

LAURA BERNAS

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I am an accomplished, disabled performing artist, teaching artist, non-profit specialist, and advocate with over 12 years of cross-population experience. Working across multiple mediums while collaborating with international companies forms the cornerstone of my career. My work is driven by a passion for creating systems in which all people have access to liberation, with art making as my main tool. My background includes acting, singing, dancing, writing, theater making, street photography, teaching, workshop development and leading, strategic visioning and planning, creative communications and engagement, network building, arts non-profit creation, organizational management, disability advocacy, and peer education. My performance practice focuses on devised theater for community development, musical theater, and dance/physical theater. I am recognized for my breadth and depth of institutional knowledge across multiple sectors, my artistic acumen and vision, my ability to work with diverse populations and needs, and my community resource development.

PERFORMING ARTIST

Professional Performing Artist

2013-Present

Theater | Music | Film | TV | Dance, USA & International

(see final page of CV for performance resume)

THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

Community Advisory Board Member

2022-2023

No Dream Deferred, *We Will Dream: New Works Festival 2023*, New Orleans, LA

- Collaborated on strategy for event planning, artistic mission and vision, artistic development, best standards and practices, expectations, and goal setting for large-scale, multi-month theater festival
- Reviewed and judged on artistic submission panel, selecting main talent for festival
- Engaged in collective visioning and discovering how this festival intersects with, and expands, current industry standards and practices across multiple factors
- Networked and leveraged current and past partnerships to develop and grow outreach and awareness of the festival, boosting attendees, sponsors, and artistic/thought partners
- Investigated current needs of the theatrical field, putting forth ideas and goals of how to elevate BIPOC artists and creators, locally and globally

Company Member (Creator/Performer AND Artistic/Executive Management)

2019-2021

Building Company Theater, Syracuse, NY

- Directed Building Company Theater's first online production *Re: Constructing America*
- Created and performed in original theatrical works based on physical, improv, & theater of the oppressed theatrical techniques
- Led online devising and rehearsing
- Offered welcoming and inclusive spaces for theatrical engagement on diverse and controversial topics
- Created an atmosphere open to questioning, interrogation, joyous expression, and consistent communication
- Supported colleagues' artistic and managerial growth by enacting empathic and service-oriented leadership styles
- Attributed expertise in systems analysis, artistic creation, organizational management, and community engagement
- Investigated artistic and business practices for alignment to mission, core values, and future visioning
- Addressed gaps in structures of company functioning
- Researched opportunities for artistic and business development
- Identified areas for growth in audience engagement and connection with potential producing partners
- Streamlined online storage systems and communications
- Recommended changes to digital marketing strategies

Sound Designer

2018

Breadcrumbs Productions' *Unearthing Mary Bixby*, Syracuse, NY

- Created design elements through participation with performers using spoken word, instrumentation, and popular music
- Collaborated with director and performers to brainstorm and distill auditory vision for creative work
- Delivered on deadlines and goals in accordance with production schedule

Assistant Director	2016
The Anthropologists' <i>No Man's Land</i> (Workshop), New York, NY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charted rehearsal progress and key directorial notes while supporting stage management • Supported director in clarifying vision for performance • Submitted detailed notes on rehearsals and artistic meetings • Assisted artistic and technical staff to systemize workflow for productive rehearsals 	
Assistant Stage Manager	2016
David Lang's <i>The Public Domain</i> , Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, New York, NY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assured communication between ASMs and SMs regarding performer inquiries and concerns • Connected performers with appropriate cues facilitating smooth performance • Tended to the needs of 500+ performers in large-scale rehearsal rooms 	
Casting Assistant	2015
Miranda Theatre Company's <i>Snow Orchid</i> , Cherry Lane Theatre, New York, NY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected performers auditioning to director and producer ensuring collaborative and welcoming environment • Contributed to discussions of acting technique, ensemble creation, and aesthetic vision • Tailored communication style to needs of executive team 	
Artistic Intern	2012
New York Neo-Futurists, New York, NY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrote digital communications and maintained company record keeping • Contributed creatively to rehearsal processes and communicated company vision in the digital space • Learned budgetary, development, and small-ensemble management practices 	

FILM PRODUCTION

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm8913474/>

Art Department Buyer, <i>The Binge</i>	2019
American High Productions, Syracuse, NY	
Props & Set Dec In-House Organizer	2019
American High Productions, Syracuse, NY	
Art Department Buyer, <i>The Night House</i>	2019
Anton & Phantom Four Films, Syracuse, NY	
Casting Director, <i>Borderline</i>	2015
NYFA, New York, NY	
Script Supervisor, <i>The Last 15 Minutes</i>	2015
American High Productions, Syracuse, NY	

TEACHING

Workshop Leader	2024-Present
The Playground Project, New Orleans, LA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and lead acting workshops for professional actors and performing artists • Provide coaching on movement work and audition prep for actors • Participate in communal discussions on the state of the industry, auditioning, agent relationships, craft development, and theater creation 	
Inaugural Retreat Cohort Workshop Leader	2024
ELLEvate Dance Company, New Orleans, LA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected from a strong community of performing artist to be inaugural participant in multi-day and multi-workshop professional retreat for developing community practice for physical theater and dance theater arts • Led an invited cohort of dancers and physical theater artists in a devised theater workshop culminating in the creation of a short piece of original theater • Taught professionals new theater making techniques and elements of story structure development • Worked with individuals specifically on the technique of etudes, moment, and movement work in character creation • Facilitated reflection and dialogue on expanding artistic process and practice 	
Early Childhood Music Educator	2022-2024
The Music Class New Orleans, New Orleans, LA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led children 0-3 through <i>The Music Class</i> curriculum teaching the foundations of music • Created an environment of play, excitement, enthusiasm, and shared learning 	

- Guided students in the fundamentals of music theory through vocal, rhythmic, and instrumental play
- Introduced children and parents to global canons of music and music theory

Teaching Artist

2021-2024

Young Audiences Louisiana, New Orleans, LA

- Coached middle and high school students in text, movement, and voice work for the actor
- Guided students in the creation of original dramatic text
- Prepared students for professional rehearsal and performance settings
- Expanded knowledge of theatrical and performance canon

Teaching Artist

2018

John Robert Powers, Syracuse, NY

- Dispensed knowledge on acting, movement, and voice techniques to children ages 5-18
- Provided safe space to work on monologues, songs, and improv sketches
- Ensured the teaching of foundational acting techniques through improvisational group games, individual artistic explorations, and partner improvisation
- Advised students on creating practical steps towards education and career goals
- Encouraged freedom of expression and creative risk-taking

Teaching Artist

2016

Dramatic Adventure Theatre, Mloka, Tanzania

- Coached elementary and middle school children in the development of basic playwrighting skills
- Educated groups of 10-12 children in the methods and forms of western improv traditions as they relate to East African communication styles
- Prepared students to be in front of an audience for the first time and present original theatrical material
- Communicated fundamentals of theater writing teaching to primarily non-English speaking students

Teaching Artist

2012

Sarah Lawrence College, Theater Outreach Program, Bronxville, NY

- Created weekly theater arts curriculum for middle school students at the Graham School, Yonkers, NY
- Adapted theater arts curriculum to the needs of middle school children with developmental and behavioral disabilities
- Progressed students from being unable to present their ideas in public through to public performance for teachers and classmates
- Expanded students' abilities to communicate with one another, create shared ideas together, and develop a personal sense of artistic voice

NON-PROFIT ADMINISTRATION & MANAGEMENT

Project Manager, The Grassroots Project and Vermont Peer Respite Evaluation

2024-Present

Human Services Research Institute, Cambridge, MA

The Grassroots Project

- Manage a multi-million, federally contracted project whose goal is to develop the next generation of disability advocacy leaders and the network of disability advocacy in the United States
- Co-design the strategic vision and tactics for the growth and development of the project
- Contribute in political, economic, philosophical analysis of current disability, social service systems in the U.S., grounded in root-cause analysis
- Track 27 areas of work inside the project ensuring all deliverables are on time
- Write workplans and sub-workplans for all needed areas of work and contribute to federal RFP responses
- Create and maintain the first ever HCBS 1915(c) Waiver Tracking database, done through rigorous research and resource collection techniques
- Solicit and review grant applications for funding awards
- Co-develop project network expansion and facilitate strategic partnership development through networking, conference attendance/presentation, and research
- Create cohesion amongst the group where there may be opposing ideologies or beliefs
- Cultivate relational longevity amongst all project partners, future partners, and the general public
- Write environmental scans, opinion pieces, and technical assistance documents for the disability advocacy field
- Write and produce all external communications via multiple channels while growing our public presence through community organization outreach and institutional knowledge of the field
- Collaborating on the hiring process and development of new hires
- Maintain our internal project management system via Basecamp, Microsoft, and Google

Vermont Peer Respite Evaluation

- Facilitate a lived experience workgroup comprised of people with relationships to the mental health system who provide guidance on the project's evaluation design, research methodologies, community relationships, and study approaches
- Conduct qualitative research interviews in-person and online to evaluate a Peer Respite center in Vermont
- Give feedback on best practices for working with service users of mental health systems and accessibility and accommodations for people with disabilities
- Provide project coordination in the form of communications, scheduling, tracking, and note-taking

Programs Director

2022-2023

Kinship Senior Center, New Orleans, LA

- Served the elders of my community with dignity, love, empathy, and respect at all times while resolving conflicts and creating compassionate pathways of communication
- Ran all scheduling, program development, and facilitation of programs for the center
- Created a wide variety of programming to suit the needs and desires of people 62+ across mental, physical, emotional, artistic, and spiritual aspects of human life
- Trained and assessed all volunteers, while coordinating the delivery of objectives and goals set out by Executive Director for programmatic advancement and excellence in our field
- Tracked and reported necessary data to maintain local and state funding i.e. nutrition reports, attendance, and member participation with timely delivery to Parish director for Council on Aging
- Kept abreast of trends in elder care and needs, best standards and practices, and innovations in the field
- Researched and networked with community partners, creating new and sustainable partnerships across membership, programming, and funding
- Continuously grew new membership base and programmatic expansion (by over 50%)
- Advanced Kinship's presence in the immediate community, statewide, and nationally through targeted digital outreach and copywriting
- Created and implemented short-, medium-, and long-term goals for programs division with beyond average success rate in implementation and results
- Collaborated with teammates on visioning for center expansion and exceptional development through regular strategic meetings and analysis

Subject Matter Contributor

2022

Americans for the Arts, Strategic Realignment Process, Virtual Consulting

- Brainstormed and created analysis of new futures for the structure, enactment, and impact of the arts in America
- Worked on analyzing mission, vision, and outreach strategic campaigns to better understand the function of Americans for the Arts now and how the organization can change for the better in future
- Collaborated with key partners and other contributors to dissect current industry needs, flaws, failures, triumphs, and areas for growth
- Thought leader and partner on key questions related to organizational development, change, and transformation of Americans for the Arts and the state of the arts in America at large
- Represented the arts as a field as a key thought contributor in this strategic realignment process

Organizational & QI Strategist | Research & Development Manager | Head Writer

2017-2018

Himalayan Institute Humanitarian Project, Honesdale, PA and Kumbo, Cameroon

- Initially hired as *Fundraising Assistant*, transitioned to organization-wide responsibilities within months of hiring
- Analyzed organizational workflow, development sources, and communications strategies
- Assessed the ability to produce short, medium, and long-term goals against current organizational practices
- Created new company goals alongside managing director in alignment with new visioning
- Researched new donors, liaised with fundraising partners, and wrote multi-sized grant applications
- Designed, instructed, and implemented a large-scale, quality improvement project for public health division in Kumbo, Cameroon serving a region of 320,000 people tracking public health data
- Authored annual reports, marketing brochures, blog posts, social media, and online communications concerning company business and Cameroonian/African women's health and business, economics, literacy and education, and public policy
- Led and collaborated in team building seminars and company management/culture workshops

Lead Copywriter

2017-2018

Moka Origins, Honesdale, PA and Kumbo, Cameroon

- Developed and honed company voice and style through marketing and branding copywriting across all products alongside CEO
- Created targeted narratives and language solidifying brand niche in public market
- Synthesized company mission and vision into long and short form branding language, cohesive across all digital and physical mediums
- Wrote, proofed, and edited products, web, social media, and blog copies

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & AWARDS

- Festival Participant, Solo Dancer, Syracuse Inaugural Dance Festival, Syracuse, NY 2019
- Festival Participant, *TEMBO!* Zanzibar International Arts & Film Festival, Zanzibar, Tanzania 2016
- Festival Participant, *Wisteria*, Capital Fringe Festival, Washington D.C. 2014
- Participant in Sarah Lawrence College's Board of Trustees' Mentorship Program 2012-2013
- Member, Sarah Lawrence College Theater Outreach Program, Bronxville, NY 2012
- Educational Award, WNY AmeriCorps, Buffalo, NY 2011
- The Frederick Douglass & Susan B. Anthony Award, Rochester University 2008

CERTIFICATIONS & LICENSES

- Vagus Nerve Program, Somatic Strategies, Jessica Maguire MPhysio BHsci 2023
- New Orleans City Tour Guide License 2023

MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

- Member of The Playground Project Performance Collective, New Orleans, LA 2024-Present
- Associate of the International Institute for Psychiatric Drug Withdrawal, UK 2024-Present
- Member of National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery, 2024-Present
- Regular Attendee of Third Lantern Lit Writer's Workshop 2024-Present
- Member of New Orleans Creative Response Network, New Orleans, LA 2021-Present
- Member Theatre Communications Group, 2020-Present
- Member @ The Downtown Writer's Center, Syracuse, NY 2018-2021

PUBLICATIONS

- Bernas, L., Brady, K., and Bonardi, A. (2024). *A National Environmental Scan of the Disability, Systems Change Advocacy Landscape*. Cambridge, MA: The ACL Grassroots Project: Engage. Connect. Advocate.

VOLUNTEERING

- Peer Educator, Safe Psychiatric Medication Tapering, New Orleans, LA 2022-Present
- Green Light New Orleans, Environmentalism, New Orleans, LA 2021-2022
- America Talks, Civic Dialogue, Virtual & National, 2021-2022

EDUCATION

MFA in Professional Acting, Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, Bristol, England

Certificate in Acting, Moscow Art Theater School/Eugene O'Neill National Theatre Institute, Moscow, Russia

Bachelor of Liberal Arts, Performing Arts, Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY

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AEA-Eligible

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THEATER

<i>The Trees</i>	Terry	Intramural Theater/Dir. Bennett Kirschner
<i>Star-Crossed</i>	Oberon	Fat Squirrel/Dr. Andrea Watson
<i>The Canopic Jar of My Sins</i>	Ralph Wiley	Fat Squirrel/Dir. Bennett Kirschner
<i>Pericles</i>	Calliope a.k.a Gower	Redgrave Theatre (UK)/Dir. Aaron Parsons
<i>Chicken Soup with Barley</i>	Sarah/Dave	BOVTS Studio (UK)/Dir. Joshua Parr
<i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	Varya	BOVTS Studio (UK)/Dir. Mabel Aitken
<i>Macbeth</i>	Lady Macbeth	BOVTS Studio (UK)/Dir. Paul Chesterton
<i>Agamemnon: A New Adaptation</i>	Clytemnestra	BOVTS Studio (UK)/Dir. Jacquie Crago
<i>Behold: A New Musical</i>	Mrs. Gunn	Columbia CFA/Dir. Emily Sullivan
<i>The Seagull</i>	Nina	Moscow Art Theater Studio/Dir. Sergei Zemstov
<i>Dead City</i>	Beatrice/Nora	Frances Ann Cannon Theatre/Dir. Kat Kmnn
<i>Animals Out of Paper</i>	Ilana Andrews	Downstage Theatre/Dir. Amelia Parenteau
<i>Pippin</i>	Lead Swing	Downstage Theatre/Dir. Caitie Cunningham

DEvised THEATER

<i>Re: Constructing America</i>	Co-Devisor	Created by Building Company Theater
<i>Apprentice: White House</i>	Co-Devisor	Created by Building Company Theater
<i>Natural Order</i>	Co-Devisor	Breadcrumbs Productions/Dir. Brad Beckman
<i>Immigration Dialogue</i>	Co-Devisor	Created by Building Company Theater
<i>Unearthing Mary Bixby</i>	Co-Devisor	Breadcrumbs Productions/Dir. Tanner Effinger
<i>TEMBO!</i>	Co-Devisor	DAT/Zanzibar Intl. Arts Festival/Dir. Candis Jones
<i>Wistaria</i>	Co-Devisor	DC Capital Fringe Festival/Dir. Jeremy Goren

DANCE THEATER

<i>Fast-Paced World</i>	Principal Dancer	Marigny Opera House/Jakki Kalogridis
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FILM

<i>The Sinister Side of Her</i>	Lead	Cult of Laura Productions/Dir. Laura Eden Kilmer
<i>Roadside Assistance</i>	Lead	MCY Productions/Dir. Michelle C. Yu
<i>Alarm</i>	Lead	VPA Syracuse/Dir. Matthew Arkema
<i>Gaining and Losing</i>	Lead	Nada Stjepanovic Prod./Dir. Nada Stjepanovic

***Commercials Available Upon Request**

EDUCATION/TRAINING

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (UK): MFA in Professional Acting

National Theater Institute Moscow Art Theater School Program: Certificate in Acting

Sarah Lawrence College: Bachelor of Arts in Performing Arts

SKILLS

Dialects: RP, Cockney, Irish, Russian, General American, Southern American, Rhode Island, Midwestern

Improv: Clown/Stand-Up/Short & Long Form/Commedia Del Arte-Christine Farrell, Geoff Sobelle

Singing: Classically Trained Dramatic Coloratura & Lyric Mezzo-Lisa Howard, Pamela Rudge, Dr. Tara Melvin

Dance: Contact Improv/Period Dance (Adv), Contemp/Hip Hop/Modern/Tap/Ballet/Jazz (Int), Salsa/Tango (Beg)

Instruments: Cello/Guitar/Piano/Snare Drum (Basic)

Stage Combat: Cert. Adv. Jonathan Howell: Rapier & Dagger/Quarterstaff/Knife/Unarmed/Broadsword/Kali Sticks

Sports: Horseback Riding (Walk/Trot), Yoga (Hatha/Iyengar), Skiing (Downhill/XC), Swimming

Languages: Spoken: French & Russian (Basic) **Sung:** French, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish; IPA Proficient