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For our final production, we worked on Assassins, a musical By Stephen Sondheim. The musical is based around 9 Americans who assassinated or attempted to assassinate the Presidents of the United States of America. Our director, James, decided to base the musical around a school where we were kids portraying historical events. As well as being casted as a character in the musical, we also had to come up with a school character. My character was called McKenzie, she was a 'nerd' that came from a christian family and that is why she was dressed younger than everyone else in the class. I was cast as Billy in the musical and Billy is a puppet which means I had the opportunity to be a puppeteer. During the process I had the opportunity to learn and develop new skills that I've yet to discover. It was quite the change for me but I easily adapted and was ready for everything that came my way.

I wasn't too sure on the musical at the beginning because we went from a rock/pop musical to a Sondheim musical. The reason I found this challenging was because Rent and Assassins differ in their themes, storylines and musical styles. Rent focuses on the struggles and joys of bohemians during the HIV/AIDS crisis, whereas Assassins explores the lives of individuals who attempted or succeeded in assassinating the Presidents of the United States. It was difficult to go from one dark theme to another dark theme, the only difference between both topics was that assassins was a concept that was based around real life events. Also, Rent is a rock/pop inspired score while Assassins showcases Stephen Sondheim's complex melodies. Rent features energetic and emotional compositions with a modern edge while assassins incorporated a range of musical influences to create a clear atmosphere for each character and their time periods. Going from one style of scores to another is really hard as I've never sung Sondheim before this module. However, I did enjoy the idea of a more text piece as we haven't performed one since the beginning of level 5 but we hadn't yet to perform a text based musical.

Throughout the process I felt like I learned so much by doing a different kind of piece as I'm more into contemporary or post golden age with a contemporary feel musicals, by performing this piece I've become more flexible as a performer and had the opportunity to tackle one of the hardest musical so I feel somewhat prepared for another Sondheim musical in the future. I haven't had the best self-esteem while completing some modules but having the opportunity to challenge myself in something I feel is outside my comfort zone has made me realise that everyone's got different abilities.

Something completely new for me during this process was puppeteering. I was in disbelief when I first found out that I had to be on stage with a puppet, nevermind controlling it. I didn't get Billy until the 3rd week, which made me a little anxious as I'd never worked with a puppet before but once I got Billy I was ready to learn. I had one rehearsal during that week with James and Elliot, that session was based on how to control the puppet. I tried to work out myself what I wanted to do with the puppet, movements wise but it naturally came as we kept running the show. I'd previously had a session on the scene without the puppet so I already knew what I was doing with the acting, I just found it really difficult to put two and two together. During one of the rehearsals, Elan gave me a valuable tip, which was to look at

Billy no matter what, as I kept looking at the actors in the scene. I needed to look at Billy because the attention would be instantly drawn to him. During the last week of rehearsal, I had a really good session with James regarding Billy the Kid. In the session we came up with a stance for Billy and a way to make him look like we were breathing, I learnt a lot during that session. I had an incredible breakthrough with Billy towards the end of the progress because I kept experimenting and had a lot of support. Being able to play with a puppet has given me so many new skills that I can add to my CV and will definitely benefit me in the future.

We used the 7 stages of tension during this production. 7 stages of tension is an effective method for exploring the physicality your character and their emotions. 'Jacques Lecoq developed an approach to acting using seven levels of tension'. The stages include exhaustion, laid back, neutral, alert, suspense, passionate, tragic. I've done the 7 stages of tension before but the way we did it with James was different. James' version of the 7 stages included different names like sick, teenager/californian, neutral, time bomb, fast time bomb, ice cream and evil mary. This method helped me a lot with Billy as I was still expressive with my face even though the acting was coming through the puppet. The stages also helped me through the opening number as we went from ice cream to evil mary within a matter of seconds, I preferred James' version of the stages as it relates more to realistic reactions.

I carried another method that's helped me previously, that being a good mantra. Mantras helped me through my acting module and rent because after repeating a phrase in my head a few times I tend to feel that emotion. I mostly used a mantra during 'Something just broke' as it was easier to use during that song, the emotion i felt in that song carried through to the ending which made a powerful impact on me.

When coming into 'Something just broke' I broke the text down into bits and examined the farmer's story as the song has a lot of speaking over each other. Once I got the story together, and discovered the throughline, I started to feel and embody the character. During the song the actual footage of JFK being assassinated was in the back playing and seeing that for the first time was really hard as I've never seen anything like that before but I used the emotions I was feeling in that moment into the character and every time I did that scene I method acted. "Method acting is a technique that performers employ to empathise with the characters they are portraying emotionally". I have used method acting since I was introduced to Stanislavsky because it's always helped me every time I perform.

A tool I used when playing Billy was imagination, because Billy didn't have much of a backstory. I had to use my imagination in what kind of a kid he was. I always thought that he was a lovely kid until he didn't get his way then he was a brat, he was always giving his mom a hard time. While using Stanislavsky's Toolkit I realised more things about imagination, 'Imagination is developed most directly through improvisation', the method helped me to experiment a little bit more with Billy because by improvisation I would discover how much i really wanted and how i wanted to poetry the character. Improvisation was the key when it came to Billy as I was a new puppeteer and couldn't think of anything original at first.

I have picked up on different methods of teaching during this process. I struggled picking up choreography as Elan had a different teaching method than I'm used to, I feel like she used more of a devising process whereas I'm used to a choreographer coming in with a set plan.

The first thing we learnt was 'Another National Anthem' and I felt like that was the choreography that took most to perfect, we were set with the marching for a long time until we unblocked the song during the last week and we also added ribbons into the piece. I felt like adding ribbons into the piece was the best option because it took a little bit of seriousness out of the piece as we weren't marching like the other. The ribboning was more of a collaborative rehearsal to see what we could do and what would work. I felt like the rehearsal for the choreography could've been more time efficient but It gave me the opportunity to figure some parts out myself as I didn't understand straight away. Working with a new and different choreographer has given me the skills set to adapt for any choreographer in the future.

While I was trying to understand this musical, I researched all the different assassins so I knew exactly what they'd done and what happened to them after. When researching the different assassins it helped me with some scenes and I was involved with Zangra's electrocution scene and Guitaueu's death scene, having to look into both character's cause of death I understood the scene on a deeper level. I took a different kind of take with a research this time as I researched into the mind of serial killers, i did this so I could understand what goes through someone's brain as they try to kill/assassinate someone. I felt like investigating that would fill me with some sort of anger. "People who commit murders often kill to assert power and be noticed. They often will do this in order to punish some person or group of people that they are unhappy with or fearful of", It's interesting to know what goes through someone's mind as they kill and this helped me to perform 'Something just broke' as it filled me with anger.

Something I did a lot during the process was moving tables, I was always moving the table while people were on them. In the rehearsal room we did have tables with wheels but the actors were always sitting, even though they were seated it gave us the opportunity to create a route and a plan. The tables were really difficult to move during the rehearsals as the tables weren't meant to be 'stage tables' but once we went into the space with the proper tables they were much easier to move. We spend a little bit on the first day of tech with the tables and the actors stood up on it and it was a really good and safe session, going forward with the tech i hoped that we would have a specific call with the tables for our safety but i disappointed that we didn't have a safety call everyday. I feel like people's safety and consent was a big factor when we did Rent as we had a call with the DSM everyday from the fight scenes, to the lifting, consent and the standing on tables. I felt like we needed one for Assassins, I have learned that this is something that I would bring up to the DSM in future production.

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