

FINAL PERFORMANCE ESSAY

In this essay I will be exploring my journey through Jekyll and Hyde. I will be reflecting on the MA and how my skills have been used in a professional setting of our final production. I'll discuss what did and didn't work, what I have learned and what I will take into the future.

Within the MA I have realized the importance of research and how it gives you a key understanding of the world of the musical and who your character is. Having the information gives you the ability to be able to perform a truthful story. I began by researching into the musical's plot line and purpose; Jekyll and Hyde the musical is based on Robert Louis Stevenson's iconic thriller, Jekyll & Hyde tells the riveting story of a brilliant mind gone horribly wrong and features book and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse along with a pop-rock score by Frank Wildhorn. Talented physician Dr. Jekyll unintentionally creates an alternate personality of pure evil (Mr. Hyde) who wreaks murderous havoc on the city of London, in an attempt to treat his sick father's mental illness by distinguishing between "good" and "evil" in the human personality. Jekyll's fiancée Emma has a growing fear for her partner. Lucy, a prostitute, finds herself dangerously entangled with the doctor and his alter ego. In an effort to stop Hyde from taking over permanently, Jekyll is fighting to find a cure for the mental demon he has brought to life. This knowledge gave me an understanding of the story we were going to be telling and the importance of humanities good and evil. I believe the message of the musical is there is no good without evil, it's all within us and we must learn how to balance it. Evil comes out of good and good comes out of evil they co-depend.

After receiving the cast list, I found out I was playing Lucy Harries the prostitute. Lucy is a complex character who lives with the cards that have been dealt to her, however unlike the other prostitutes in the Red Rag Drag she still carries hope for a better life. For a better understanding of her complexity, I researched into the time era and the world of it. Jekyll and Hyde is set in London in the late 19th century. Britain was a strong country with a vibrant culture in the Victorian era. The country was growing, its franchise was expanding, and its government was stable, considering that three-fourths or more of its population was working-class. It was a great time of change in Britain with the industrial revolution which made London's population boom, however this caused the divide between rich poor to widen. Gender and class served as the primary organizing factors of Victorian society. Gender was thought to be biologically rooted and to determine nearly every aspect of a person's ability and character. It was said that men and women were made for various purposes and were different. Women were weak, whereas men were strong. Sex was important to men, and reproduction was important to women. Men were independent and women were dependent. However most working-class

people couldn't depend on a single man wage therefor, these factors would bend. They would put their kids at work in warehouses. As well as daughters working in prostitution from 12. It was believed there were 80,000 prostitutes in the late 19th century, most of which were between 18-22 years old. A lot of orphan girls went into prostitution by being lured by violent pimps and having no other options. Many prostitutes were assaulted, raped and even murdered, with the police rarely troubling themselves with such cases.

Doing this research gave me a greater understanding of Lucy's life, why she is where she is and why she wants a better life. With Lucy having this lifestyle and dealing with the societal look on women, I wanted to play with the character having a real strength and resilience on the outside but a hidden vulnerability within. I also wanted to play with her, having adolescent hopes and dreams but also having to mature beyond her age from the life she has so far lived. Doing all this research independently before rehearsals helped me greatly as Kev unlike most of our past directors, didn't focus as much on character work and the world of the musical. It also helped me be able to come into rehearsals with an understanding of the scene and the characters' situation.

During the process a major skill I wanted to focus on is my professionalism and learn how I want to approach things in a real professional setting. The first challenge I faced was the script. As a big fan of the musical, I have seen many adaptations and concepts of the show. When I read the script I enjoyed the fast pace, energy and drive of the musical. However, it lacked moments for the audience to breathe and character development for Lucy. How I approached this issue was by discussing with Kev what I believe is necessary for the story.

The first point I brought up is the fact that the audience will be expecting the iconic song This is The Moment, as it is a crowd pleaser and if it is not in the musical, the audience may be leaving feeling unsatisfied. The song also portrays beautifully Jekyll's determination and passion for his work and life, it gives the audience hope for an ending that is tragic. The second point I brought up is that Hyde quotes the song Sympathy Tenderness whilst killing Lucy, however the song wasn't in Kev's version therefor how would Hyde know to quote it. Kev first didn't want the song as it is a segue into Someone Like You, which he didn't like, as it (like most of the songs he cut) repeated the same point throughout. I completely understood his point with this, so I suggested that we kept just Sympathy Tenderness which made it logically make sense, but it also shows the lack of care Lucy has received in life and why she's so grateful and drawn to Jekyll. The last suggestion I made is adding A New Life back into the show as I felt that this song is key for Lucy's character development, it shows her pure vulnerability and courageousness. Her hope turns into a reality making the audience more invested in the character's life. Therefore, this makes her death even more tragic and shocking for the audience. Kev took all my suggestions on board and edited the script. This taught me that I can voice my opinions to

directors with professionalism and have conversations with them if I'm not comfortable with something or need a better understanding, without coming across as being selfish. I was worried at first that Kev would think I was being a diva, which was not the case and he reassured me that I wasn't.

Another skill I developed during the process was the ability to adapt to a new director with a completely different approach to ones we have had in the past. At the beginning of rehearsals, I found it difficult with Kev's fast-paced style of directing. I felt quite overwhelmed. For instance, when I was learning A New Life, he wanted me to perform the song full out whilst blocking it, the same day I had learned the song. I found this hard as I went back into my perfectionist ways and felt the need to get everything right. My brain would automatically want to focus on the vocals instead of the performance of the song as that's where I knew I was lacking. However, Kev wanted me to focus on the performance. With the mix of receiving lots of notes, trying to learn the song and blocking it, I became overwhelmed, which then grew into frustration with myself as I felt like I was getting everything wrong. To overcome this, I stopped and explained to Kev how my brain works, he explained to me that he doesn't expect me to be able to do everything considering I had only just learnt the song. He just wanted me to focus on the story telling, not how I sound. After this we spoke about how I wanted to portray the song. The song is emotive and it's in the moment. Kev and I discussed about how we didn't want the song to be done in a poor me, I need a man way. I wanted to perform it in way that displays Lucy's fight and drive, and how she finally wants to do something for herself, where she discovers self-love. Once Kev and I had a discussion I was able to perform the song with clear and smart choices. From this process I learnt that I need to be easier on myself to be able to work effectively. However, it also taught me that I have a right to work in my own way and not be afraid to voice that. I grew to enjoy Kev's fast past directing style as it pushed me to limits, I didn't know I had within me, it just took me a moment to adjust to it.

A skill that we have been working on in the MA that I kept in mind during the rehearsal process is the work we have put into connection from Stanislavski and Meisner. With Kev we didn't focus much on connection, however it became clear the amount of work we had put into it during the BA/MA as we would naturally connect with one another. This became apparent in mine and Zaks scenes. I found these the easiest to perform at first as Zak and I have performed many things together, one of which was Roger and Mimi in Rent where we had built this intense infatuated connection, so it's easy for us to have on stage chemistry as we know exactly how each other work. However, this meant we would default into "TV acting" and speak too quietly, we explained to Kev that our preferred method of acting was Meisner, He understood this however he wanted us to elevate the performance and push it more. At first me and Zak found this difficult as it felt untruthful but the more we ran it the more we were able to adapt

to it. By the end we had compromised with the concept where it still felt truthful but had a more elevated performance.

One other skill I used from the MA is the work from my singing sessions. Chris and I worked on developing different styles and tones with the songs. We wanted each song to represent different states of Lucy. With Bring On the men we wanted it to be a complete contrast to her other songs. Therefore, we worked on more jazzy tones and it being very performative and show Bizz, this song represented Lucy's mask of hard exterior. It wasn't her; it was a performance. A challenge I faced with this song was my pernoctation, I found it difficult spitting out the words. A reason why this became a challenge was because I carry a lot of tension in my jaw, so to overcome this I did my jaw message exercises and tongue rotations that I had learned with Loraine before every rehearsal. Another challenge I had in the song was breath control especially when I sang with choreography, I felt as if I could never catch my breath. I faced this challenge by breathing in the appropriate places and engaging my core.

The next song Chris and I worked on was Sympathy Tenderness. For this song I had a more pure and classical approach to display Lucy's affection towards Jekyll. A challenge I faced with this song was the fact that I would get stuck in its melodic beauty and lose the storytelling of it. Kev helped me greatly get out of this by doing an exercise where I closed my eyes and sang the song to him touching his face. This enabled me to feel her emotions and hear the words that she was saying. During the process I really loved singing Girls of The Night with Vicky and Mared, because I could feed off them. I also loved that it challenged me to use my multi-tasking skills, singing against the girls and singing in harmony. With A New Life Chris and I focused on leaning into the pop rock style. Kev and I worked lots on the different gear changes of the song, when's her moments of reflection, her moments of fight and drive. What worked best for me performing the song was when we were running the show, I felt as if I was able to get into character and produce an authentic performance. A vocal challenge I had with the song was instantly tensing up when I would sing the big notes at the end. How I corrected this was by trying to relax my shoulders and pull them down, Chris also suggested that when I practice the song to move around in the space. This really helped me as I was able to belt at ease, when I ran the song, I would use my muscle memory to engage appropriately. I really loved singing Lucy's songs for the show and how they covered many colours of her complexity, I also enjoyed the challenge of creating different styles and tones with them. Performing these songs has made me realize how far I have come along from the BA and how much my skills as a performer are growing.

A big thing I have learned from the process and Kev, is the importance of physicality. During the BA we have been looking at the physical side of performing but not into the intensity or depth we have with the show. Every day we would do a 45-minute workout, which I now see to be

incredibly beneficial. A clear place where I would see this is my growth of performing Bring on The Men, at first the song would be challenging to perform, and I would feel fatigued. However, by Tech week it became effortless even amongst nerves. During the BA I have always struggled with dance and when I found out I was the only MA doing the dance number as well as leading it with the first years, I was extremely nervous. As I have dyslexia and dyspraxia, I find retaining choreography difficult. How I approached this was by telling Lara (our choreography) and Kev how I needed to do it bit by bit, what helped me was making notes on the lyrics of what I needed to do. As well as this Charlie (our SM) filmed it, I would use the video and go over the choreography when I wasn't needed for rehearsals. All this combined made it possible for me to perform the song at ease without second guessing myself. I'm glad that I got to experience performing this song, it made me realize that I can do more than I think, all I must do is make it me own and trust my process. A massive physical aspect of the show was stage combat. I found it so interesting watching as well as participating in the combat. Throughout the show I was receiving combat, and Kev I worked a lot on the anatomy of pain. One of my favourite moments to perform was Lucy's death, I learned a lot from Kev with how to react to being stabbed, how your body moves with the blade and pulsates off. I learned that how reaction is just as important as action. I have a learned so much about the importance of the physicality doing this show and I have a completely new appreciation for it. In future I will definitely be making more efforts to make me physically fit, so I can become a healthier performer.

Performance week was an intense, exciting and challenging week. During the week my time management, teamwork and multi-tasking skills were put to the test. Having to do such long days I had to make sure that I was treating my body well by drinking lots of water and eating properly, so I could sustain the energy. A few challenges that arose during the second dress run was the fact that I forgot some of my lyrics. However, I was confident enough in the work I had put into the show to get myself out of the situation, where the audience wouldn't be able to know what went wrong. A big factor of this happening is because of nerves but also because we didn't work a lot with connection so, I found it difficult getting into character. I have discovered that my preferred method of acting is Meisner. What I learned from the second dress run was the fact that I need to find a way to connect with myself before going on stage. Therefor before going on, I would take deep breaths and think of Lucy's mental state and situation. Another aspect on why I made silly mistakes during the show is because I felt pressure to do well with playing the character Lucy. Lucy is a character I have been told in the past that it's very suitable for me, as well as the style of Jekyll and Hyde being my forte. It felt like a heavy weight on my shoulders having this expectation, however I ignored them thoughts and learned to love performing her with freedom. A massive part of the enjoyability of performing the show was having such a great bond with the cast. During the MA we have grown extremely close, and I feel very lucky to be performing with such hard working and talented people. I also loved

working with the first years. Watching them grow has been very rewarding, they made the musical come alive. I look forward to seeing the great things they do in the next coming year.

Overall, the experience of working on Jekyll and Hyde has been thrilling, intense and demanding in the best ways possible. Kev has done a brilliant job of pushing us a new direction before leaving the MA. I have come out of the experience with lots of new knowledge from different style of directing, teamwork and the industry. But most importantly I have learned about what I need as a performer and how I work. I am incredibly grateful with everything I have learned in my past 3 years in WAVDA and the work we did in Jekyll and Hyde is a reflection of it.

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