If You Gotta Care for One Day: How Janis Joplin Taught Me to Abandon My Ball and Chain in *Streamers*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

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The Thesis of Kyle Hester is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

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DEDICATION

For Eddie Vona
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor Marc Barricelli, Chair

Ian McKellen describes how, early in his career, instead of inhabiting a character, he would instead walk alongside of it, showing the audience his creation, pointing out interesting details about it to them, but never truly losing himself, never being. For so many years, this too had been my experience. Not until working on Streamers did I first taste what it could be like to begin to relax my death-hold grip and abandon myself to a character, to “jump out of the airplane”, as one of my professors put it. Streamers was unlike anything I had done before: violent, intense, always demanding, occasionally terrifying. The technique and rigor I was learning in my Voice, Speech and Movement classes melded with the simple, unending
exhortations in Shakespeare to merely “listen and respond”, culminating in a sweet and unexpected breakthrough: walking, speaking, dreaming, heartbeat-ing as this sad, beautiful, damaged creature: Billy, whom I felt quietly waking up inside of me and for whom I found myself suddenly feeling deeply and inexplicably responsible. As J.R.R. Tolkien wrote of Bilbo, “the tremendous things that happened afterwards were as nothing compared to it.” Peter’s simplicity and confidence in Strange Men, Ray’s “unbitted lusts” in What of the Night?, Iago’s precision-improvisation and fireworks-creativity; any modicum of success I had in these processes had its engendering in Streamers. “I used to bang my head against doors like a sledgehammer until they would open,” says Mark Rylance. “Now, I just play. I look for the joyful thing.”