Wade McCollum (Ernest Shackleton) accompanied by Valerie Vigoda (Kat) in *Ernest Shackleton Loves Me*. (Photo: Jeff Carpenter.)

the spine of the musical's premise, one wishes that there were more original songs and two or three less echoes of the "Star Blazers" theme or the rousing "We're on Our Way."

Peterson directed *Shackleton* with an audacious athleticism on Nichols's icy skeletal grid of a set. Vigoda and McCollum made use of every sparse square inch of the playing area, transforming objects littered across the stage, such as a roadie box and floor lamp, into a sled or a lifeboat with oars. Nichols's projected images informed and interacted with live action as integral parts of the storytelling, even when McCollum hilariously dueled himself as de León for the hand of "fair Katerina." Of note was the fluid incorporation of Endurance crewmember Frank Hurley's archival photographs and film footage of the historical voyage of the *Endurance* into the production's intricate layers of multimedia.

Ernest Shackleton Loves Me dared to embark into innovative theatrical territory and pioneered new technical vistas for musical performance, mirroring form and function in an emotionally satisfying exploration of the devastating abyss of depression.

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DULCEY AND ROXY AT CITY HALL: A PLAY FOR THE THEATER OF ARRHYTHMIC BULLSHIT. By Maksym Kurochkin. Translated by John Freedman. Directed by Graham Schmidt. Breaking String Theater, Salvage Vanguard Theater, Austin, Texas. 3 May 2014.

Dulcey and Roxy at City Hall is, to quote its Ukrainian playwright Maksym Kurochkin, a "strange play." Disjointed and absurdist, alternately humorous and harrowing, it is an artistic reflection of the quickly changing political situation in Ukraine, as envisioned by one of the most important and imaginative Ukrainian playwrights of the contemporary era. Kurochkin, who writes in Russian and resides in Moscow, is a mainstay of the contemporary Ukrainian and Russian stage and cofounder of Moscow's theatre of new drama, Teatr.doc. Commissioned by Austin's Breaking String Theater, which seeks to bring Russian theatre to Austin audiences, Kurochkin's play was conceived on the theme of international collision. It follows the arrival of a wild-haired Ukrainian man named Vadim to Austin's City Hall, where he demands the keys to the city and warns of an impending catastrophic invasion.

Noel Gaulin (Vadim) in *Dulcey and Roxy at City Hall.* (Photo: Will Hollis Photography.)

Katy Taylor (Roxy) and Gricelda Silva (Dulcey) in *Dulcey and Roxy at City Hall*. (Photo: Will Hollis Photography.)

Dulcey and Roxy received its premiere reading at Moscow's Liubimovka Festival of Young Playwriting in September 2013, one month before Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych suspended plans for a trade deal with the EU, heralding a move toward a Russian-oriented future and leading to the outbreak of pro-European protests in Kiev. The relatively calm first act of the play remains largely unchanged from this initial reading, in spite of a series of workshops in Austin with Kurochkin, director Graham Schmidt, translator John Freedman, and Austin artists in November 2013. As Kurochkin explained in a video message to the audience during the play's second act, he intended to return to Moscow and "fix" the play after the workshops. However, he changed his mind after seeing news of the growing protests in Kiev's Independence Square and visiting Kiev in January 2014: "after seeing the photographs coming out of Kiev . . . I felt I was better off leaving everything as it was. I would just pick the play up from where we left it." The play's ruptured form thus becomes an integral part of its message. In contrast with the first act, the second act begins in a world turned suddenly violent, brutal, and chaotic, as the Austin residents have taken up Vadim's charge, turning their city into a mess of barricades and bullhorns.

Staged in the black box of Austin's Salvage Vanguard Theater, a converted warehouse, the play was set in a City Hall boardroom. A long table cut across the space diagonally, with the audience positioned in banks to either side. The audience entered to the recorded sounds of a local radio station, alternating music, including Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart," with traffic reports and Austin's real-life city slogan, "Keep Austin Weird." The play opened with Vadim's sudden arrival, layers of dust catching the light as they flew off his heavy overcoat. In addition to Vadim, the act was punctuated by the arrivals of the play's title characters: the mayor's illicit girlfriend Dulcey, who showed up to demand money, and the receptionist Roxy, who wandered in and out while becoming progressively more inebriated. The action was largely limited to speech: Vadim dictated a bizarre list of suggestions for the city, including outlawing tacos and building a subway system, while the impeccably dressed mayor offered such platitudes as "we're concerned about the Ukrainian diaspora." I felt confused as I tried to keep up with the stream of consciousness spewing from Vadim, who frequently referenced historical events and literary figures in his vaguely worded admonitions, pausing to admit that he sometimes forgot that Americans "have difficulty with abstract

Gricelda Silva (Dulcey) and Judd Farris (Mayor) in *Dulcey and Roxy at City Hall*. (Photo: Will Hollis Photography.)

concepts." While the mayor and his associate grew increasingly bewildered, Dulcey and Roxy conveyed a sense of growing reverence, which culminated in Dulcey's act-closing declaration, referencing an earlier suggestion from Vadim: "that's it! I deleted Facebook!"

If we were to try to apply a moral or message to the first act of the play, it might be simply that a wide berth separates Austin/America from Ukraine, and that we have something to learn from our distant peers. But the second act threw everything into confusion: suddenly, the play was not so much a statement about international differences as an immediate and violent artistic response to societal rupture. Donned in riot gear and shouting at the audience through a bullhorn, Dulcey and Roxy had risen to positions of power in a transformed Austin. The mayor, now dressed in coveralls reminiscent of an early Soviet work uniform, was reduced to sneaking tacos from a trashcan while cowering in front of a graffiti-covered picture of himself. They had elevated Vadim, absent in the months since his visit, to spiritual leader. All changed when Vadim finally reappeared, seemingly overwhelmed by all the changes made in his name, meekly stating that he was not actually prophesying the arrival of physical invaders. The radical societal changes were for naught. The play ended on a final crushing moment of defeated resignation in which it seemed as if all the tremendous momentum simply came to nothing, and the mayor reclaimed a place of authority.

And yet the play was not quite over. After the curtain call, the actor who had played Vadim quieted the audience's applause, directing our attention to the screen, where a final message from the playwright appeared. In an address recorded one week before the play's May 2014 premiere, he spoke of the gathering Russian troops on the Ukrainian border and movingly dreamt of a day when Ukraine might "rid itself of the Soviet past." As much as the play's events were catalyzed by the moment of intercultural contact of its commissioning, the play, particularly its second half, was not about Austin at all, but rather read as an expression of heartbreak at the current political situation in Ukraine—a creative explosion so violent in nature that it could not be contained in a traditional dramatic structure.

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