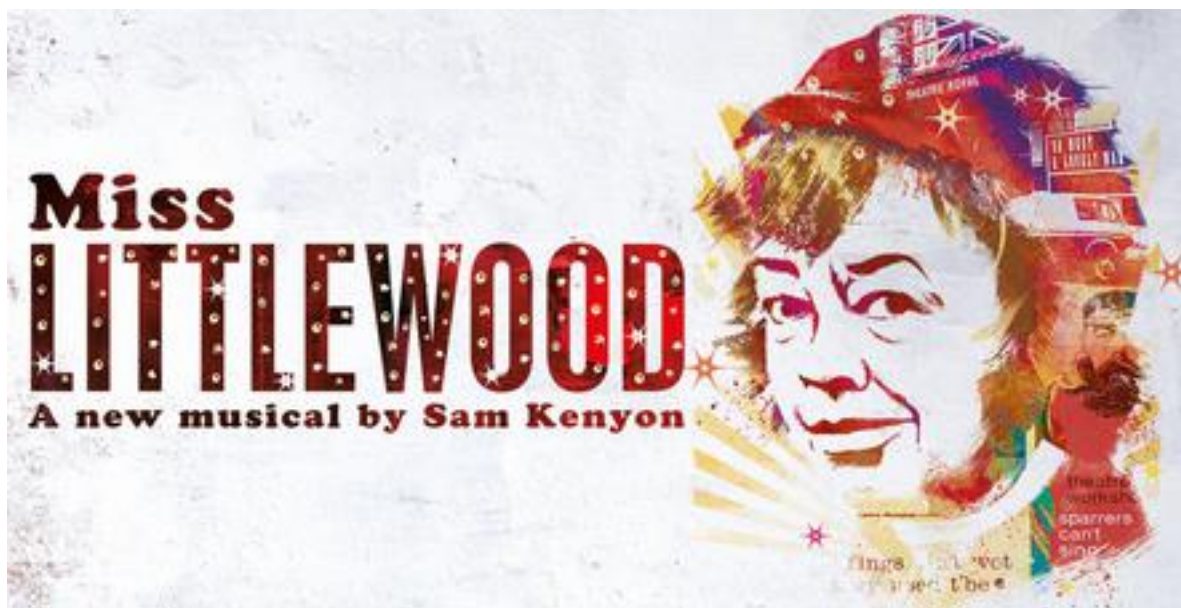


Miss Littlewood Process Journal (ADPA7007/C)



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Introduction

This process journal is intended to outline my individual creative processes throughout the production of Miss Littlewood as completion of my MA Musical Theatre course. Each section will reflect, and outline completed exercise and activities undertaken throughout the rehearsal process to effectively document the progress of the production as a performer. Additionally, the journal serves as a centralised archive evidently recording the ideas, decisions, crucial details, and progress of the production throughout the rehearsal process.

It will define my approaches and reactions to the tasks and exercises surrounding the influential theatrical style of Brecht. Throughout the journal I will be maintaining details on successes or constraints to my progress whilst looking in on the effect of communication, collaboration, and the successful outcome of working with my peers and creative team.

My key objective to fulfil throughout this production was professionalism in the field of the industry, working alongside creatives and taken upon new roles and responsibilities within the production when appropriate. I hope you will be able to identify this objective throughout my progress in this journal.

First Impressions

My first impression of the production was quite intimidating as previous productions we were given a longer period to expose ourselves with the material prior to the rehearsals commencing.

My biggest fear was the short period of time to create this production to successfully demonstrate my development of professional attributes as a performer. Multi-rolling was an additional fear I had, ensuring that I had the capabilities to make clear differences in the portrayal of different characters whilst remaining on the stage for the full duration of the show.

To ease any doubts about the production's creative development process we were immediately given a task after our first full read through to write down as many questions that we might have about the piece. The figure below outlines the series of questions I probed from my first impression of the text.

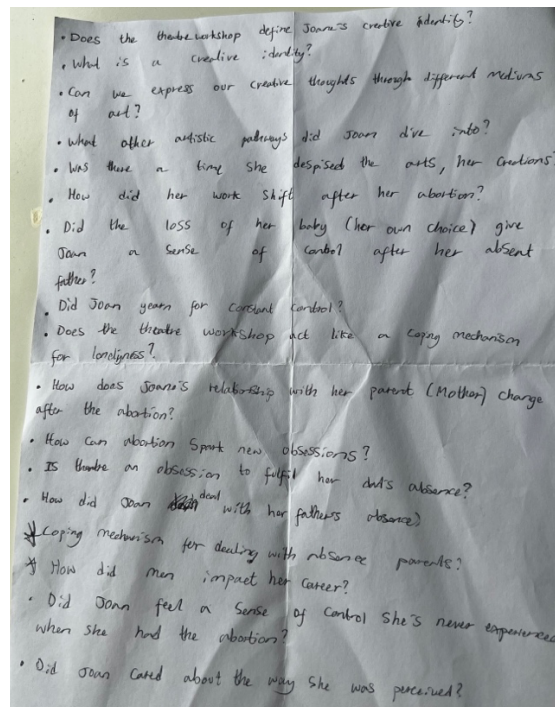


Figure 1: First Impression of text questions

In completion of this task, we as the cast discussed our findings, identifying similarities and picking out interesting questions which sparked conversations about Joan Littlewood. This task assisted all of us as creatives to establish a core meaning or ideology in which we wanted to portray to the audience.

Control and obsessives were crucial themes which appeared in most of our discussions about Joan and how theatre became her asylum and how we can portray this in every aspect of this show. For example, the show revolves around Joan directing the production, which is her life, we see many acts of obsessiveness in controlling her theatre company's actions and portrayal of herself.

To understand the text, research was a key attribute to the entire cohort at the beginning of the rehearsal process. This ensured that we were comfortable with our knowledge on Joan Littlewood's life and most importantly her career and relationships.

Joan Littlewood

Joan Littlewood was a British theatre director and innovator, a formidable force in theatre during the 20th century Holdsworth (2006). Born on October 6th, 1914, to a teen mother Kate Daisy Littlewood, Joan never knew her father and was brought up by her Grandparents Caroline Emily and Robert Francis. Known for her bold experiments and

radical approach to staging ideas, she challenged the conventions of traditional theatre throughout her active years in the theatre industry.

Littlewood's productions were aimed to break barriers between performers and audiences, creating a sense of collective engagement. Her most acclaimed work, *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963), abbreviated her characteristic style through its use of songs, props, and multimedia elements to critique war and nationalism.

The Theatre Workshop proved influential not only in terms of artistic expression but also in creating opportunities for artists from diverse backgrounds. Through her collaborations with other artistic visionaries such as Ewan MacColl (also known as Jimmie Miller), she revitalized marginalized genres such as music hall and developed a distinctly British brand of political theatre that left an indelible impact on the theatrical landscape. Joan Littlewood's legacy continues to inspire generations of artists to push the boundaries of theatre today.

The Theatre Workshop

Throughout the production we follow Joan's theatre company, The Theatre Workshop. At the end of WWII, Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl established Theatre Workshop in 1945. Between 1945-'52 they toured around the country 'developing bold and daring experimental productions' (Barker, 2012, p.133) which investigated the effect of class division, global politics, and other upcoming topics of discussion such as the Cold War. The company quickly gained recognition for their innovative and bold approach to staging and profound social commentary (Goodman, 1975).

Theatre Workshop Manifesto, 1945

The great theatres of all times have been popular theatres, theatres which reflected the dreams and struggles of the people of their time. The theatre of Aeschylus and Sophocles, of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, of the Commedia dell'arte and Molière derived their inspiration, their language, their art from the common people.

Today in Britain, there is no popular theatre; there has been no popular theatre since the Jacobean age. Only a very small percentage of the population of Great Britain has ever been inside a theatre, this in spite of the fact that great numbers of people are organised as never before, into political organisations, social bodies, and trade unions.

The theatre of the twentieth century Britain is the property of a small section of society; its dramaturgy generally reflects the life of this small group, a life so trivial that it is without interest for the really important sections of society, the miners, engineers, weavers, dockers, and all those who are involved in building a new world.

The great events of our time, wars, social upheavals, the frustrations of man's social desires, and the attempts to build a new civilisation find little expression in the contemporary theatre.

We in Theatre Workshop want to remedy this.

We want a theatre which will restore the great plays of the past to their rightful place - that is with the people.

We want a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not afraid of the sound of its own voice and which will comment as fearlessly on society as Ben Jonson and Aristophanes did.

Theatre Workshop is a team of skilled artists and technicians who have broken with the moribund conventions of the commercial theatre. We believe that by combining all that is best in the great theatres of the past with the most recent scientific and technical developments we can create a theatrical form sufficiently flexible to reflect the rapidly changing twentieth century scene.

The theatre must become a great art again and this cannot happen unless it becomes an important part of the life of the working people.

Figure 2: Theatre Workshop Manifesto (Cleaves & Holsworth, 1945)

Their manifesto, shown in the above figure offers their aim as a company, to create truthful theatre that was accessible to all audiences across the spectrum (Dickens, 2017).

Additionally, their work also revolved around energy, vitality, blood, and sentiment in the hopes of offering new and fresh outlooks on the political state of the country.

‘I do not believe in the supremacy of the director, designer, actor or even of the writer. It is through collaboration that this knockabout art of theatre survives and kicks’ (Littlewood, 1961).

The company struggled, living in poverty and were unable to secure financial offerings by the arts council. This was due to the nature of their work as the touring model presented financial risks which the arts council were endeavour without a base for their work. Gerry Raffles assisted in finding a permanent home for the company at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, East London. The successful growth and popularity of the company continued for the next two decades (Koch, 2021).

Theatrical Influences

Classic Theatre

Inspiration for the company’s work revolved around many historical influences, although the biggest was the connection with common people, a feature of the Ancient Greek theatre, Jacobean theatre, etc. Littlewood was drawn by the ethos of the ensemble submerged by different styles and sometimes connected the audience as influential features in pieces.

Naturalism/Realism

Introduced by Russian writers Tolstoy, Gorky and Chekhov, this style of theatre advanced on human behaviour with the character’s impulse and engagement are of the most importance. Joan was drawn into Stanislavski’s further developments of this style introducing imagination, emotion, rooting to emphasise the significance of action and text connection (Jones, 2020).

Agitprop

A method originally used by the Soviet Union as a form of communication to political messages. The combination of agitation and propaganda aimed to disturb and make audiences feel unsettled into action. Within the early work of the Theatre Workshop developed by Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood it drew inspiration from Agitprop, mostly highlighting contemporary issues for the audience through Living Newspaper.

Productions & Timeline

When starting out as a company, Ewan MacColl was the core writer for productions including Uranium 235 (1945) and Johnny Noble (1945). Shifting to different collaborators and writers such as Littlewood herself and Gerry Raffles in The Long Shift (1951), they began to evolve and find further successes in their productions.

One of the successful collaborations was with Brendan Behan, The Quare Fellow (1956) followed by a Taste of Honey Shelagh Delaney (1958). The Theatre Workshop achieved commercial and artistic success between 1959-'61 with productions transferring to London's West and Broadway. With some unsuccessful productions along the way, They Might Be Giants, Hal Prince (1961) the company was gaining global recognition prior to Joan's departure to France to work on the fun palace with the architect. Then returning in '63 and creating one of their biggest productions of all time, Oh What a Lovely War.

Some of the key influences which inspired the company's work included the following:

The first World War (1914-1918)

General Strike (1926)

Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

Second World War (1939 – 1945)

Labour Government and the Welfare State Formed (1945)

Nuclear Weapons (1958 – 1992)

Lord Chamberlain Censorship

Researching into all these historical factors to portray a truthful and accurate representation of Littlewood's productions was beyond beneficial throughout the rehearsal process. It allowed us to dive into the emotional states of our characters and appeal to the audience in a more realistic and direct manner. Furthermore, looking at the archives of their productions gave a sense of political insights and motifs of their objectives collaborating with various artists and writers on a global scale.

Joan 1-6

Throughout the musical we come across Joan Littlewood and six other versions of herself Joan 1-6. Joan Littlewood is the director of the show replaying the story of her life, using volunteers within her theatre company to take upon each role of Joan aging through time and experiences. Each version of Joan we come across is a different concept, overview, or remembrance of Joan Littlewood from past collaborators, friends, acquaintances, artists, etc.

These ideas were gathered by writer Sam Kenyon through various interviews taken verbatim to create the most truthful interpretation of Joan from the people she was closest to in her daily activities. This was extremely successful in depicting the characteristics of Joan 1-6 whilst gaining an insight on her qualities and how she grew and developed as an artist throughout her active years in the theatre industry.

Kenyon discusses the importance of seeing Joan as she was described in each era and how not to let emotion drive the performance “If you begin to feel emotional, just shrug” (Kenyon, 2023). This was later referred to as a core element for us as actors to maintain the factual interpretations of the text to the best of our ability, so the audience are constantly being educated by the historical events and legacy of Joan’s artistic work.

Character Research

To create an authentic and thorough set of characters to portray accurately from history in this production, a detailed analysis of their backstory, career ventures, physicality and relationships was essential.

An exercise which made a big difference for us in the rehearsal room was having pictures of each character we were playing and a few facts underneath the picture. Beginning with the simple facts of these people’s lives, for example the time and location where they were born/died, spouse, education, etc. Having access to these facts offered a base to begin more detailed interpretations of the characters, and how we could portray them through different eras whilst adapting to the Brecht technicalities and skills.

Hal Prince, composer
1928 – 2019, NYC



- Prince was born to an affluent family.
- Prince began work in the theatre as an assistant stage manager to theatrical producer and director George Abbott.

John Bury, theatre designer
1925 – 2000



- A British set, costume and lighting designer who worked in theatres across the UK and Broadway.
- Was a part of the Royal Navy throughout WWII

Avis Bunnage, actress
1923 - 1990



- Avis attended Manley Park Municipal School and Chorlton Central School in Manchester.
- She worked as a secretary and a nursery teacher before deciding to become an actress.

Rosalie Williams, actress
1919-2009, Manchester



- Rosalie Williams was an English actress known for her appearance as Mrs. Hudson in The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes TV series produced by Granada Television from 1984 until 1994.
- Mother to 3 children from 2 marriages

Figure 3: Character Research Sheet

The figure above is a compacted example created by me to assist in developing clearer imagery and a sense of the character with few facts to develop my confidence and knowledge for an accurate and truthful portrayal of these people. Being able to see this figure on the walls of the rehearsal room was extremely beneficial in embodying certain characteristics for scenes. It was also seen as a reminder throughout the rehearsal process that this musical dives into the lives and careers of these people in the arts.

Character Physicality

Character physicality and traits were an extensive part of the rehearsal process, working with the Alfred's text, *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor* (2007) and engaging in practical exercises to dive into the technicalities of clowning and how it resonates with the Brecht text. To understand the character's physicality, you must go beyond general appearances and diving into the core of the character's emotions, actions, and motivations (Bouyarmane & Valliant, 2016).

This was a crucial aspect we needed to explore as performers throughout the rehearsal process to navigate mannerisms, body language and gestures of these historical figures being portrayed.

When developing character physicality for this multi role production I was drawn to the work of Hagen's 9 questions (1973). Their method concentrates on the specifics of developing a storyline which is true instead of concentrating on the portrayal of stock characters commonly associated in Brecht style productions.

1. **Who am I?**
Who is your character? Identify all the details: name/age, physical traits, relatives, education, personal opinions, likes, dislikes, hobbies, fears, ethics, and beliefs.
2. **What time is it?**
The year, the season, the day, the minute. What is the significance of time?
3. **Where am I?**
Identify the country, the city/town, the neighborhood, the building, the room, the specific area of the room.
4. **What surrounds me?**
What is happening in the environment around you? Weather, landscape, people, animate/inanimate objects.
5. **What are the given circumstances?**
Identify events in the past, present, future. What has happened, what is happening, what is going to happen?
6. **What are my relationships?**
This is more than your relationship to other people. Think about your relationship to objects, characters, and events.
7. **What do I want?**
What do you want immediately? What does the character want overall?
8. **What is in my way?**
What are the obstacles to getting what you want?
9. **What do I do to get what I want?**
What actions do you take (both physically and verbally)? What tactics?

Figure 4: 9 Questions (Hagen, U. & Frankel, H., 1973)

These 9 questions assisted in pinpointing key characteristics and goals when portraying a different character. Insisting that each character had a goal in each scene worked well throughout my personal development on this production.

To convincingly play a role, an actor must be able to physically embody that character. This means understanding how the character moves, talks, and interacts with their environment. Physicality also allows performers to better connect with their audience.

Brecht Devices & Techniques

Clowning

Clowning work was an important skill which we developed throughout the rehearsal process to remove the naturalism of the story and lighten some of the darker themes introduced throughout the story. Bye (2008) suggests that Clowning can be observed as a form of escape from the harsh reality of the era, a state of playfulness.

Our introduction to the clowning style of theatre began by watching clips of Charley Chaplin's silent films from the 1920's. Clowning was rehearsed content which was developed into choreographed sequences which could be filmed for entertainment purposes (Gené, 2021). Bayes & Scott (2019) offered further insights on the physicality demands of silent film actors to 'maintain comedic and precisions in each movement' (p.104).

Once we saw a few examples we were given 50 minutes as a collective to collaborate and generate a rough choreographed sequence for the song 'Walk to Manchester'. There were set of objectives and imagery which needed to be fulfilled to compliment the content of the song. Being able to create something as a cohort was such a unique experience to collaborate and explore our artistic approaches together in a supportive environment. When developing this sequence, we were able to work with current technical movement abilities and collaborate effectively to embrace humorous elements within the era of inspiration.

Although the material developed was cut at the final stages of the production prior to opening night, it was one of the most beneficial exercises which assisted us as a cohort to tune in with each other throughout the creative process.

The Alienation Effect

Created by Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright, the distancing effect is commonly referred to as the alienation effect Speirs (1987). This effect is to encourage the audience to 'look at

the ordinary in a different perspective' (Held, 2017, p.45) adapting to a new way in which the ordinary becomes unfamiliar and strange.

Throughout this production the alienation effect was extremely beneficial in delivering a performance which openly presented that we were simply just actors portraying a character. Additionally, it was an opportunity to shift away from the naturalism techniques studied in our Stanislavski sessions throughout the advanced acting module.

When experimenting with this technique I found it difficult to turn off and relax on stage. Gradually as I came more familiar with text and began rehearsals off book, I was able to accept that this type of production requires relaxation and flexibility to portray the story and maintain the fluidity within the performance.

Multi-roles

All the cast multi-rolled and some were split rolling for this production, therefore differentiation in identifying subtleties such as age, mannerisms and motivations was a crucial factor continuous throughout the production. All character changes were directed using costume; one piece would be transferred to the next actor portraying the same role. The exchange of the costume and changing into it was made a crucial focus point for us as actors to ensure that each audience member understood that the costume was the transferrable source of each character. This also reminded them that we are actors playing a role and not indulging in the naturalism of the story or memories which is taking place on stage.

A short task we completed was identifying key characteristics and stereotypical behaviours commonly portrayed from the text.

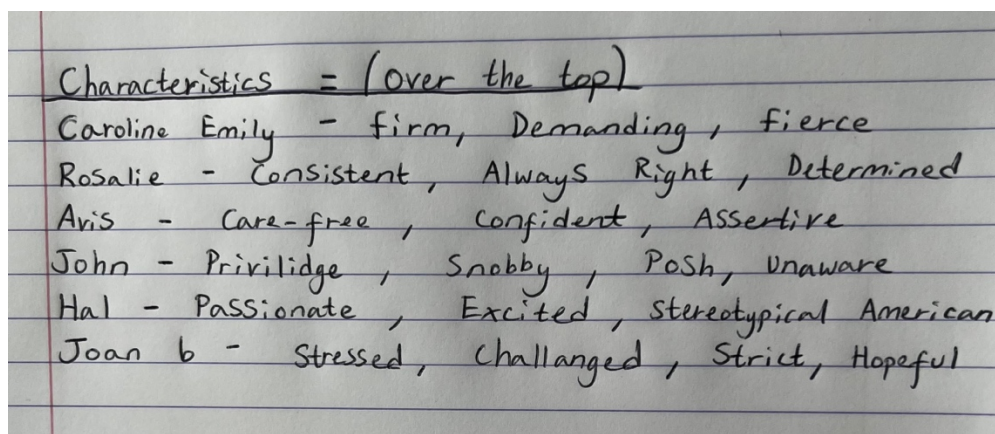


Figure 5: Stereotypical characteristics and behaviours task

This task was another helpful source when changing characters throughout the scenes. It ensured clear navigation of physical and mental shifts for us as performers, whilst making change obvious and understandable for the audience.

Rhythms & Structure

Sidiropoulou (2019) used beats and rhythms within text to 'navigate the sequence of representations and motivations' (p.109). Reworking the patterns of the text during the rehearsal, we explored the importance of poetic device of caesura, 'a pause in a metrical line causing counter-rhythmic interruption' (Duarte, 2017, p. 230). This device was used to meet the raging alternation of representations in Brecht's works (Kappelhoff, 2015).

Exposed to this rhythmic structure we played around with the text for intimate and heated scenes in the rehearsal room. One example when this worked well was in the first scene with interactions between Caroline Emily, Kate, and Robert as it added the comedic elements whilst maintaining the serious tone and themes of the scene.

Further activities and experiments were completed throughout the rehearsal process regarding rhythms and structure of each scene, often observed at the end of songs. Accuracy was key in this area of the creative process to maintain the high energy of the ensemble whilst achieving further comedic moments in each scene presented to the audience.

Discussion with Sam Kenyon

With a thorough understanding of the Brecht devices and broad overview of what the musical presented to the audience, we were fortunate enough to have a Q&A session with the writer of the show, Sam Kenyon. It was an exciting opportunity being able to speak with the writer and composer of the musical and gain further insights on his views and creative process in developing this piece.

He offered advice on how to steer away from the emotional complexities of the piece as the sole purpose of the show is to bring out the collective discussion of real people's interviews on their views of Joan through time.

Additionally, it was quite shocking when we were informed that some of the text was verbatim from interviews Sam had collected from various acquaintances of Joan herself (Murray Melvin, Barbara Windsor, etc.).

Evaluation

Throughout this project I've developed significant professionalism with the assistance of my peers and the creative team. I was immersed in a range of intensive exercises surrounding the technicalities of the Brecht theatrical practitioner. Engaging in daily exercises to develop clear character qualities and narratives with our director gave a direct impact on re-visiting the text and gaining new perspectives on the story we were telling the audience.

When evaluating my performance, I believed that my delivery was detailed, strong, and I used the intentions of each character I was portraying to apply further depths within the historical figure of Joan Littlewood. The most difficult role undertook was Caroline Emily, Joan's grandmother due to the lack of information which was made public about her. Our aim as performers in this production were to give an honest and accurate portrayal of each person we were performing as, out of respect of referring to real people in history. With the lack of historical facts, photos, and archives of Caroline Emily I felt as though I wasn't being completely truthful in my portrayal of her.

The end of the creative process and developing this production offered a vital opportunity for me to reflect upon my growth and personal development of my skills and techniques throughout the duration of the MA degree. I am proud of how much I was able to accomplish within this project, specifically working with flammable materials and props on stage. Gaining a further insight on the demands of performers within constricting working environments (such as the rising temperatures in the gate theatre during performances).

If given the opportunity to participate in this project again I would like to dive into the dramaturgy of Brecht and be more explorative and daring when given group tasks to assure further progress in developing my artistic choices/style. Although this, I believe that I matured and gained so many professional qualities throughout this process that has left me prepared and ready to explore the industry as a graduate.

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Appendix – Further Research

