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Acting Through Musical Theatre (ADPA5023/C)

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Reflecting on this past module, I believe I have made considerable progress in my acting, particularly in applying different methods to partner work, character development, and emotional truth. This module offered an exploration of techniques from practitioners such as Stanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, Konstantin Stanislavski, and Michael Chekhov, which deepened my understanding of responding authentically to given circumstances.

A central focus of this module was exploring partner work. Working in pairs, we selected a song and a scene to analyse and perform; my partner and I chose "Some Things Are Meant to Be" (Howland and Dickstein, 2005) from the musical *Little Women*, a moment centred on the intimate relationship between two sisters, one of who is dying. This, therefore, requires emotional depth and a clear bond. To develop this, we used Stanislavski's and Hagen's approaches, including identifying our characters' objectives and answering personal questions such as their individual aspirations, favourite childhood stories, and beliefs about relationships. Hagen's "Nine Questions" helped us to create a detailed character timeline and clarity on the given circumstances. This information helped as it meant "I continue to build my early life and consider its consequences on my present one" (Uta Hagen and Haskel Frankel, 1973, p.155). Understanding their previous choices guided how I reacted and made decisions in the moment, influencing the character's behaviours and responses throughout the scene. Although each actress "will find different answers and make her own substitutions" (Uta Hagen and Haskel Frankel, 1973, page. 156), this meant that I was able to use my own approach to the scene, relay my own interpretation, and make my own original choices for the character. So, although these questions did not appear directly in the performance, they broadened my understanding of the character's inner life. This deeper knowledge helped us explore the scene's emotional stakes more truthfully. When we performed our piece to the class, we felt confident through our preparation, and the feedback highlighted how we successfully captured the emotional connection and high stakes of the moment, confirming that the preparation had been effective.

Another part of this module involved Active Analysis, meaning that when an actor abandons emotional analysis and actively analyses their roles on stage, removing the gap between analysis and embodiment. We engaged in a variety of exercises that helped provide insight into the importance

of connection and responsiveness in a performance. I particularly struggled with the exercise exploring solar plexus awareness and mirroring. Where we would, in partners, have a leader and mirror each other, for example, with hand movements, which then later develop into responding to each other's movements with no clear leader. I found it difficult to fully immerse myself in it and respond to my partner intuitively. I instead relied on conscious movement rather than letting my impulses guide my actions. Therefore, highlighting a tendency of mine to prioritise having control over allowing instinctive responses which limited a connection with my partner. Despite this, I was able to learn and, for future practice, to explore acting more on instinct. The Silent Etude further enhanced this reflection in this exercise. I stood in the Grasp position and read a scene from "Love and Information" by Caryl Churchill (Churchill, 2016), noting any feelings, impulses, or physical reactions in myself or my partner. Then we reflected and discussed what occurred, naming what we experienced in an objective. Knebel is clear that the function of the time to discuss is to "put the smallest amount of living tissue onto the skeleton of the play page" (Merlin, 2014, p.201), in giving us time to clarify any thoughts or questions we had and then apply them to another read through, as well as improvisation. In which I identified an underlying objective I wanted to understand and found that focusing on it gave my actions purpose and clarity. I found this exercise was valuable and worked well for me as it strengthened my ability to link physical impulses and emotional reactions to clear objectives.

In this module, we have also been preparing and performing the musical revue "I Love You, You're Perfect Now Change" by Jimmy Roberts and Joe DiPietro, a comedy exploring modern relationships from dating to marriage to growing old. It has offered an excellent opportunity to apply the skills I have explored in a performance. The musical's series of short vignettes allowed me to connect with authentic impulses and objectives for my characters. In my specific scenes, one of them being Stud and Babe, where I played the Babe. Playing this part required observing my partner's cues and being aware of my own impulses. Julie is vulnerable, with a facade of confidence, and desires to be understood and wanted. Understanding this about her helped me to portray her personality and authentic self. As well as this focusing on her objectives helped me significantly, for example, I want to be wanted as an objective helped to guide my choices and respond to my scene partner. I applied Meisner's techniques and his emphasis on living truthfully. His focus on listening and being fully present with his scene partner was essential in this scene, where the comedy and awkwardness rely on spontaneous interactions, as "control is considered what divides truth from false hood" (Curran, n.d.). I allowed Julie's impulses, such as her attempt to fill awkward silence by mentioning her brother and then quickly retreating with "No, maybe not..." (Roberts and DiPietro, 1996) to feel

natural and unforced. This showed his principle of authentic behaviours appearing from an honest reaction, which helped me to portray Julie's insecurity and desire to be understood.

In conclusion, this module has significantly developed my understanding of acting authentically. By exploring the techniques of different practitioners, I have learned the importance of having clear objectives and working responsively with a scene partner. The detailed character work supported by Hagen's questions strengthened my ability to make informed and personal choices, while Active Analysis and exercises such as the Silent Etude challenged me to trust my physical impulses and integrate analysis directly into performance. Although some exercises initially highlighted difficulties, particularly in instinctive responses, they proved essential in supporting my growth as an actor. Applying these techniques in performance contexts, including *Little Women* and *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, enabled me to put them into practice, strengthening my confidence and emotional truth on stage. Overall, this module has deepened my understanding of my own acting process and highlighted clear areas for continued growth and exploration.

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