

**Inside the Artist -
Taryn Noelle
May 2016**



How did you get started in this artistic endeavor? What has been your journey? What brought you to the place where you thought you wanted to do this?

I saw William Inge's play, "Bus Stop," directed by George Woodard, a piece of local theater that I saw when I was a teenager, and I totally fell in love with. That was huge. You and Jo Sabel, and Veronica (Blount) and Roger (Hamel) were in it. It was beautiful and it's stayed with me. That's how it starts, finding something that gives you inspiration early on and makes you see what's possible. Jo brought me to that show. We were family friends and Jo was in it, and I was 15 and went with my family. I'd done a little bit of theater in high school and a little bit at good old' LCP (Lamoille County Players), and was just starting to think about what theater was and just took my first voice lessons, so I was very new and green. So that's how it started—in Waterbury—how perfect is that? And I did more theater in high school and Stowe Theater Guild.



Later I went to theater school (Hart School of Music) for a year, but it wasn't the right program so I came back to Vermont. Did more work, and grew up a little bit, and eventually went to New York City, to school at Circle in the Square--which I loved. But while I was in Vermont for those 5 years between, I first delved into choreography on my own. I had a bit of a backwards

approach. Someone dropped out of a project that they couldn't do for personal reasons and they needed to fill a hole for "Cabaret" at Stowe Theater Guild. I was like 23, and I had my first chance to really choreograph a main stage show. I had worked on Pippin at the Barre Opera House when I was still in high school, and I was given the early shot in the arm of Fosse work. In doing that, it made me do a ton of research. I watched tons of Liza Minnelli, and I watched "All That Jazz," so I just started doing my own little pockets of research and started to fall in love with the genre that it is, so was armed with that when I got the chance to do Cabaret all those years later. I thought "cool, hard work, a new challenge!" So I dove in and it was a blast! I had great dancers, and it was such hard work, and it really was where I truly began.



Then about a year and a half later I was at Circle in the Square, and I loved that. My time in school was completely invaluable. It was so amazing and I can't place a \$\$ value to it. It taught me a lot. I didn't love it enough to pound the pavement evermore, but I stayed a year afterwards and auditioned and got some jobs, some out of town work, too, which was great. I got to go to work in Indiana, different parts of Jersey, and New York State, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and that was awesome. But I came back to Vermont not really planning to stay, and I never left. For the last decade I've been here trying to work in the arts as much as I can and learn and grow and figure out what I want to be when I grow up.

In 2001 I also saw a piece of theater in NYC that was another shot in the arm to move forward to a goal that I still have. It was a show that Susan Stohman directed and choreographed called "Contact," performed at Lincoln Center. She is one of my favorite theatrical choreographers and a fabulous director. It

gave me this window in what I think is possible and what I enjoy. It's kind a dance theater crossover. There's probably a better word for it than that. She calls it a Dance/Musical. When it was nominated for a Tony award, it was nominated in the Musical Theater category but it changed my world in that moment. My goal is to create my own dance theater main-stage piece. A lot of people would call it Dance/Musical. It's not a musical in my case. At least the plan is that there won't be actual live-sung vocals. You use popular song to underscore the whole show from different genres and different periods of time. Sometimes they might be in public domain titles, but licensing becomes tricky with this kind of thing where you have to pay royalties for amazing music that covers a large patchwork quilt, BUT dance would be the mainstay mode of communicating the storytelling along with some dialogue. And it's what I've been searching for ever since as way to do that.

What most inspires your work right now? What are the criteria, the guide to choosing your creative projects?

If I feel like I'm getting stuck too much in any rut of doing anything too often I find that I want to make my next thing challenge me in a very different direction. So I am in the midst of a "Hairspray" run at Lost Nation with two weeks left and I was the lead choreographer on the show, but I had two amazing assistants, each had their own style to absorb and work around. Theatrically, I am also in the show playing someone against type, which was very much on purpose. I just don't get cast that way, I don't audition that way, and I don't give myself the chance to work in that realm a lot. And so just to push myself I wanted to do something very different and it's been a mixed blessing, but it's been fun at the very least. And it's a great learning opportunity.



In terms of directing at the high school level, or anything I might do for the town of Stowe, we all have different pieces of "peu de

chance” that we are drawn toward and I think directorially or choreographically if I’m in the position to choose a title I want it to be either that it is so joyful with a large dance component, or that is a large ensemble dance show that gets people from all walks of life coming together. In the high school, less variety and age, of course, but I like things that bring people of all different abilities together. That’s really exciting for me. So I will often choose to choreograph pieces that have that opportunity for me. On the other side of that, I like things that aren’t over produced, in terms of musical theater, and have a nice emotional through-line that gives young people an emotional challenge. If doesn’t have a tremendous amount of energy and joy and hope in challenging them as dancers and making people of all ages and abilities come together and dance together, then it’s got (to have) a story that has a lot of heart in it, a really nice journey, and challenges them emotionally. Those are things that I gravitate towards.

What has been the biggest thing/event to influence your work? Do you have any artistic heroes, musical or otherwise?

That show, Susan Stroman’s “Contact” I spoke of earlier, which I saw in 2001. And of course I’ve seen things since then that were astonishing, but this made me want to make something myself. It was so groundbreaking.



And then I had a really wonderful actor professor in particular. A lot of Vermont students go to Circle in the Square because of Bill Reed. A lot of faculty have also come to Vermont to teach because of Bill Reed. One is Alan Langdon. He is one of my heroes who always sit on my shoulder when I am working. He’s a reminder of truth, and why we do what we do, and what’s important, and being real with yourself. He reminds the “self” to

get out of self’s way. He’s an angel that sits on my shoulder for sure. I also got to work with a really fabulous jazz voice coach, Gregory Toroian. He’s brilliant.

Tell us about activities you enjoy outside of music.

Not enough! That’s one of my new immediate goals. Do other stuff! Go outside more. Go to the library to read. Do more art projects—paint and watercolor, and collage. I’d also like to play more sports outside. I want to play volleyball, soccer, and be a kid and play more sports outside.

What are you reading right now?

I’m re-reading “The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden” for research. That and “The Alchemist,” by Paulo Coelho—again.

What’s next for you?

I supervise the theater program at the Stowe High School and they have a One-Act Competition that many schools in Vermont take part in. This year I’m going to write a Dance/Musical theater one-act for them. Not the same thing I want to do as an independent project, but for the school I want to try a new medium on for size for the one-act competition world. I have a ton of research to do to find out what’s allowed and what’s not, but basically I want to give the kids an opportunity to do something different. And I think text is so important, I’m not diminishing that, I just want to try something different. It’s a template for me to dust off my own larger idea and test it with kids and see what the response and feedback is. The nice thing about this one-act circuit is there is a panel of wonderful professors and educators that are commenting on the work from high schools all over the state. It’s a huge learning opportunity because you get to hear so much experience and background from so many walks of life and from where all these directors have come from. Most of these directors for the state one-act festivals are adults, but sometimes there are students directors so there can be a mix of experience level there. But that’s my plan. This summer I’m going to write a dance theater one-act for my high school and spend the summer tweaking it and in the fall maybe do a little workshop thing, and then we’ll cast it and rehearse it and put it on its feet and see what it becomes. But that’s my idea. I’ll start there and see where that goes.

One of my students who is graduating wrote a really cool one-act musical review. He’s a great writer and he’s probably going to go into film studies in California. He was a lead for me that last two years that I directed at the school, he’s a great kid and a

great writer and I wanted to give him an opportunity to do one more thing at school before he graduated. We’re doing it off site at Town Theater in Stowe in mid-May, only 2 performances, and we’re going to pair his work with another small one act. I was trying to condense “Bus Stop” into a one-act because his piece is also about a diner, called “Night Hawks.” It’s a musical review and I’ll direct the song portion and he’ll direct the text. All the songs are popular covers, but he wrote the dialogue. So we’re going to pair that with another short one-act, either the condensed one-act or I’ll stage “The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden,” which is Thornton Wilder’s precursor to “Our Town.” It’s only 30 minutes long. It’s the beginning of that play and it’s about how the words are so important and the details of that family’s life he valued so highly and I think that’s really beautiful. I want to give high school kids a chance to work on that. I think that’s where we’ll probably land. We’ll do this not on their high school stage, but in their town, which is so different. I’m so happy to give them that chance. It’ll be in a staged reading format, but they will probably not need their scripts in hand because their brains are so young and fresh.

And I’m staging the dances and also playing in “The Great American Trailer Park Musical” at the Valley Players that goes up in late June through late July. So much fun (!), as much as the title would imply. I love dialect work! If I could just go back to school for dialect work, I would. I get to play north Florida trailer trash and that’s thrilling for me! Any chance to work outside of Standard American speech is so exciting for me. I just love sounds. And they are really down-home people that are really easy-going and the banter is really funny and there are a lot of clichés--a lot of what you might imagine. I think it’s so funny. And really good people on the production.

Later, I am also staging the dances for “Jesus Christ Superstar” with Stowe Theater Guild. That kind of rock music is a new challenge for me, it different for me, it wild and free yet rooted in something really grounded. It’s cool! I’m excited!

Where to follow Taryn Noelle’s work:
Hairspray—Closes May 8 @ Lost Nation Theater, Montpelier
Night Hawks—May 13 & 14 @ Town Hall, Stowe
Great American Trailer Park Musical--June 23-July 9 @ Valley Players Theater, Waitsfield
Jesus Christ Superstar—August 17-September 3, Stowe Theater Guild, Stowe