

2015 Rob Drummond Residency: Reflection by Evie Coves-Datson



I told everyone I knew that I was going to a football game with a Scottish playwright. Not everyone gets to do this, you see. When my love of Michigan football and of the experience of seeing *Bullet Catch*, a brilliant one-man plus audience stage production that came to Ann Arbor in 2013, somehow preposterously fortunately coalesced into the opportunity to attend a game with that playwright, I jumped on it. I had already gotten to interact with Rob Drummond after his performance in 2013 for a roundtable discussion with other medical students and house officers following our viewing of the show, and I remembered him as extremely affable and easy-going, and as an intriguing thinker with a keen world view. *Bullet Catch*, taking its name from the traditional stage trick in which a magician selects at random an audience member to shoot him with a live gun, stages what Rob envisions as the likely turn of events when the famous bullet catch went wrong in the 1900s and ended with the randomly selected audience member being the plaintiff in a murder investigation for the death of the magician. For the show, Rob had to transform himself into a magician. Training to become another is something of a trademark of Rob's; in the past, he's also trained as a boxer for one of his stage productions. After discussing how to understand the intersection of his world in stage production and our world as doctors and doctors-in-training immediately following that evening's *Bullet Catch*, Rob felt moved enough that he knew he wanted to return to assume the role of another once again, this time exploring what it meant to be a doctor or student doctor. In particular, Rob wanted to know what it's like to care for dying patients to explore themes for his next stage production. This set in motion a November 2015 two-week artist residency for Rob in which he'd have the chance to learn as another yet again: he attended second year medical student classes, went on trauma rounds at the crack of dawn with a surgical team, interviewed dozens of medical students about their views on death and dying in medicine and in life, and led theater and creative writing workshops for medical students and house officers. Personally, both on the last occasion he was here and this time for his residency, I have learned a lot from Rob.



Going to the football game with him, another medical student, and a group of staff from University Musical Society, was in some ways like saying hello to an old friend. He can talk about anything, and in a way that

seems familiar, but so well-articulated and from a slightly different perspective that it's also refreshingly new. When I was interviewed by Rob about my experiences as a medical student exposed to such heavy topics as death and dying on a regular basis, I felt that I learned something about myself and how I handle those topics. I grew in some



ways as well when Rob's theater workshop forced us to be "on stage" looked at by and looking at our colleagues, forced us to move around the room intentionally, forced us to connect with each other deeply enough to all say the same word at the same time without communicating verbally. What I gain most from Rob is a new perspective on uncertainty and how I deal with it. In one

memorable and pivotal moment towards the end of *Bullet Catch*, Rob gives each individual in the audience the opportunity to decide whether he or she would like to learn how he levitated a table earlier in the show. I closed my eyes during the reveal because I didn't want to know, reasoning for myself that somehow knowing would be less satisfying than being caught in the uncertain. To me, Rob's work addresses what's known and unknown to us and how we feel about that uncertainty, which are powerful themes for any human. As a doctor-in-training, they also strike me as particularly relevant to my career, as physicians must be comfortable acting on little information when caring for a patient, comfortable wheeling and dealing in the uncertain. Rob's next stage production will call back to themes of not knowing when it comes to test results and diagnoses, as well as death. I'm ecstatic that once complete his new production will return to Ann Arbor; I definitely plan to be there on opening night. It's been a real privilege to get to meet and interact with Rob, as one doesn't usually have the opportunity to have an intimate view of a theatrical work in progress and from such a genuine person to boot.

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