

## **Professional Practice for Performance Essay Plan**

### **Title - The learning process and memory retention of operatic repertoire over a six-week performance module**

#### **Introduction**

The course of learning operatic repertoire over a six-week process is complex and involves many layers of understanding to be able to fully execute a well-rounded performance at a high standard. This volume of learning does not merely require vocal ability and linguistic dexterity but a further intelligence surrounding physical consistency, emotive connection, and discipline to the learning process.

This essay will discuss my professional practice for performance module and study the structured approach and cognitive methods used in attempt to master the repertoire designated to me by module leaders. The central theme of my study are the learning process of repertoire by memory, and the development of memory retention allowing me to enhance performance.

#### **Week one – Musical introduction and adjustment**

Closely prior to the module start date, the selection of repertoire chosen for the show “WAVD’AIR” was given to each of the cast in order for individual performers to have a ‘level one’ understanding of their repertoire through independent study in preparation for week one. The criteria for our chosen pieces was selected for us to ultimately achieve better adaptivity skills through a diversity in musical contexts. This was approached through difference in language, genre, and environment.

For the initial exposure and learning of repertoire, I used techniques such as listening to recordings from different vocalists, backing tracks retrieved from coaches whilst simultaneously following the score, libretti and, where required, if IPA translation which incorporated my uses of “passive listening”. This technique I initially like to use as it involves the basic retrieval of information that is not overwhelming due to it being an “absorption of language without the conscious effort” (Nida, 1982). Secondly, I begin to build on memory retention strategies using my using several mnemonic devices, “memory devices that helps learners recall larger pieces of information” (University of central Florida, 2012), which helped me to recall larger pieces of information. An example of this is image mnemonics whereby I’ll draw small images on/by sentences on my score that sound or look similar to me, to help me differentiate. Additionally visualisation as a strategy is key to my learning process as it helps to memorise sections of music that I as an individual have continued to struggle with. I do this in the first stages by using different fonts on letters I battle with and colours on words/sentences which according to research is seen to “play a significant role in enhancing memory performance” so much so, that it has been used as a memory aid to treat patients with Alzheimer disease. (Dzulkifli, M.A and Mustafar, M.F., 2013). An example of this was my

score for 'I feel Pretty' whereby I used colour to help combat the frequent rhyming words and sounds.

### **Week two - Accelerated Practice and language development**

During this period of process, learning and memorising was important as it helped me establish an organised, more intensive daily practice routine. With better understanding of the pieces through weeks one's group and singular tuition, both music calls and director discussion, I had more of a grasp of what was expected and the process that was devised personally to get me there. Being equipped with a set schedule enabled me to organise musical break down in my independent study and construct a plan that would not overwhelm me. According to William R Klemm, Ph.D., "organization is good for our working memory. The working memory can only hold so much information at once, so keeping an organized space and organized to-do list can simplify what our working memory needs to hold at any given time" (Castle, 2023).

This itinerary consisted of further musical analysis and language acquisition, in my case the repeating of sentences with and without music, in rhythm and without. At this stage, my memory strategies become more progressive, with practice in parallel with both positive and constructive feedback in addition to extensive note taking to help with retention on repertoire.

### **Week Three – The integration of movement and music**

Before embarking on the module when we retrieved our list of repertoires, and I researched the pieces and their context. That meaning if they were a stand-alone pieces of music or part of a work, when they were written, the composer who wrote them and what the story behind the libretti was etc.. This connection mnemonic helped me to have a deeper understanding about what I was singing, and the association strategy helped me to remember when learning.

This section of learning interested me in the development process as it furthered my stamina physically and mentally as well and my retention of my music. As someone who has struggled with information retention, the idea of integrating movement and music was a concern of mine when setting out. However, working in an environment with regular accompaniment and directing helped cement the words and ideas as I was able to connect them to emotion and movement. The constant refinements and context given by Sarah Crisp, our director, enabled me to internally imagine the performance idea rather than focusing on the over analysis of text and notation, thus combating my regular performance anxiety commonly stemmed through my struggle of reading and retention. Furthermore, it heightened my experience of multitasking more effectively, which was in hindsight needed elevation. when setting off on the course.

### **Week Four – Character development and emotive connection**

Through our opportunities of regular repetition, I felt that my retention was at a point where I was able to explore my characters emotional dimensions and add to my performance. My worries on repertoire memory, I feel has held me back from fully connecting to the ideas advised on performance previously by lectures. However, with the guidance given to me by Sarah Crisp, musical director and the combination of

character and personal characteristic being cleverly combined in the making of the production, to the concept of embodying a new identity in performance became a lot easier to grasp. Reports show that ‘association in learning’ that being the “connecting of new material with something already known” has been described by ... as a method that helps the learner “to learn quickly and remember easily”(Reed,H.B 1924), which in my case in this process I would agree. Implementing constant feedback both new and sometimes recurring highlighted the importance of repetition as a technique to the learning process.

### **Week five – Perfecting Performance**

Repetition was a key tool for refining performance at this stage. Doing full run throughs regularly helping to consolidate memory, tackling new weaknesses and addressing new challenges, As well as singing in costume to really get the feeling of character. The technique of repetition for me I highly consider one of the best forms of memory retention especially in this module and has been supported by sources, one referring to it as the “golden rule of learning”.

### **Week six – Concluding rehearsals and performance.**

Final adjustments and changing of environment did have significant impact on memory as the prior consolidation of moves, timings and performance anxiety were different to what was previously experienced in the learning process. This however according to research is not uncommon as according to clinical psychologist ‘Vanessa van Ast’ States that “when successive experiences take place in the same environment, they become more deeply imprinted in our memory. But when an experience takes place in a new context, the memory of this experience pushes earlier memories to the background” (University of Amsterdam , 2022). She further discusses how prior environment that has regular uses our learning process is critical to efficient learning and the changing in that could be answers for a decrease in recalling information which didn’t affect you as much before. It could explain reasons for mispronouncing libretti on occasion, changes in movement and efficiency in vocal tonality and stamina. The repetition of change over the space of the 5 performances did become less daunting in all those aspects as ‘practice makes perfect’ but always was room for improvement for me as an individual.

Overall, the uses retention techniques I have discussed have been key to the learning process and have helped me memorise central information and repertoire to the best of my ability. The integration of physical, emotional and cognitive elements was a big part in the module so memory retention for me on a whole was a central theme to my learning experience for me as an individual explaining my choice of topic. Improvements I would implement for future after researching and experiences this module would be highlighting the importance of metacognition which translates to the understanding of our individual learning needs, strength, and weaknesses. And furthering the methods and strategies I have been advised on throughout the six weeks by module leaders and experience. Reflecting on my learning experience has

highlighted to me the importance of a holistic approach to me as an individual and in the operatic industry.

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