The story of one working professional who honed his communication skills through a new SCE masters program

The Cherry Orchard

By Mary-Lea Cox

The play's power comes from the characters' passionate interactions, as reinforced by dramatic lighting and music.

In one memorable scene at the end of the first act, the characters wheel out identical white plastic chairs and sit down to watch a video of SOC professor Arnold Aronson explaining the significance of the breaking string, which sounds twice in the play. According to Aronson, the sound, which is never explained, marks the beginning of modern drama.

This unusual use of multimedia takes place right before the intermission, and when the action resumes, a party is taking place onstage; and the action centers around a modern pink toilet, where the characters arrive in turn and soliloquize about their futures.

Sociologist recruited Grammy-winning sound engineer Marcelo Cien and Ed Eidelberg, GSAAP'06, set designer for the films Big Fish and Minority Report, to help him with the unique design and concept of the show.

The experience has been unique,” said Sociologist. “I feel very grateful to be collaborating with such talented people and have the opportunity to bring the work downtown.

While Souki does not think his interpretation of the Russian masterwork is unique, he admits that he related to the play because of his South American background. "I am touched by the content of this particular play, so to speak to South American realities, I said to myself, that's because my world, it's common to see your social status changing from one country to another, and I wanted to bring out the bivouac beneath the surface of Cherry Orchard, the business in the way the actors move, which brings back memories from home.

Sociologist added that he particularly enjoyed the experience of performing the play from its academic context. “Once you do that, the audiences are much more demanding and that made the show grow so much,” he said.

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The final test, however, came when Rogers had to present his analysis and recommendations last December, twice—first to a review board of SCE faculty and board members, and the next day to Tango’s editors and founder.

It was an intimidating situating, combining the intensity of an academic oral defense with a real-world pitch in a corporate boardroom. Fortunately, after a while, Rogers had done enough preparation that he was able to sail through with flying colors. In fact, Tango was very impressed with the practicality of his research that they followed up to discuss the cover of their next issue and future editorial strategy.

Trudi Baldwin, who has directed the M.S. in strategic communications since the program’s inception in 2002, says that Rogers’ focus is far from atypical. During the past three years, she has received a great deal of positive feedback—both from the students who have participated and from representatives of the companies and organizations they have worked closely with, who acknowledge having received valuable advice.

“The benefits go both ways,” Baldwin says, pointing out that a number of students have received job offers as a result of their work in the program or have moved up within their own workplace.

What makes Baldwin’s assessment, saying that the program is often received as a valuable springboard to strategic thinkers instead of just doers,” she explains.

For more information on the strategic communications M.S., go to www.cc.columbia.edu/stratComm/index.cfm

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