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Final Production (ADPB003)

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Participating in “*Alice by Heart*” was a valuable experience that challenged me both creatively and physically as a musical theatre performer. Unlike previous productions, this process required me to rely heavily on physical storytelling and ensemble work to communicate character and narrative within a highly movement-led performance style. This reflection assesses my growth through rehearsals, feedback, and practitioner theory, focusing on how they shaped my physical performance practice.

Initially, I struggled to value rehearsals where I wasn't involved, feeling excluded during real-world sections. This hindered early development through affecting confidence. As rehearsals progressed, I reinterpreted observation as a creative tool, analyzing spatial relationships and physicality. This shift helped me engage more critically with directorial decisions and peer work, aligning with reflective practices that turn experience into embodied knowledge through sustained reflection (Meskin and Van der Walt, 2018). This mirrors professional devising, where performers generate and test material, emphasising creative risk-taking. This change in mindset became particularly important when developing my contrasting roles. While the

Knave of Hearts had a clearer storytelling framework, my ensemble characters relied almost entirely on physical differentiation. Initially, I focused on choreography accuracy and vocal clarity, but this resulted in uniformity across characters. I realised that without distinct physical vocabularies, each role lacked clarity for the audience. Uta Hagen's emphasis on objectives and given circumstances encouraged me to shift focus from external execution to internal motivation. By asking not only what each character was doing but why they were doing it, I introduced more specific physical intentions, particularly in the Caterpillar, whose unpredictability needed a more precise physical approach to sustain coherent storytelling through shifting movement and focus.

However, Hagen alone was insufficient for this movement-led production. While Hagen's focus on internal motivation supported character intention, it risked limiting the physical spontaneity required within a movement-led process. In contrast, Lecoq's methodology prioritised the body as the primary site of meaning, however, this occasionally lacked the specificity needed to sustain narrative clarity. Negotiating between these approaches allowed me to develop contrasting physical states for each character: controlled precision for the Knave, fluid unpredictability for the Caterpillar, and neutrality for ensemble transitions. This allowed me to build clearer distinctions between roles rather than just relying on costume or dialogue.

One significant challenge was adapting to the production's choreographic demands. Early in rehearsals, I prioritised technical accuracy over expressive clarity, which resulted in movement that was correct but emotionally disengaged. This created a disconnect between physical execution and narrative communication. Zarrilli's concept of acting as an "embodied practice" (2020) became particularly relevant here, as it reframed movement not as a separate choreographic task but as an

extension of character intention. This encouraged me to integrate emotional and physical decision-making.

A turning point occurred during a rehearsal when the director stopped the run due to a lack of energy and clarity in performance. The feedback highlighted a gap between technical and expressive intention. My Caterpillar sequence was noted as lacking unpredictability and dynamic contrast. In response, I began experimenting with making shifts to disrupt audience expectation. This adjustment improved character clarity, showing how feedback can expose habits and facilitate embodied readjustments.

In performance, this earlier hesitation remained partially visible, as the unpredictability did not disrupt audience expectation, suggesting that my physical choices were controlled rather than fully embodied. This highlighted the gap between rehearsal experimentation and performance execution. Director feedback in rehearsals consistently reinforced the importance of “surprise” and narrative clarity in physical performance (Street-Phillips, 2026). Initially, I misinterpreted this as making larger movements, but through experimentation, I understood it as a requirement for unpredictability in intention rather than scale. This distinction was crucial in my Caterpillar portrayal, where subtle shifts in timing and focus created a more compelling sense of instability.

Working in traverse staging further deepened my understanding of performance.

Unlike end-on staging, traverse requires continuous spatial awareness and readjustment of focus to ensure communication with both sides of the audience.

Initially, I defaulted to performing towards a single side, which reduced the impact of my storytelling. Over time, I developed awareness of the space, adjusting my body

orientation and eye-line to maintain engagement across the performance environment. This aligns with Hann's assertion that scenography actively "orientates" both performer and audience (2018), reinforcing the idea that space actively contributes to shaping the meaning rather than a neutral background.

Brecht's concept of Gestus further supported this development by encouraging consideration of how physical actions communicate broader relational and social meaning rather than individual expression alone (Brecht & Willett, 2019). This was relevant in ensemble sequences, where collective physicality needed to communicate atmosphere and narrative progression without reliance on text.

Applying Gestus allowed me to refine gestures to be more expressive, ensuring clarity even in large-scale movement sections. Although Gestus enhanced clarity in ensemble storytelling, its emphasis on communication occasionally contrasted with the emotional immediacy encouraged by Zarrilli's embodied approach, requiring balance between expressiveness and truth.

By the final rehearsals and performances, I noticed improvement in my ability to remain present within the physical and emotional demands of each role. This was clear in the Caterpillar, where increased trust in embodied decision-making allowed greater spontaneity and stronger audience engagement. The sharper contrasts in tempo and stillness created moments of unpredictability, where sudden shifts in acting produced stillness within the audience's attention, indicating that the character's instability was not only implied but experienced. Additionally, clearer physical distinctions between roles improved narrative clarity, enabling smoother transitions between characters without confusion. As a result, my performance shifted from technically accurate but disconnected to one that was both physically intentional and communicatively effective.

Despite progress, I tend to be cautious with physical risk-taking, often waiting for validation before committing to unconventional movements, especially in ensemble work. Reflecting on Lecoq's "everything moves" (2013, p. 33), I see that embracing risk earlier in the process could have improved my character's dynamism and clarity. Moving forward, I plan to engage more fully in physical experimentation from the start to refine, not restrict, expressive possibilities.

Overall, "Alice by Heart" was a rewarding experience that significantly developed my physical storytelling, ensemble awareness, and adaptability across multiple roles. It strengthened my understanding of performance shaped by rehearsal, feedback, and theoretical engagement. By integrating practitioners such as Hagen and Brecht, I developed a more nuanced understanding of how theory can inform practice. These insights align with professional performance practice, where performers must balance technical precision with responsiveness and adaptability to sustain audience engagement. Moving forward, I intend to further embed experimentation into my rehearsal process, trust embodied instinct earlier, and continue developing a more dynamic and responsive physical performance.

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