

Theatre Laboratory
ADPA4003
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Reflective Essay
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Throughout the Theatre Laboratory Module, I've learned valuable skills and techniques for performance. With the help of my lecturer, DGH, I explored learning songs from a piano, understanding harmonies, and collaborating effectively. We worked on diverse genres including Golden Age, Kander & Ebb, Disney, and Pop Rock, broadening my song knowledge. Experimenting with unfamiliar material proved highly beneficial, enhancing my overall experience as a performer.

In our first term, DGH introduced us to Kander & Ebb and the Golden Age of musical theatre, assigning 'Coffee Break' from 'How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying' as our first song. "*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning musical, is a story about the triumph of the common man amid the buffoonery of big business." Yates.A (2020). This marked our group's initial test, learning the piece from scratch. While the harmonies weren't overly complex, rhythmic precision was crucial for supporting the soloists. DGH provided dynamic instructions, urging score annotations for rehearsal. Collaboration was key to achieving cohesion in our first ensemble piece. "The ensemble is often a unit, having to work together to make sure that they are all in the same world, in the same style, functioning both individually and together." Christopher.B (2022). Infusing humour into the performance with American accents and caffeine-deprived character portrayals added depth. Maintaining rhythmic precision proved tricky at times, necessitating thorough practice to stay on track. Despite challenges, our collective effort resulted in a successful rendition, showcasing both musicality and comedic flair.

Our next challenge was a mashup of Golden Age songs, including 'Anything Goes', 'S'Wonderful', and 'De-Lovely'. Similar to 'Coffee Break', it featured intricate rhythms but included complex harmonies. The ensemble mimicked various instruments to enrich the piece's sound. I was an alto in this piece which was a challenge for me as I usually sang as mezzo. "The word 'alto' is a general term used to describe a lower female voice rather than a specific vocal category. Chorus music usually calls for an 'alto' part for voices with a strong middle and lower register." Hagen.E (2022). We learned the song in sections due to its complexity, utilising piano note bashes provided by DGH for individual practice. Harmonising with diverse rhythms added another layer of challenge, demanding precise timing and strong musicality. Initially daunting, we sought guidance from DGH, who emphasised repetition for learning harmonies. DGH also provided us with a music file with all voices recorded on the piano so we could practise the piece with the other parts which greatly aided our practice.

In our final ensemble piece of the term, we tackled a mashup of 'Nowadays' from 'Chicago' and 'Spiderwoman' from 'Kiss of the Spider Woman'. "Broadway boomed in post World War II America, as audiences were looking for escapism and could finally afford it on the other side of the Great Depression. This outlook shaped the style of musicals of the Golden Age." BWW (2022). These 2 songs were a great example of classic Golden Age songs with a melancholy feel. While 'Nowadays' was familiar to the class, 'Spiderwoman' posed challenges due to its lower register. As an alto, projecting low notes proved difficult. DGH advised incorporating body engagement and a breathier tone to enhance projection and create a haunting atmosphere. He also balanced volume dynamics to prevent parts from overpowering each other. Following DGH's guidance, we successfully navigated the piece, ensuring clarity across all parts.

For this term's performance, we prepared songs off copy to focus on blocking, storyline, and movement during intensive week. I was allocated as dance captain for this piece and I was excited to choreograph for the pieces, especially for the Anything Goes mashup. "A musical theatre choreographer is tasked with interpreting the script presented from the composer/lyricist to discover how dance can aid in the story telling of the piece." Abate.C (2022). Combining stylized movements and formations was challenging but visually engaging. It was challenging to create choreography that was suitable for all abilities but I addressed it by checking in with the class and offering extra practice time. Overall, our performance was successful. We showcased passion and dedication, captivating the audience with nostalgia. Harmonies were executed with precision, enriching vocal textures and resonating deeply with the audience.

In our second term, we explored Disney and Pop Rock, which excited me for its modernity and familiarity. Our first song, 'Seize The Day' from 'Newsies', demanded camaraderie and mastery of different voice types and volume dynamics. "Based on the real-life Newsboy Strike of 1899, this new Disney musical tells the story of Jack Kelly, a rebellious newsboy who dreams of a life as an artist away from the big city." Broadway Shows (2024). Achieving uniform cutoffs and mastering 'dip-thong' usage posed challenges. To overcome this, we practised as a group, using clapping to synchronise cutoffs and ensure accurate timing. "Singing in unison allows for a fuller and more powerful sound, creating a sense of unity among the different parts. Creative use of unison in popular music production can lead to a dynamic and engaging listening experience for the audience." MPG (2023). Despite difficulties, we quickly grasped harmonies and retained dynamic choices, showcasing significant progress. Learning the entire song in one session highlighted our collective growth and dedication under DGH's guidance.

Our second piece, a Disney princess medley with a modern comedic twist, blended familiar songs with new melodies and lyrics. Despite expecting this piece to be easy due to familiarity, I found it surprisingly challenging to deviate from the original tunes. The inclusion of countermelodies added complexity, requiring intense focus to maintain the correct vocal line. "Underneath the main melody, you have a counter-melody that goes against it, and together they make harmony. This is different from harmonising, where someone sings along with the melody at an interval. The counter-melody is a separate melody that could stand on its own." Sivers.D (2020). To overcome these hurdles, we committed extra time outside of sessions to rehearse. This collaborative effort fostered a sense of teamwork as we supported each other. Through dedicated practice and mutual support, we achieved an excellent performance, showcasing our dedication and drive to successfully perform the song.

Furthermore, we worked on two songs which the ensemble was used as backing vocals. These songs were 'No One But You' and 'God Help The Outcasts'. Both of these songs required soft, gospel style singing to highlight the soloists. "Gospel singing requires the ability to sing evenly from the bottom of the vocal range to the top with the same volume and effortlessness. Also, the ability to produce vibrato evenly throughout your whole vocal range." Wicks.D (2018). I feel that although this was a new style of singing, the class

handled the challenge well. Initially, we struggled with achieving the gospel sound, however, DGH suggested we all lowered our larynx positions to create an almost operatic sob sound. This, accompanied with the lowered volume allowed us to create a gentle, emotional tone which overall, I feel added depth to the songs whilst also highlighting the soloists.

The final ensemble piece, a Disney villain medley, presented challenges in learning new melodic lines. Unlike the princess piece, it spotlighted soloists with the ensemble acting as accompaniment. Exploring different vocal qualities like twang and belt added enjoyment, particularly in my solo as 'Mother Gothel' in 'Mother Knows Best'. 'Mother Gothel' is "vain, manipulative, and selfish. Mother Gothel has some motherly, nurturing qualities, but they're always part of a façade used to maintain control over Rapunzel." Charactour (2024). Characterising a villain was a new experience that I found challenging, however, DGH's suggestion of using a lower, more spoken voice helped convey the evil nature. Incorporating physicality exercises also aided in embodying Mother Gothel's character. I read a passage from 'Embodied Acting' which stated "As the actor's body expresses the physical behaviour of the situational self, emotions can be stimulated through the proprioceptive system." Kemp.R (2012). This approach developed a seamless transition into character and also allowed me to effectively transfer this skill to utilise within the ensemble's portrayal of evil and menacing themes throughout the song.

Furthermore, DGH assigned Eva and I a duet, challenging us to create a unique piece to break up the ensemble. Collaborating, we decided on a pop/Disney mash-up of 'Creep' and 'Let It Go'. After liaising with DGH, he expressed that the chord progression of Creep was different to Let It Go. "In terms of chords and melody, Creep is more complex than the typical song, having above average scores in Chord Complexity, Melodic Complexity, Chord-Melody Tension and Chord Progression Novelty." HookTheory (2024). So, DGH suggested using 'Reflection' for a better fit. With his guidance, we arranged the score and experimented with harmonies. Establishing character narratives and intersections, we dove into context work. Working in a duet was a rewarding experience, providing new skills for future collaborations.

For our final performance, the class demonstrated exceptional teamwork and dedication. As dance captain, I focused on choreographing 'Newsies' to showcase our ensemble's progress in singing, dancing, and acting. Despite challenges in hitting musical cutoffs with intense choreography, we overcame them through rehearsal and muscle memory. "Muscle memories that have been moved into the long term storage area of the brain tend to become almost automatic and require very little thought or effort to act and coordinate." RVR (2024). Balancing the nuances of each genre required careful attention to detail, from vocal harmonies to instrumental arrangements. Additionally, maintaining consistency in our performance level throughout rehearsals and the actual show demanded dedication and perseverance from everyone involved. Yet, it was through overcoming these challenges that we grew closer as a class and ultimately delivered a memorable performance that left a lasting impact on both ourselves and our audience.

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