, street theatre, gives you a tremendous advantage in always being, what’s the word I’m searching for, refreshing...you’ve got a winning product in that you’re bringing in new people because it’s a constantly evolving audience.”

Many of the thousands of audience members in Merchants Square that VTM’s *MTACC* touched over the past ten years were participating in a live theater experience for the first time. For many others it was only one of a few encounters with live theater that they had had in their lifetime. This begs the question of whether this vehicle has introduced them to a new practice that will inspire them to see other live performances and to try on the role of an audience member who seeks to engage with live theater. Is this experience transferable to seeing other live theater or is it too distinct in format, time frame, and the specific geographical location that is part of a Colonial Williamsburg experience?

I was surprised to learn that nearly half of the returning audience members I interviewed did not self-identify as recurring theatregoers outside of the VTM experience. Given the emphasis that so many of them placed on the space itself, Merchants Square, and the magic they experienced around the holiday time in that space, it may not have occurred to them to look elsewhere for such an experience. It could also be, as is the danger with any yearly performance of *ACC*, that audiences were only interested in returning to a space to hear the iconic story that has become a ritualized experience of the holiday season for themselves or their family. What

would it mean to cultivate audience members who are willing to see more than just this one story?

I was encouraged by the fact that most of the participants interviewed did note their willingness to see a different VTM production (other than an adaptation of *ACC*), although many added the qualification of only if it was at another time of year. Henry, who lives in a very rural area requiring him and his wife to go to Williamsburg for their groceries as well as all of their theatergoing, even noted how “if you do something I’ve never heard of... I mean now that I know you guys, right, I would probably see it.” Hal, speaking for his family’s experience, made a point to mention how they “followed the VTM and signed up and we get the notices like that on Facebook and if y’all were there in October it would give us another reason to come then.” Lou noted how his decision to return is connected to how “we’ve become attached to the actors, so if you guys were to do *Taming of the Shrew* we would love to watch that as well, if you guys were doing Shakespearean things,” with Shakespeare clearly holding a similarly esteemed place as masterpiece and high art as Dickens. Frank, suggesting we capitalize on our “winning product” went so far as to propose the other work we could present, all in relation to the experience of coming to Colonial Williamsburg: “you’ve got a lot of events that draw people to CW...so you could tune in to a veterans day, memorial day or 4th of July, you know the birth of the nation.” Although all echoed Michael’s comment when discussing the possibility of other shows and plays, “I hate to loose *ACC* though.” Whether this audience member would travel to another public mall or public park to experience a production is a larger question. Merchants Square was the setting/space for each of his imagined productions.

One of the most direct ways for me to analyze the larger implications of this mobile production in the lives of individual audience members and for the future prospects of young

theater artists, is to briefly discuss the implications of how another show, other than *MTACC*, might adapt on the VTM and in the same space of CW. In the fall of 2017, I was in a class that asked the students to create an adaptation of a myth or fairy tale, with emphasis on what the process of adaptation meant and how this adaptation would hold relevance for a 21st century audience. I created an alternative feminist version of the Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel*, that addressed core themes of domestic violence, the lure of technology as the sought-after confection of the 21st century, as well as examining the degree to which gender roles are ingrained in our social interactions. While not discussed in the paper, I envisioned this adaptation on the stage of the VTM, particularly as a possible production to present in MS in the month of October as part of the ever-growing capitalization of Halloween in CW. Merchants Square now has an ever growing list of special events for families during Halloween that include costumes for the horses to make them look like horse skeletons as well as the perfunctory opportunities for children to collect candy. CW also has year-round Ghost Tours, as other tourist city destinations have developed, that are an especially strong tourism draw during Halloween. I am confident that I could sell this known story to the business owners at MS given my record with them and because it is a seemingly safe tale that on the surface provides lessons of gluttony during this time of overindulgence of sweets. This production on the VTM would use all the same tools to once again enchant those on the streets, using the wonder of the transformative machine (the trailer itself) in conjunction with the wonder of the theatrical spectacle of transformation that is core to the VTM experience: Actors playing multiple characters; objects and puppets being brought to life; quick costume changes; a dizzying array of sound cues to change atmosphere instantaneously, props appearing and disappearing; and even scenery actually transforming itself in front of the audiences gaze.

The surface story would be one that everyone knows and feels comfortable with, like *ACC*, yet the other issues I alluded to in my adaptation would be present for those willing to see these ramifications, for those who might be drawn into the wonder of the mobile machine. The resonance of the environment of *MS* and *CW*, both as places of history and current tourist destinations, would, as was true with *ACC*, shape the experience of the audience as they perform the role of consumer/tourist immersed in the birth of a nation and the celebration of U.S. values and ideals. The place, in this case *MS* in *CW*, always becomes part of the show, a factor that every theatre-maker often overlooks, even in fixed theatrical presentations. The wonder of the *VTM*, as an engineering spectacle and as the frame for the overtly theatrical nature of the presentations, exists no matter where it is parked. However, the resonance and embedded meaning of each performance destination of the *VTM*, the space that surrounds the audience and the trailer, brings an added dimension that shapes not just how the audience responds to the story or play, but the entire experience of being at that place, outside, with strangers -- all sharing in what for many is an unusual communal event in today's ever isolated, individualistic world.

Mobile productions in heightened spaces of consumption that communicate caring for others, valuing charity above profit, recognizing the gendered nature of domestic violence, or naming the controlling power of technology can hopefully plant seeds for social change and/or a desire to engage again in the wonder of live theater. Veronica told me during our interview that she "loved" that the production "was free and it was just kind of like really ummm a gift, it just felt like a gift and we talked and talked about it and like I said it made such an indelible mark on me...the top of the wish list to find you guys and see it again." It is important to imagine and construct theatre as gifts, events where the theater artist can bring people together to experience, collectively, a sense of wonder that can awaken a social consciousness (Appendix 2n).

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Appendix 2-A

The Virginia Theatre Machine, parked and opened for its first dress rehearsal.



Appendix 2-b

2010-2011 Performing Arts Tour Directory Virginia Commission for the Arts

NEW!

**VIRGINIA
THEATRE MACHINE**
Inquire

CONTACT
Mark Lerman
Proprietor/Director
114 Sherwood Drive
Williamsburg, VA 23185
757-784-5337
E-mail: virginiaatheatremachine@cox.net
Web: www.virginiaatheatremachine.com

FEES

<i>A Mercurial Roadshow</i>	\$750
<i>Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol</i>	\$450

All fees include post-performance Q & A with Actors/Director/Playwright (15 minutes). Fees do not include travel expenses. Discounts are available for multiple performances on the same day (even different venues as long as they are within a 5 mile radius of each other. Block-book with neighboring schools/organizations and save!).



AVAILABILITY
A Mercurial Roadshow:
March-May 2011;
Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol:
November-December 2010

TECHNICAL Assume shows are OUTSIDE. Level 15' x 15' space needed to park Machine. Inside performance possible with door clearance of 9'(width) x 12' (height). Electrical outlet within 150'.

AUDIENCE All ages

ABOUT "A new twist on drive-in theatre!"
The Virginia Theatre Machine is a technically equipped mobile stage prepared to transport engaging and innovative professional theater to audiences anywhere a 2,000 lb trailer can be embedded: museum parking lot, local schoolyard, basketball court or public park. VTM combines a fully designed theatrical production (light, sound, scenery, costumes, puppets, special-effects) with an energetic street theatre performance style and audience interaction.

PERFORMANCES *A Mercurial Roadshow* (35 minutes). Commissioned by the College of William & Mary's International Mercury Expo, premiering April 2010. Explores the media wars concerning the benefits and threats of the chemical element mercury as related to energy production, food, health care, global warming, and even Broadway. Facts? Myths? Three actors and a few dedicated puppets make sense out of the mayhem, while creating a little chaos of their own. Study guide provided.

Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol (25 minutes). Master Thespian transforms himself into multiple characters of all ages, gender and spectral variety in this adaptation/abbreviation of the Dickens classic.

THEATRE

39 VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS

Appendix 2-c

2013-2014 Performing Arts Tour Directory Virginia Commission for the Arts

VIRGINIA STAGE COMPANY *Theatre K-12*

CONTACT

Janelle Burchfield
P.O. Box 3770
Norfolk, VA 23514
757-627-6988, ext. 358
E-mail: jburchfield@vastage.com
Web: www.vastage.com

FEES

In-School Performances \$250-\$600
In-School Post Performance Workshops \$75-\$375

Discounts for same-day repeat performances. Some performances may require accommodations or travel expenses, outside of 50 miles from Norfolk

PHOTO: BRENDAN HOYLE



AVAILABILITY October 2013 – May 2014

TECHNICAL Clear floor with 15' x 15' dimensions, at least 10' ceiling and electrical outlet

AUDIENCE Grades K-12

ABOUT CULTIVATE, VSC's education and artistic research team, offers experiences that build a lifelong connection between learning and the arts. VSC is Hampton Roads' only professional, resident theater, designing, building and performing shows for 34 seasons.

PERFORMANCES CULTIVATE In-School Performances provide SOL-based plays incorporating themes and core curriculum to encourage creative thinking and personal growth. Performances are suitable for grades K-12 and include a detailed Study Guide to assist teachers in integrating the performance into their curriculum.

Visit www.vastage.com/educationoutreach/touring-productions for this season's offerings. Current touring productions: *Virginia's History: Jamestown* (K-5); *The Tempest*; *Explored* (Grades 6-12); *Meet Mark Twain!* (K-12+).

Past touring productions: *Aesop's Network* (K-5); *Julius Caesar* (Grades 6-12); *Romeo & Juliet* (Grades 6-12); *Jungle Book* (K-5); *Hansel & Gretel's Grimm Tale* (K-5); *1,001 Arabian Nights: The Story of Aladdin*.

WORKSHOPS We can custom-design workshops to meet your lesson needs and SOL requirements: Careers in Theatre Arts, Improv, Stage Combat, Shakespeare for Young Actors, Theatre Games, Electoral College and more.

VIRGINIA THEATRE MACHINE *Theatre*

CONTACT

Mark Lerman
Proprietor/Director
114 Sherwood Drive
Williamsburg, VA 23185
757-784-5337
E-mail: virginiatheatremachine@cox.net
Web: www.virginiatheatremachine.com

CONTACT

Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol \$600

All fees include post-performance Q & A with Actors/Directors/Playwright. Fees do not include accommodations or travel expenses.

AVAILABILITY November-December 2013

TECHNICAL Assume shows are OUTSIDE: Level 15' x 15' space needed to park Machine. Inside performance possible with door clearance of 9'(width) x 12' (height). Electrical outlet within 150'.

AUDIENCE All ages

ABOUT "A new twist on drive-in theatre!"

The Virginia Theatre Machine is a technically equipped mobile stage prepared to transport engaging and innovative professional theater to audiences anywhere a 2,000 lb trailer can be embedded: museum parking lot, local schoolyard, basketball court or public park. VTM combines a fully designed theatrical production (light, sound, scenery, costumes, puppets, special-effects) with an energetic street theatre performance style and audience interaction.

PERFORMANCES *Master Thespian's A Christmas Carol* (25 minutes)
Master Thespian transforms himself into multiple characters of all ages, gender and spectral variety in this adaptation/abbreviation of the Dickens classic. Re-written and re-designed every year for those looking for some annual holiday cheer.



PHOTO: LISA CUMMING

THEATRE

Appendix 2-d

Jr. Thespian Button given to three volunteers from the audience at the end of each performance



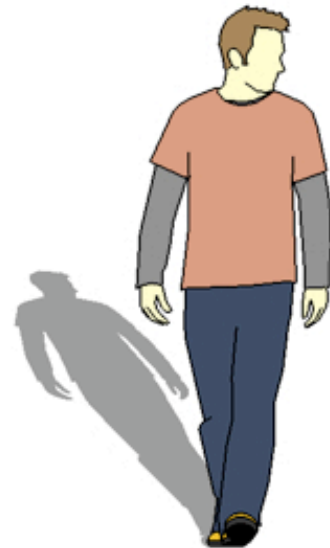
Appendix 2-e

The Virginia Theatre Machine in performance at night in Merchants Square



Appendix 2-f

Original design illustration



Appendix 2-g

Sampling of puppets and performing objects used in productions



Appendix 2-h

Sampling of puppets and performing objects used in productions



Appendix 2-i

Sampling of puppets and performing objects used in productions



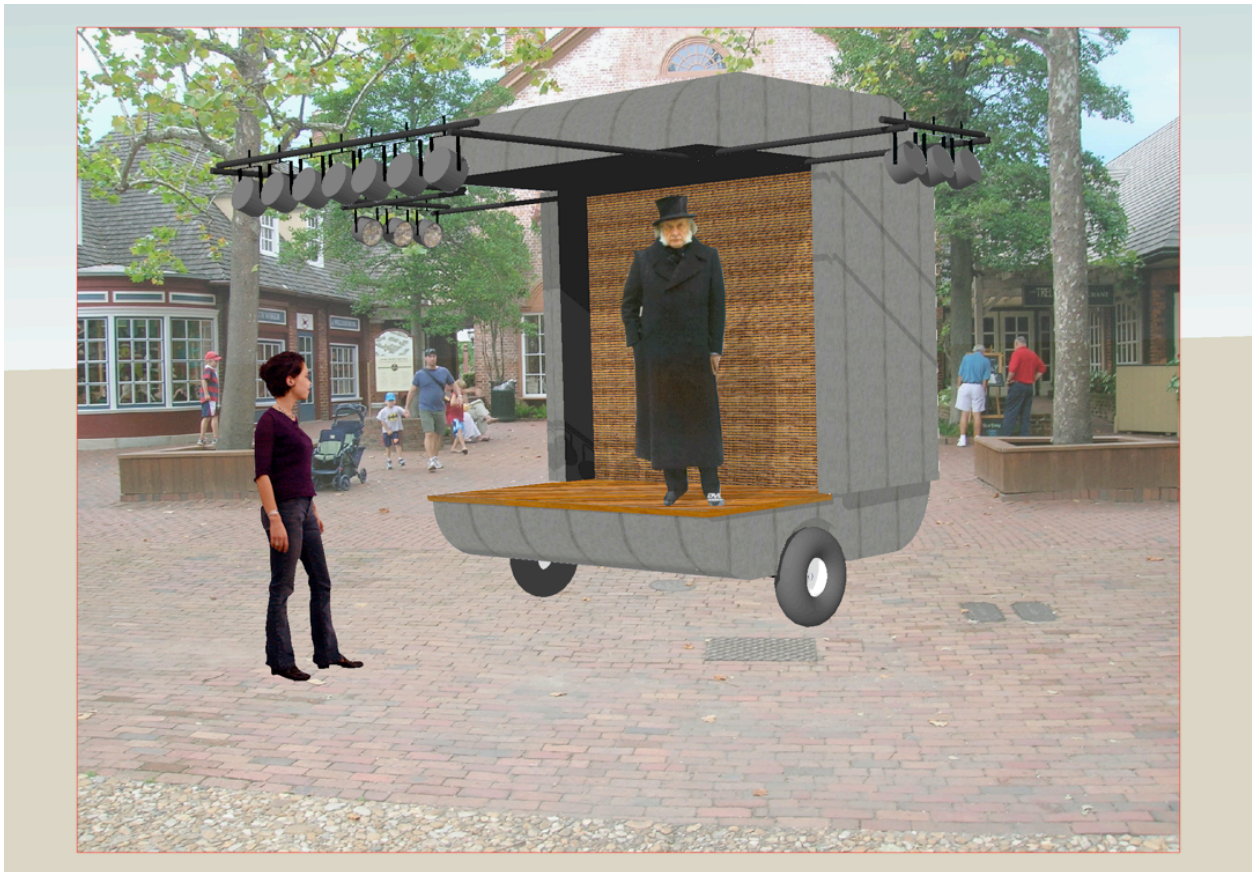
Appendix 2-j

The ghost of Marley's first surprise entrance



Appendix 2-k

Mock up of trailer in Merchants Square with the character of Scrooge (George C. Scott)
on the stage



Appendix 2-1

Original Presentation submitted to Merchants Square

A technically equipped mobile stage prepared to transport highly engaging and innovative professional theater to audiences anywhere an 8'x8' (x 11' h) 2,500 lb trailer can be embedded. Whether it is the parking lot of your favorite mall, the local schoolyard, a public park or private beach, or even stationed in front of your own back door, Virginia Theatre Machine will perform. The Virginia Theatre Machine, under the direction of Mark J. Lerman of Williamsburg, VA and designed and fabricated by Jeremy Woodward of Providence, RI, rolls into production in the fall of 2008.

The Virginia Theatre Machine Tech Specs

-Stage Dimensions:	8ft x 8ft
-Elevation of stage from ground level:	2ft 4in
-Clearance from undercarriage to road:	1ft
-Height Clearance for trailer:	11ft 4in
-Footprint of entire trailer (w/ tow bar):	
Parked & Locked	8ft 6in x 12ft
Performance ready w/ side walls folded open*	9ft 6in x 12ft
Performance ready w/Side walls fully extended*	24ft x 12ft
-Lighting Equipment:	LED stage lights
-Sound Equipment:	500watt power amp/mixer/4 speakers (built into trailer), wireless mics, mp3 player
-Powered by regular household Edison outlet/Travels with 2 very long extension cords!	

Master Thespians' A Christmas Carol – in under 15 minutes!

Be witness to Master Thespian's solo performance extravaganza as he attempts the grueling and stage defying act of recreating Dickens' classic tale of redemption- in less than 15 minutes! Master Thespian will transform himself into multiple characters of all ages, gender and spectral variety. Master Thespian will put himself in psychological harms way as he exposes his inner soul to the full range of emotions needed to transport his audience from laughter to pity to shock to love to despair to hope. He will conclude with a full catharsis of all the emotions ever recorded*- again, all in under an unimaginable 15 minutes**. Master Thespian regards himself as one of the world's greatest and least recognized Grand Dame's (but the male equivalent) of the theater. He prides himself on noting that 100% of all his outdoor performances with no seats end in a standing ovation! He will perform this feat of theatrical wizardry on the stage of the newly minted Virginia Theatre Machine. Audiences will be able to gather around this outdoor stage to share in this intimate marvel of stagecraft with full production values: Lights, Sound, Sets, Props, Puppets, Costumes, & Special-Effects. Master Thespians' A Christmas Carol will be directed by Virginia Theatre Machine's proprietor, Mark J. Lerman. The sets, special effects and puppets will be designed by the Virginia Theatre Machine's resident designer, Jeremy Woodward. Bios for Mark J. Lerman and Jeremy Woodward are attached. Master Thespian refuses to offer a bio as he feels his name and reputation speak for themselves.

*Free tissues are always provided in any performance by Master Thespian.

**This reflects a performance time only. Virginia Theatre Machine and Master Thespian are not responsible for the extra minutes or hours needed for encores and autograph signing post performance.

Appendix 2-m

Master Thespian as barker calling in the crowd before a 2008 performance



Appendix 2-n

An enchanted evening in Merchants Square



Vita

Mark Jonas Lerman was born on November 6, 1963, in Rochester, New York, and is an American Citizen. He graduated from The Westminster Schools, Atlanta, Georgia in 1981. He subsequently received his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1985 and a Directing Certificate from the Trinity Rep. Conservatory in 1989. He was the Artistic Director of the Perishable Theatre from 1990-2005. He is the Proprietor and Director of the Virginia Theatre Machine, LLC, founded in 2008.