

The Embrace is Inevitable: Connection and Audience Engagement in Tennessee Williams' The Two-Character Play

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"The Embrace is Inevitable": Connection and Audience Engagement in Tennessee Williams' The Two-Character Play

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Abstract

Tennessee Williams called *The Two-Character Play* his most beautiful play since *Streetcar*. Yet this play, following a deranged brother and sister as they attempt to perform a play for a hostile audience, has rarely met with success in performance. Early audiences found the play too personal to the playwright. Others were confused as to why the well-established playwright would change his style from poetic realism to the Theatre of the Absurd. Yet surely a play this inventive, emotionally honest, and loved by its playwright deserves its chance. If a production of *The Two-Character Play* focused on the connection between the characters, Felice and Clare, would it still engage its audience even if they left with unanswered questions? This was the hypothesis with which I approached directing *Two-Character* for the William & Mary Second Season in the Fall of 2013. I supported my theory with research into Williams' life, his other works, the earlier versions of *Two-Character*, and the philosophy and plays of the Theatre of the Absurd. I used what I learned to work with the actors to shape a production in which the connection between the siblings was the guiding force. I evaluated the success of my production using a select sample audience.

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