

Performance Review- Ashlyn Zunker, “G.H.O.S.T Unit: The Live Event” Introduction to Play Analysis, March 8, 2022.

Information- *G.H.O.S.T Unit: The Live Event* is an original production done by students and staff of Southwestern University and Graklejack productions, in Georgetown Texas. Devised from Anton Chekov's 1904 *The Cherry Orchard*. Most recently performed for the Kenedy Center American College Theatre Festival on February 26, 2022. This piece involved directors Sergio Costola, CB Goodman. As well as Campbell Duffy (actress/writer,) JamieLynn Hotaling (actress/writer,) Dane Parker (actor/writer,) Jessica Workman (invisible helper,) Oskar Brian (Inisable helper,) Harrison Jones (Invisible helper,) Lilly Percifield (actress/marketing,) and Ashlyn Zunker (marketing.)

Introduction- This play takes place in modern times as we follow a team of ghost hunters as they take their “live-streamed” audience along on another one of their adventures. Although the play has four total characters Charlotte, Gayev, Alfonzo, and Danny we mainly focus on the first three. We watch the characters interact first directly with the audience and then with each other as they move through space to get set up for their adventure. The show is presented in a brand new style of hybrid theatre, which combines the virtual zoom space that was introduced over quarantine and traditional live theatre through the use of green screens. This means that there are two separate audiences happening at the same time, one at home watching through their computer and the other sitting in a theatre. The themes of the play were actually taken from *The Cherry Orchard*, the creative team went through and picked out themes they wanted to focus. This very long process left them with a few in mind; class division, social hierarchies, and the

willing ignorance of society. However, they are told in more of a comedic style as we follow this goofy little gang and their hilariously named gadgets.

Directors Concept- The director's concept actually started about two years before their last performance when faculty members Serio and CB wanted to lead a group of students into devising their own pieces. They wanted to pull traditional social themes, like the ones found in *The Cherry Orchard* with a new style of performing theatre. The creative team designed the original hybrid theatre with a very specific plan in mind. Although both these groups are watching the same show done live the in-person audience gets a special treat, as they get to see both the streamed show and one of the actors performing in front of a green screen and doing all the behind-the-scenes magic. This style was developed as a way for future theatre to prosper, instead of simply returning to the old ways we are taking everything we know and devising a brand new age of theatre. One that can be taken to libraries, children's schools, old folks' homes, or anywhere that we can set our little theatre up in. The idea of ghost hunters was actually just a devise of which to hold their chosen themes. Much of what they wanted to present to the audience will go over their head as they laugh at the boob jokes but if you have the full picture it's there. The social hierarchies are clearly seen through the character's interactions with each other. In order to develop this is the creative team turned to the television series "Ghost Adventures." They then mimicked the same kind of structure seen there with a leader and the underlings.

Design Elements- As stated in the director's concept they wanted to bring a different form of theatre into the light. Due to this, they don't share the same technical elements, there is no stage or set or scene lighting. Instead, you have a green, ring light and a desk full of technology that is

worth more than my life. The green was done like nothing I had ever seen before, the lines between the actor's figure and the pictures on the background were so crisp you would never even notice that they weren't real, even all their little hairs popped perfectly. Their costumes were wonderfully done, which included a fashionable navy jumpsuit and a tight green suit to make them invisible to the virtual audience, but not to the in-person audience. Per the director's concept, they wanted to create two separate experiences for the audience. Therefore, those in-person got to see the actor slip into their green screen suit and perform the magic that they then got to view on the screen. This hybrid theatre also introduced different elements of tech that aren't always seen in other forms of theatre. For example, puppetry came out to play and we got to see the characters transform into various forms of "mini-mes" in order for the audience to relax and suspend their disbelief. Which also allows the audience to become more receptive to the themes of society's ignorance. It is not something that people often want to hear "You are choosing to ignore issues around you for your own selfish benefit!" But when we soften them up with light comedy and fun little puppets they begin to let their walls down and we are able to spoonfeed them the developed themes without retaliation.

Acting- The acting was amazing. Each actor played such a complex role. They had to perfectly balance who they were reflecting in *The Cherry Orchard* and who they were drawing from in "Ghost Adventure" with the characters they had written themselves. It was quite the balancing act. They also had to pull off comedy which is incredibly hard but they always got a laugh out of the audience both in-person and online. Additionally, because the creative team created a new theatre the actors actually couldn't see each other. Due to the fact that they had to act into a professional camera, they were reacting only based on what they could hear through their

speakers. This takes an enormous amount of skill and improvisation to pull off. But they all did this wonderfully with almost no hiccups in sight. Also to add to everything else the actors are controlling their own tech through a small control panel on their desk. All their transitions, filters, videos, backgrounds, sound effects, camera effects are done by them in the moment! They have to multi-task like nobody's business but also can't look away from the camera because they have to stay connected with the audience. They are quite literally doing the impossible. The actors also do an amazing job of using their actions to show the hierarchy being developed in the theme. Charlotte who obviously plays the leader is very "large and in charge" her lines are delivered in a very direct manner with an A to B or economic style of acting. Although we don't see her cross the stage in this fashion we see it in her smaller movements. Gayev, and the other characters but especially him, has a wonderful way of filling up their tiny little box with so much character and pizzazz. Specifically, when he is doing his spectacular new poem, it is equivalent to as if he had gotten up and marched to center stage with a spotlight.

Structure- Although the play is not very long it still follows a very organized structure. It was perfectly presented to both the virtual and in-person audience. Some might argue that some stray old ladies caused hiccups in our production but I would shut them down immediately. We chose to do live theatre therefore those old ladies were perfectly normal. It's as if a real-life and someone decided to run up on the stage. The play's structure is linear with a cause-and-effect organization. Everything that happens is directly caused by something before it. They hold a contest and get a house to go to. They use teleportation to get to the house, This causes Charlotte to become sick. This causes them to be behind of schedule, This causes them to watch the sunset. It all follows the event that occurred immediately before. Some could argue that them

discovering their story of the ghost is a flashback but this would be wrong. Because they are not performing that piece as if it is live and they have jumped back in time. They are learning old information at the present time which then affects their next actions.

Conclusion- *G.H.O.S.T Unit: The Live Event* is a beautifully devised piece of hybrid theatre. Which involves unimaginable acting skills and futuristic green screen performing to develop some truly beautiful themes. The new-age technology that brought us this hybrid theatre is developed in a way that creates an equal audience. Accessible by anyone in the world. They aren't charging hundreds of dollars in tickets for only the one percent to see. They aren't holding it in a tiny house that is inaccessible for people who are disabled. This is theatre for everyone in the world. It can be watched from a hospital room, an orphanage, or live in person the way theatre used to be. The actors can be performing all around the world, we can have one based in India or Scotland even. It is a wonderful and funny production that is guaranteed to make any audience laugh.

Research:

- Ghost Unit official website- <https://www.ghostunitlive.com/>
- Anton Chekhov 1904 The Cherry Orchard
- The Cherry Orchard Themes - <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-cherry-orchard/themes>