

In my final module here at UWTSD, I was a part of the Specialized Performance: Actor Musicianship Group. In this module we were tasked to create and devise a show from scratch using music and acting. We were also tasked with being able to comprehend and take in different skills and tools as actor musicians.

Coming into this module, I already had some experience in this style of theater under my belt. Back in America, I was a part of a production at my home university called "*Wake Up, Brother Bear!*". In this production, I played the Spring Sprite and my instrument, as in this module, was the flute. In this show, my character was not able to speak anything you could comprehend and express ourselves/communicate through our instruments. When I found out that that is what our module was going to be like, I felt very well prepared for this module. I've written basic lines of music before so I knew that was something I could do. I created a character with my flute before. All I wanted to do differently was make sure I could talk in this one haha.

One of the first tasks we were given was to talk about our skills, what our main instrument is, and what style of music we like and/or want to try and explore more in this module. Well, a cool thing about me is that I play the flute which was going to be interesting to include in a piece where three of the others play guitars. I also sing which is something that is very useful with these other instruments. But, Sam and I both agreed that I should try to challenge not just myself but everyone else in trying to incorporate a flute into a melody with, let's say, an electric bass guitar. So, I took that challenge. With the music preference and exploration, I had to go with my favorite style of music I like to listen to: classical. I love listening to classical music, underscores to movies, and classical versions of pop songs like in the Netflix show *Bridgerton*. The example I used as a reference for a monologue was a rendition of "Kingdom Dance" from the movie *Tangled*; the rendition was done by the Frostudio Chambersonic. It is an epic version of the original song in the movie and it is SO cool.

Another style that I wanted to explore was the type of music that animates or 'disney-fys' actions like in old cartoons. When I mentioned 'disney-fying' music, they were very confused. So, for an example, I used the song "Petite Jeune" from Cirque Du Soleil's *Kooza*. In the song, you can hear distinct moments where the music can influence or highlight the action or movements of characters in the scenes.

Sam had asked us in the beginning to write down things that we were passionate about in life. Some of the topics were advocacy, women's/human rights, etc. My biggest one is about mental health. I am very passionate about understanding, researching, and advocating for mental health. With these topics, we were given tasks to write monologues off of those topics. In total we wrote three. Mine were about uses of music, mental health, and positivity. Then, we were asked to create music/melodies for these monologues. The first one we did as an ensemble was to my 'uses of music' monologue. We created a kind of folky-pop, instrumental melody to it that was really cool. I really enjoyed doing that with everyone. It was a lot of fun and it played into my style of classical music.

Throughout the creations of the monologues, we played games such as soundscapes, rhythm murder, breathing and synchronization exercises, and followed the leader. In these games, we worked becoming an ensemble and creating melodies from random things and completely made up by ourselves. The game we play most often is a soundscape game called 'flowers'. The first time we played it, we literally picked the name of a flower and created a small melody with the name of it. Then we all joined in creating a really beautiful melody. It's interesting, looking back, and how influential that game was to how we created melodies and the songs in our final performance.

Using these skills from the games, we were tasked to create music or songs based off of the monologues someone else wrote. The main ones I did were turning one of Heather's monologues into lyrics to a song and creating flute melodies or counter melodies to two of Jaimee's monologues and part of Abbie's monologue. This was a fun task as I used the references and musical inspirations to create melodies to this song. This task also challenged us to work with everyone. We worked together to create full songs or supporting melodies written by others. It was so cool to see everyone go from not being confident in their composing abilities to creating full songs for our show! I loved it. Once we had all the pieces written, we paired pieces and monologues together to create our show. Some had to be cut unfortunately but we all understood because we needed to focus on our main theme and story of the show.

The story. Boy, did that take a while to figure out. It changed like four different times throughout this process haha. Eventually, we came to the word Sonder; which is both the title of our piece and the theme of our piece as well! Sonder is explained as *"...each of us is at once a hero, a supporting cast member, and an extra in overlapping stories."* We had several ideas about wanting to tell individual stories but making sure we talk and show that we are an ensemble too. Sonder fit perfectly to that narrative.

Now as we were putting it together and blocking everything, when we got to the song I wrote for Heather's monologue, I really wasn't looking forward to it. The monologue was about mental health. As we ran through it and did it several times, it made it very difficult for me. I have been struggling with mental health for a while and singing that song, in the way I originally wrote it, repeatedly, made my mental health really bad. Unfortunately, that was a few days before the performance. But I went home the day we fully ran through that song and I couldn't stop crying. I felt that way before I left, I just held it in until I left. I emailed Sam to work through that moment differently because I couldn't sing that repeatedly the way I did originally. Cause when I first wrote it, I didn't know we were going to use it for the final piece. I would have done something different if that was the case.

One thing I brought up at the beginning of this process was that I wanted to try and make some sort of positive work for our final. Because the world is so negative and sad already, I wanted this to be an escape from that, not just for use but for the audience too. This was something that we sort of accomplished with our story when all of the characters' stories were resolved. But that monologue really stuck out to me. I talked with Sam and worked on a way to change the way I performed the song. I instead, decided to do it in a way that was more gradual and more calm and not as bad as I had it before. I really appreciated how helpful Sam was in helping me change it. Everyone else was just as supportive and I really appreciated it.

After the performance, I was extremely proud of everyone. The reactions from the audience was amazing and it made the performance so much better! It went a lot better than I expected! In a final reflection, being an actor musician is fun. Learning more skills on how to improve the skills I already had and to build onto them, was something that I am very glad I was able to do. This is a form of theater that is not

explored often enough so that I could have access to it back home. I am very grateful to Sam that she was able to come and teach us this. It's given me a new found appreciation and respect for it and another skill to add to my tool belt as an actor. However, when asked if this is something I would continue to do in my professional career, I would say no. I would love to do this as a side hustle maybe or a part-time thing but this is not my favorite style of theater. Something else this module taught me is that I do not like doing very serious pieces. At least, until I can figure out the skill of separating my character and my work from myself. I need to get better at leaving these things at the theater. However, I am so glad I had this experience and I was able to learn and develop these skills as an actor.



References

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