

Theatre Lab

Task 2 (Written Assessment)

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Content:

Reflective Essay on the Level 4 Theatre Laboratory Module

Reference List

Theatre Laboratory Essay

Over the course of this Theatre Laboratory Module with tutor David Harrington we explored a range of theatre styles, analysed sheet music and rehearsed and performed group ensemble pieces. Throughout I was challenged with moving harmonic lines in each song to give me a vocal range, as I am usually a top soprano. By changing harmonic groups for each song it gave me a challenge of getting out of my comfort zone, helping me progress throughout. During the module I set myself individual goals to achieve success when coming into class and preparing for Lab Week. My first goal was to learn songs and harmonies quickly and efficiently in my own time, so I could contribute to the best of my ability when in class. Another goal was to be more free with expression and to come forward when I had an idea for a piece. I believe I have succeeded in my goals throughout each term and am now able to move forward with the knowledge and skills I have learnt.

During both terms the chosen songs showed a range of different styles and a variety of composers with challenging harmonies. The first piece given in the first term was 'Oklahoma' from the 1943 musical Oklahoma. Lyrics and playwright by Oscar Hammerstein, written by Rodgers and Hammerstein (Encyclopedia Britannica. M.B, (n.d) (Rodgers & Hammerstein, n.d. (2022)). For this piece I had the harmonic line of Alto 1. This was challenging because it was lower than I was used to, but I was able to pick up on the harmonies quickly. The second piece was 'Ascot Gavotte' from the 1956 musical 'My Fair Lady', and I was set as an Alto 2 which again was lower. I surprised myself with being able to obtain notes that I didn't think I would be able to before and therefore was open to trying new harmonic lines throughout rehearsals. The third song we rehearsed was 'Mamma Mia! Mega Medley' arranged by David George Harrington. For this, I was set on the Alto line. This piece included a variety of songs by ABBA and has also appeared in the 1999 musical 'Mamma Mia'. This was fun and energetic, even though it had difficult harmonies. I believe our group worked well together during the process of learning this, as we all helped each other when finding things difficult. Our fourth song was 'Make them hear you' from the 1996 musical 'Ragtime'. I was on the harmonic line Mezzo. The final piece was 'Epic Queen Medley' also arranged by David George Harrington. This was filled with different songs mashed up into one arrangement which I found very exciting. I was given the harmony line of Alto 2 for this, which was something I felt comfortable with.

By the end of term we had an intensive week where we developed these pieces even further, by working on detail and presenting a showing on the last day. We incorporated choreography, singing techniques and ensemble work to create one final piece. During the first Lab Week we decided to nominate two individuals to lead on choreography for each piece, becoming more efficient with time.

Along with this, the group decided if anyone had any ideas for a piece that they would come forward, allowing everyone to be involved in the process, which worked well. Throughout the week we worked closely with tutor, David Harrington, with specific notes and ideas that we could incorporate. The first piece 'Oklahoma' we decided to set in a wedding, where all the guests were immensely drunk, as if they were doing karaoke. This created a comedic side to the song and an enjoyable way to perform it. During rehearsals we were given solo lines in the piece which required us to bring our own character into them and also bring forward the Oklahoma accent, which I found quite challenging. This song was filled with speech enhancing characters that needed a very 'twangy sound'. At the end of the piece we were given the note of making the ending letters "OKLAHOMA" aggressive and sharp, creating a clear speech quality for the audience to hear. The second piece 'Ascot Gavotte' we decided to go in the direction of acting as if we were statues, everyone had their own pose of looking like a typical higher class resident at that time. Throughout this we moved in unison to create an eye-catching performance whilst focusing on clarity and sharp cut offs, making it strong and effective. Moving on to 'The Mamma Mia, Mega Medley' we decided to add choreography as it is very energetic, whilst creating parts in unison and changing dynamics throughout. The fourth piece 'Make them hear you' is filled with strong ensemble work, working on attacking notes and words to give a more meaningful edge for the audience as it is a very heartwarming piece. The piece was showing a group of people coming together after something sad happened around them. For the final piece 'Epic Queen Medley' we were given the direction to pronounce every continent, making a stronger and more effective sound. The piece itself was filled with strong harmonies, gospel sounds and climactic notes. At the beginning we created a 'school scenario' where a group of people were bullying one person but then once they found it 'cool' the entire group joined in. At the end we decided to sing out to the audience, bringing a strong ending to the entire show.

Moving on to the second term, the chosen songs were 'Another Opening Another Show' from the 1948 musical 'Kiss Me Kate'. Lyrics and Music by Cole Porter. For this piece I was an Alto, which I am now confident in that harmony. The second piece was 'Ballad of Sweeney Todd' from the 1979 musical 'Sweeney Todd' (Wikipedia, 2020). Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim (Twitter et al., 2021). For this I was set on the Bass line which was extremely challenging for me, as I have never sung that low before. I believe I worked well under pressure as it was a new challenge for me to pursue. The third song given was 'Wait' also from the musical Sweeney Todd. I was set on the Mezzo harmony. 'So in Love' was our fourth piece, starting as a solo from Lilly, moving into an ensemble piece. I was on the Alto harmony line. Our fifth and final piece for the arrangement was 'Still I will Love'. Music and Lyrics by Shaina Taub. I was given an Alto harmony line.

Our second Lab Week started by going through each song and working on details of each harmony. For this Lab Week we were directed by Angharad who had ideas for each piece. Starting with 'Another Opening of Another Show'. This was set as backstage of a theatre where all the cast had a party the night before and were waking up to the show call. As you can imagine this piece was chaotic, but an organised chaos. Throughout, there were elements of unison, the use of creating "flocks" to pull the audience's eyes to one place. This was filled with vibrato endings of phrases and bright staccato sounds. The use of crescendo notes and sharp endings created a strong piece in the mix of all the chaos. 'The Ballad of Sweeney Todd' had intense text which was short and sharp, needing fear in the voice to portray the correct emotion. This piece was filled with sharp endings and used a variety of changing tempos, depending on each part in the piece. Angarad decided to create a 'Sweeney like' figure out of a long trench coat and hat. We were challenged to move this figure across the stage with two people on each arm, one holding the hat and another the back of the coat. Once again, we used the direction of a flock fading away and coming back in towards 'Sweeney'. By the end the figure was turned into a real life character played by Lloyd. The third piece 'Wait' started off with a crescendo sound from each harmony group creating one sound. This was my favourite as it was a calming sound throughout which was filled with challenging harmonies and elongated vowels, making the piece very satisfying for the ear. For this, we were directed to go in pairs and create a 'frantic assembly-like' sequence where you constantly touched the other person and did not break eye contact. I felt we could have had one vocal point in this piece, as I think it was confusing to the audience as everyone's sequence was different and the audience didn't know where to look. For 'So in Love' we used the 'flock' technique from Angarad to create a pushing momentum on Lilly so she couldn't get to where she wanted to go. I believe this was effective, as it gave the audience one vocal point to look at. The final piece 'Still I will love' is a gospel piece. We chose to have everyone facing the audience to create a strong outlook of the song. For this, everyone had their own individual thoughts on what the song was talking about and interpreted their own individual emotion to the audience, which I think was very effective as by the end the audience was clapping with us.

To conclude, I feel that this module has benefitted me a lot, by developing my knowledge of different styles and vocal techniques. I now have a wider range of vocal ability as before the module started I always put myself in my comfort zone, working only on soprano harmonies, and I am now able to perform as low as a bass, which I never thought I would be able to do. This has demonstrated to me the progression I have made as an individual and has taught me skills which I can use in the upcoming modules.

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