

THE THEATRE ARTS PROGRAM

at the University of Pennsylvania

presents:

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The Penn Theatre Ensemble Presents *The Orlando Project*

A short documentary film to feature in the 2020 Philadelphia Fringe

Philadelphia, PA – *The Orlando Project* is a 28-minute short film created by the Penn Theatre Ensemble, a group of Penn Theatre Arts majors led by faculty member Dr. Marcia Ferguson. The film combines expressive accounts of the students' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, freewheeling footage, text from Virginia Woolf's novel and original music.

The class rehearsed a production of Sarah Ruhl's *Orlando*, which was to travel to the Edinburgh Fringe in August. With the University of Pennsylvania moving to remote learning after Spring break and the Edinburgh Fringe ultimately canceled for 2020, it was clear the course would not be able to proceed as planned. The class was already underway, combining rehearsals with artistic resident Blanka Zizka's training workshops.

Looking for a way to build on this initial work within a new format, Dr. Ferguson gave the group a new assignment: weekly video projects in which the individual members of the class reflect on Ruhl's play, the Virginia Woolf novel on which it was based, and their experiences of the pandemic. Though the class was unable to perform in Edinburgh this year, the Penn Theatre Ensemble is delighted to share their work in the 2020 Philadelphia Fringe Festival.

PROJECT CREDITS

Ensemble/Creators:

Whitney Barrett
Olivia Demberg
Adam Ritter
Susset Tamayo
Matthias Volker

Director/Editor:

Marcia Ferguson

Original Music:

Marcia Ferguson
Adam Ritter

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Dr. Marcia Ferguson, an actor and director, is a core faculty member in the Theatre Arts program. She has directed multiple productions at Penn, as well as for several professional companies in Philadelphia, most recently appearing in the Barrymore-recommended *12 Chairs* (Juniper Productions). She is a member of Artistic Boards for White Box Theatre, the Idiopathic Ridiculopathy Consortium, the Paper Doll Ensemble and the Philly Improv Project. In addition to teaching and directing classical and new plays, she is dedicated to an interdisciplinary approach to theatre-making, co-creating original performances, and facilitating multi-disciplinary work as a foundational part of her art-making and teaching practices.

ABOUT THE PENN THEATRE ENSEMBLE

The Penn Theatre Ensemble is made up of five undergraduate Theatre Arts majors at the University of Pennsylvania. Every other year, a new ensemble is chosen to prepare a piece for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, a tradition built over the last twenty-five years.

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QUOTES FROM ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

Olivia Demberg: “The ensemble building we did fostered close relationships between all of us and continues to foster those relationships even from afar. The thoughtfulness of our responses to each other’s work that was so greatly impacted by our personal situations gave us an unwavering support system as well as a creative outlet, both of which are essential in the life of an artist.”

Whitney Barrett: “The idea of imagination and using your body to build something took on a new meaning after spring break. We started rehearsals with the knowledge that we wouldn't be using many props or other physical tools to bring the story to life and in Blanka's workshop so much of it is focused on the self and what your body can do. When I am at home doing these videos a lot of it is just me and the outside, I could only pull from my surroundings and myself without my ensemble.”

Matthias Volker: “Our first zoom class after making our videos there was a really raw moment where we all realized we were making something special. Everyone's videos were so good and truthful, and suddenly we didn't seem so distant from one another. It reminded me to turn to art during difficult times and has given me a great sense of perspective.”

Susset Tamayo: “Working on this project has given me the space to reflect on my own experience of this pandemic. Most of my other classes continue to run as close to before as possible—lectures, readings, and discussions that follow the original syllabus. Because this project has transformed into a one that ties in our current realities, it has served as a meaningful, creative way to listen to and take in my experience of and thoughts about the present moment.”

ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS

Penn Today article on *The Orlando Project*: <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/Penn-theatre-arts-personal-documentaries-Orlando-Edinburgh-Fringe>

Interview with Director Dr. Marcia Ferguson: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbZto7_D-tU