Making a Doll Breathe: Invigorating Ibsen's *A Doll House*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Directing)

by

Kate Jopson

Committee in charge:

Jim Carmody, Chair
Kim Rubenstein
Andrei Both
Manuel Rotenberg

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The thesis of Kate Jopson is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014
DEDICATION

To my father, for teaching me to enjoy dirt... and my mother, for all her sighs.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature page................................................................. iii

Dedication........................................................................ iv

Table of Contents............................................................. v

List of Supplemental Files................................................ vi

Acknowledgements........................................................... vii

Abstract of the Thesis....................................................... viii
LIST OF SUPPLEMENTAL FILES

File 1. Nora returns from shopping (Act 1)
File 2. Nora and Anna share chocolates (Act 1)
File 3. Torvald kisses Nora's neck (Act 1)
File 4. Nora and Emmy Dance (Act 1)
File 5. Nora clears the room for Krogstad (Act 1)
File 6. Nora and Rank (Act 2)
File 7. Nora's Dance (Act 2)
File 8. After the costume party (Act 3)
File 9. Rank's last night (Act 3)
File 10. Nora's attempted suicide (Act 3)
File 11. Nora goes upstairs to change (Act 3)
File 12. Nora in the snow (Act 3)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I want to acknowledge Gabor Tompa for opening my mind to the possibilities of theater as an artform. He showed me what it means to fight for theater with your entire being.

I also want to thank my designers for having endless discussions, debates, and epiphanies. Especially Natalie Khuen, for being able to read my mind.

Lastly, I want to convey my gratitude to my cast for being brave and investing their spirits in the process. I must thank Kim Blanck for being my Nora, and for her relentless experimentation and humble honesty.
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Although I was raised to be fiercely independent, the societal pressure to assimilate into traditional standards of femininity can be overpowering. Reading Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House*, I was chilled by how much I related to the struggles of Nora, a woman who bowed so much to societal standards that she lost her individual identity. I thought that I was too well educated, too strong to be susceptible to the pervasive vanity of contemporary American culture. *A Doll House* made me take a hard look at myself and those close to me. I realized that we can all become dolls—all we need to do is run from the uncomfortable, ugly and embarrassing parts of the world towards careful, controlled and beautifully sentimental fantasies.
While directing *A Doll House*, I strove to maintain my personal honesty while employing a rigorous preparation of the material and experimenting with a new rehearsal technique. I investigated the preparation process of many different directors who worked in realism—the dramaturgical style of *A Doll House*—and tested their approaches in my own process. Breaking out of my normal modes of preparation allowed me to discover facets of the play that had alluded me in the past. I also crafted a rehearsal process with the goal of increasing each actor's personal investment so they could create complex characters that lived naturally within the world of the play. Ultimately, I hoped to create the same feeling of recognition for my audience that I felt while reading the play.