

My name is Aimee Paxton and I am a grad student in the theater and dance department.

(Aimee Paxton from *Summer and Smoke*): What you have here is not the anatomy of a beast, but a man. And I reject your opinion of their love isn't the kind of truth you believe the brain to be seeking. There is not...

I always knew that I wanted to go back to school for a theater degree. I just didn't know when or where that would happen. What brought me to Missoula a few years ago, I was at a big theater festival and they have something called "Next Step Auditions" and someone from this department was viewing the auditions and a day later I received an email. Just to let me know, you know, we have this grad program in Missoula.

And then I spoke about it with some friends and they spoke highly of this program and visited for professional's weekend and ended up really liking it. So, I completed the application process and the audition process and here I am.

I love that they are incorporating more musical theater and dance into their program. I was very impressed when I toured the school too of how tech heavy it is for their students and how many wonderful tech students come out this program. It's just a huge program, I love that there's so many students that are majoring in theater and it's just very encouraging. That definitely drew me to the department.

I skyrocketed into this program at 100 miles an hour. Day one of school we started rehearsals for *Summer and Smoke*.

(Aimee Paxton from *Summer and Smoke*): I have a million things to do, I suggest that you, would you please go up to your room. Yes Nellie, coming Nellie.

Alma is an amazing character and a beautiful character and a huge character. The biggest role I've ever taken on.

There are a few moments of, of I think it would be called hyper-realism. Where some things are kind of in her head, but they're shown on stage. There's a moment where she sees John Buchanan outside and she shouts, "There he is". And, reaches forward. And then, has like a contraction inside and something strikes her. It's all not real, really, but Tennessee Williams wrote that into the play beautifully. I think that, that is my most challenging moment.

I'm learning tons from Bernadette Sweeney who's the director of *Summer and Smoke* and just freakin' brilliant. Just brilliant. She started right off the bat with object-work. Which is basically just working with an object that your character might use in the show. And learning the different ways that you might interact with that object. Whether it's a hot day, or someone just yelled at you or, she would give us all these different circumstances. So, there's something about physical performance theater that she's really good at. She was able to create these moments in *Summer and Smoke* between John and Alma. They're like, repeated moments. In

the beginning of the show John touches Alma's heart. And then, towards the end of act one Alma touches John's heart and then you're reminded at the beginning, "oh remember that time when things were a little more bright and cheery and he was touching her heart." Yeah, there's little reminders in there. I don't know, she's brilliant.

Ryson, who plays John in *Summer and Smoke*, calls Bernadette a mad scientist. And it's very true.

Our days are very, very full. I'm not teaching this semester, but I am doing all of the publicity. And so there's meetings and meetings with the newspaper and meetings with faculty and just trying to figure all of those things out for publicity. And, lots of classes. And then, in my down time, I'll study more Alma or do homework and then I'll go to rehearsal for about four hours in the evening. It's a long, long day, but I love it.

I guess I feel like I need to do theater because I love storytelling. It can be a very self-centered profession or business, but there's something so inspiring about going into the theater and putting on a show with the mindset of, "you're going to reach one audience member today." At least one. And they're going to be able to relate to you or they're going to know that they are not alone in something.

I would love to, in five years work for three or four different regional theaters, professional theaters, and just kind of audition for them and travel a little bit. I also have, I think it would be fun to one day be an artistic director of a theater company, but we'll see. We'll see. That's way down the road.