

The following text is a summary of reflective journals I have written throughout the past 5 weeks.

Assassins by John Weidman, Stephen Sondheim and concept by Charles Gilbert Jr, is a political dark comedy that focuses on nine people who tried to assassinate the presidents of the United States (Stage Agent, n.d). Personally speaking, I believe this show is about the American dream and who it is really for, which inspired my overall performance and character beliefs throughout the show.

I played Charles Guiteau, the assassin of James Garfield. I thoroughly enjoyed my research into his life. Unfortunately, Guiteau has quite the sad history, his father beating him in striving to remove the devil from him after his mothers death as he struggled with a speech defect, and his father believing this was the reason for his mothers post natal depression, Guiteau's struggle with being 'unable to sit still' which caused him problems as a child, his persistant social issues and the Syphilis in his brain being so bad that doctors had believed he shouldn't have been able to survive upon his death (Folsom, 1882). He is believed to be insane (Lepore, 2019). I enjoyed looking into multiple books, websites, videos and documentaries to gain knowledge on his life. Knowing this history allowed me to play with the madness of the character. Although I didn't feed into the social awkwardness of his persona, I did try to create a childlike variation. I was inspired by characters from popular film such as Olaf (frozen), The Joker (Joker) and Patty Simcox (Grease), I tried performing each run as each and by the time we reached tech week I achieved what was my final Guiteau. Reflecting back, I believe this as a less extreme form of Lee Strasberg's method acting (Ates, 2023), which I had been looking at for a previous project. I would embody these characters and think about how they move, speak, inflect and think and tried to replicate them. This allowed me to create my own combination of these characteristics, to create idiosyncrasies for my character that represent Guiteau, such as my slightly mad smile and finger twitching when in an isolated situation, inspired by Joaquin Phoenix's performance as the Joker (JOKER, 2019), and the airy and silliness the rest of the time.

We learnt about the 7 states of tension. Although we learnt James' variation the original theory is by Jacques Lecoq. This is a technique originally used for physical theatre and dance to embody a character, but can be used within the heightened naturalistic acting space. The levels are: exhausted, laidback, neutral, alert, suspense, passionate and tragic (Murray, 2019). Each level goes up in tension in the body. I learnt that physicality is key in this form of acting, for instance, in laidback, you can give off a unbothered or bitchy energy dependant of how you hold yourself. In James' version the levels had an intention added to them. I used suspense, which in our version we called ice cream, a level that is tense in a longing way, wanting something so much you could almost lick it. I used this in the scene with Sarah Jane Moore, I looked at Nico with desperation and tension within my body to show the real creepiness and ill intention of my character. I wanted the audience to feel uncomfortable in this scene, as if it was a man playing my role and a woman playing Nico's it would portray the unsettling vibe easier, therefore it was important that I addressed this physicality from the opening of the scene. Audience feedback suggests that I was successful in my goal. I will use this method going forward in my future career to embody my characters.

With this, I have also developed a greater understanding of safety within the industry, and the topic of consent as an actor. Within the before mentioned scene, I was touching Nico in quite an intimate way, and performing a scene suggestive of sexual assault, I had to ensure both he and I were comfortable when rehearsing and performing these movements, and

choreographing this exactly so that Nico did not feel uncomfortable or shocked. As discussed in an article by Medium, scenes like these can cause actors to feel they can not speak up on their own physical, emotional and psychological safety, which takes focus off the scene meaning the job or purpose of the scene is not being filled properly (Tydings, 2021). Following advice suggested online and through stage management I would ask Nico if he was comfortable that run for me to touch him within the scene as well as informing him that I consented to performing the previously agree'd upon movement. If for any reason this was not consented to this would be communicated to Stage Management and the director (Ross, 2019). Through this experience I have learned that consent is everyone's responsibility and not just that of the stage management.

Throughout the previous projects I have been focusing on naturalistic Acting, using elements of the Meisner or Stanislavski technique. This project demanded a more dramatic style, therefore I did research into someone with a drastically different approach, Brecht. The Brechtian theory is that an actor is to use actions of a character rather than naturalistic (BBC, 2019). The main technique I used from Brecht is the breaking of the forth wall. I made a character choice that in any situation they are searching for attention, so James and I decided that I was aware of the audience at all times. I learnt from the performances, that this can actually scare and intimidate an audience, but is a handy tool to keep with me for other un naturalistic performances.

This project has taught me quite a bit about health as a performer. The Centre Of Performance Science suggests that performers may struggle with avoidance behaviour when it comes to health (Centre of Performance Science, 2020). I had issue with looking after myself efficiently within this process. Firstly, I had a cold which caused me to have a sore voice from week four right through to show. However, unlike a normal workplace, I had a pressure to perform. I took extra measures to look after my voice such as drinking lots of water, rest, and steaming, but my voice was not fully healed by the time the show came around (NIDCD, 2015). This reminded me of how I need to look after my voice properly outside of performance time, as it is my instrument and vital for my work. I feel like loosing full health of my voice allowed me to learn how valuable vocal health is. I also struggled with not warming my body up properly before rehearsals, and cooling down efficiently causing me to get bad muscle cramps. I have learned that I need to create a proper routine that serves my body and the demands of the production. As a result of proper warm up I will loosen my joints, muscles and ligaments which will decrease my risk of strain or other injury. I will also increase agility, blood flow and reduce muscle soreness (Masterclass, 2021). A proper warm up should include breath and calming exercises, cardio to increase heart rate, proper stretching and core work to add stability (Golucke, 2020). I will take this knowledge forward to everything else I do in the industry.

As someone who has struggled with dance, and dance retention in the past I found my dance solo and memory quite the challenge. I found that working with Elan helped my confidence as she really worked with me to go over everything in detail when I was learning it. I used focus, and chunk size learning to develop my remembrance of my routine (Suzanne, 2015). However, I forgot my routine on many occasions despite my practice. I did learn to improvise on the other hand and make it up on the spot to keep going. Some audience members did not notice my dance mistakes which I am proud of. For future, I will try to perform the routine full out every time to help me with my memory, I will write down the steps as this is usually how I learn my spoken lines and I will record and watch back routines via recording (Schwartz, 2021). This should help with my memory.

Stephen Sondheim is a New York composer who took inspiration from Hammerstein in order to write many iconic musicals such as *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Anyone Can Whistle*. He is known globally for his clashing harmonies and unusual timings within his work (About Stephen Sondheim, ND). I found challenge in these tricky music parts, especially singing in $\frac{3}{4}$. I have never worked on a Sondheim production and had a tendency to slow down to suit the 4/4 time signature in my head. In saying that, a metronome in the correct time really helped me in early rehearsals, using my footsteps to embed the time in my mind and taught me that asking for help is much easier than suffering in silence. I felt greatly supported by Barney and in the industry I have learned to take the support where its offered. I also found challenge in pitch, and realised that my sense of pitch was deeply affected when I was nervous. There were a lot of moments in 'The Ballad of Guiteau' that meant I had to pitch without backing. In the future I will express my concerns to my musical director earlier in the rehearsal stage. In this production I have learnt a lot musically through the mistakes I have made, and I am grateful for the skills I have improved, inclusive of timing and pitch.

Moving furniture in a fast and safe manor was something I had not done before. I learned how to use creative problem solving to fix problems when they would occur. For instance, when a break would not be set on a table correctly I found myself figuring out ways to help the actor by stabilising the table or fixing the break. Sometimes when moving set in rehearsals, there would be an issue where someone else's furniture would have a hold up or be in the wrong place, and it would be my responsibility to create a new path for myself to keep Alicia, who was on top of the table, safe but also to get out of the way so that the issue could be solved. I had to use visual communication to ensure Will understood what we were going to need to do. I learned to use head signals which all three of us were aware of and were able to use at any time. I felt in these moments it was better to continue than to stop the rehearsal. I feel this is a great skill to have going into the industry as I can work, communicate and problem solve safely. Mistakes like this I now know mistakes are wonderful because they can improve my collaboration skills, dramatic intelligence, decision making and overall communication skills (Cash, 2021).

Over the past two years I have learnt quite a bit about myself, and who I am as a performer. I feel like within this new process I have found different things I can add to my skill set. In rent, I used Meisner technique and naturalistic acting as well as massively concentrating on reaction to my fellow actors. In comparison, I have added more dramatic acting styles, Brecht and imitation, to my tool kit which I feel has made me a more rounded performer. I have learnt skills for dance and voice health, and learnt a lot about myself and what happens when I am nervous. I have developed new skills in collaboration, decisions and communication. I also I have developed skills for deeper research and within my academic work.

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