

Learning in the Digital Era E-Portfolio

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Task 1 (Essential Skills)

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Essential Skills as an Actor

Consistency and perseverance are vital skills as an actor. Uta Hagen says that 'the actor... is the instrument, and must play on it ... with the same ... dexterity with which the violinist makes music on his.' (Hagen, 1991, pg. 37). This reflects that in order to be the best actor we can, we must train continuously as hard as any of the other arts to perfect our craft. Another essential skill is respect. Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera mention this importance whilst talking on focusing on yourself as an actor and not judging your fellow actors, for example: giving notes to others, being late and gossiping. This emphasises that from being respectful the best environment for acting is developed. As an actor, team work is extremely important and Indeed supports this idea by stating that: '*As an actor, you'll rarely be working alone*' and to establish '*positive relationships with your co-stars and crew.*' (Indeed, 2023). This emphasises that from developing teamwork skills you'll ensure the best process possible whilst performing and then when furthering your career. Finally, taking direction as an actor is an essential skill as stated by Backstage: 'Be flexible. Don't take things personally. Ask questions'. Most certainly, this will allow you to develop your craft to its extremities whilst also proving yourself to others as an intelligent and capable actor.

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Task 2 (Live Performance Review)

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Brand new Welsh Musical ‘Mess ar y Maes’ is a *tidy* piece of theatre

An innovative and current exploration of the Welsh language and it’s culture coloured with original song, dance and fresh performances from university students.

‘Does dim diflastod mewn undod’ There’s no misery in unity. According to the synopsis¹(Ticketsource, 2023), ‘Mess ar y Maes’ is an original musical which follows Mari who doesn’t feel ‘Welsh enough’. Seemingly, this new piece of theatre tackles the struggles of identity as a Welsh person and perhaps issues within Welsh culture.

Directed by Sara Lloyd, who directed the hit TV and theatre show ‘Anfamol’ (gaining a strong 4/5 stars review² (The Guardian ,2021)), Mess ar y Maes is a collaborative projects by WAVDA 2nd year students with the aid of Llinos Mai who is no stranger to comedy and song, in 2022, writing the hit show ‘Anthem’ for Wales Millenium Centre³ (WMC, 2022). Alongside Musical Director; Chris Fossey, who is an encyclopedia on Musical Theatre, recently taking the same role in Concept Players’ Into the Woods.

The musical begins with Mari discovering that she must take over the role of Chief Executive of the National Eisteddfod from her mother. In an interview with one of the cast - Glain Llwyd⁴ (Tiktok, 2023) - she states that Mari must deal with ‘different problems and different characters’. Through Mari we are introduced to a series of varied Welsh stereotypical characters present at the Eisteddfod.

The musical succeeds in placing the audience into the festival, instantly, whilst walking into the small space, through a variety of purple, blue, red, green lighting accompanied with Welsh music. The set was minimalistic, two gazebos placed at the back either side of the stage, and pieces of set moved around by the cast. Following the wise words of Uta Hagen ‘Even without

¹ TicketSource (2023) Available at: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on/cardiff/wales-academy-of-voice-dramatic-arts/mess-ar-y-maes/e-eejzzm> (Accessed 5th December 2023)

² The Guardian (2021) *Anfamol* review by Gareth Llyr Evans. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/oct/01/anfamol-review-sherman-theatre-rhiannon-boyle> (Accessed: 29th December 2023)

³ Wales Millenium Centre (2022) *Anthem*. Available at: <https://www.wmc.org.uk/en/whats-on/2022/anthem> (Accessed on 3rd January 2024)

⁴ @wavda_uwtsd (2023) 7th December. Available at : https://www.tiktok.com/@wavda_uwtsd/video/7309909494803352865 (Accessed: 9th December 2023)

the help of a set designer, an actor can create an entire landscape on a bare stage' (Hagen, 1991, p. 183)⁵. This was certainly true, seen initially early in the play with the characters on a bus travelling to the Eisteddfod. The physicality of all actors (complimented by sound effects) really painted a realistic image of a moving vehicle, with all actors bouncing at the same time and leaning forwards and backwards. Subsequently, to the use of the space by the Merched y Wawr with only a seat and a small desk, you could really picture being inside the tent itself, alongside the smell of damp grass and fresh tea and biscuits, through their set, sound and lighting the cast activated and stimulated all of the audiences senses. The minimalism of the show's set allowed for a more intimate, concentrated experience with the characters and their journeys.

My biggest compliment to this musical is that I viewed the performance both nights and it felt completely new and exciting each night. All actors succeeded in their comedic timing and managed to invoke laughter when dancing, singing or acting. In the words of Mike Alfreds 'exposure means vulnerability' and actors must 'break the limitations they may have imposed on themselves ('I'm not good at "funny")' (Alfreds, 2007, p. 319)⁶. Without a stage, actors were in direct eyeline with the audience – a vulnerable position, and I noticed that some jokes that got a roar the first night didn't even get a giggle. What was so impressive about this cast is that they didn't let that deter them. Uta Hagen quotes an interview with the Lunts: "The line where I ask for a cup of tea is so funny in that circumstance ... Why can't I get a laugh there? ... Because you're asking for a laugh instead a cup of tea." (HB Studio, 2018)⁷. For example, early on in the play, Gwennan Mars' character Linda (the villain) has many lines which are cruel but comedic as it plays into a stereotype. Gwennan understood this and so didn't expect a laugh as Linda herself was not trying to be funny. She and her cast mates truthfully in the language of their characters and the audience's reaction was irrelevant. 'living truthfully under imaginary circumstances, which is my definition of good acting' (Meisner, 1987, pg. 15)⁸. By Meisner's definition, all performers presented 'good acting', completely committed to their environment and its portrayal. This made the comedy more effective as it felt utterly authentic and natural.

The production made me reevaluate my position on Welsh Culture – it's toxicity, it's divisiveness and simultaneously it's kindness and warmth. It made me cackle, cry and feel. If you are a fan of comedic, uplifting, provocative theatre I highly recommend seeing this musical. From the comedic tap-dancing old lady duo of Glenys and Nerys to the vocally gifted Britney Spears wannabe; Bethan Jen, this musical provides you with an emotional rollercoaster of song, dance, surrounding a very powerful, current message.

⁵ Hagen, U. (1991). *A Challenge For The Actor*. New York: Scribner.

⁶ Alfreds, M (2007). *Different Every Night*. London: Nick Hern Books Limited.

⁷ HB Studio (2018). *Uta Hagen's Acting Class*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLSkEL3T6JI> (Accessed 20th November 2023)

⁸ Meisner, S (1987). *Sanford Meisner on Acting*. New York: Random House Inc.

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Task 3 (Reflective Essay)

Due: 26/01/2023

Reflective Essay on the Improvisation Module of Acting

During our acting lessons with Tonya Smith, throughout November, we developed our skills in improvisation. We started slowly with different sources of inspiration coming from other students' ideas, for example: walking to university; what you do after coming back from university. I ended up miming brushing my teeth and found it difficult to see where everything was – I wasn't aware of how I held the sink, or used my body to bend over. I researched this and found Uta Hagen saying that you must '*alert yourself to objects with which you deal in daily routine: the textures and smells*' '*observe how you respond to these stimuli*' (Hagen, 1991, pg. 76). From this I began to observe my own behaviours, my physicality, rhythms and positions in preparation for the future activities.

My most complimented piece of improvisation was on the 16th of November, under the brief of getting ready for a night out along with the given circumstances that we were meeting someone we hadn't seen in a while. Here, I turned to Stanislavski's Circles of Attention: '*time affects atmosphere and psychology and motive*' (Merlin, 2007, pg.103)¹. Focusing on the smallest circle (the self), it provided me with a sense of isolation and intimacy, allowing for me to be enveloped in the activity. I accepted the given circumstances which invoked emotions naturally, as Mike Alfred states: '*a flow of feelings accompanies the actor-characters on their journey through the play, the feelings aroused at one moment affecting how the actions will be played in the next*' (Alfreds, 2007, pg 105).

I decided that my most familiar process that I have is putting on makeup. So, I sat and chose a spot on the wall and used that as my mirror. I then proceeded to open my drawers and pick out makeup and apply it. I really imagined the objects, their weight, their shape, how I held them and how much pressure I used to apply them and to what areas of the face. Due to the familiarity, I felt that I could really submerge myself in the process. By this point, I had learnt not to rush, not to skip steps – for example, placing the lid back on the concealer before placing it back in a

certain box within the drawer. It was these intricacies which allowed for a hyper-realistic demonstration of getting ready.

Despite this, I realised imagining holding a makeup brush was much more challenging than it seemed – the actual step of placing it downwards into an eyeshadow pallet and then flipping it around and blending the shadow onto the eye. Thus, I stopped, allowed myself to somewhat detach from the process by really imagining a brush: I played with it in my hand; held it in different positions; and proceeded with the process.

Sansford Meisner claims that “*“The foundation of acting is the reality of doing... If you do something, you really do it!”*” (Meisner, 1987 pg.16-17) ². So, using my imagination, I didn’t pretend to put on makeup – I really did it. I felt the texture of the brush and felt the wetness of the concealer – and when I blended something I didn’t pretend to blend it – I pictured the unblended bits, how it felt and how that subsequently changed after I’d blended it.

Studying Uta Hagen independently, I learnt of her First exercise: Physical Destination. I gave myself the superobjective of finishing my makeup and leaving the house, and the objectives of: placing the concealer, blending the concealer, powdering the concealer ext. From this I had a goal and a need to complete it – I was particularly proud of myself as I focused so much on the details of what I was doing – all reality around me dissolved.

However, by the end of this, I noticed that I was still only at the first stages of my makeup and everyone else had finished and were not watching me. I became self-conscious and aware that if I were to continue I could be hours. The lecturer Tonya Smith complimented me and said she wished I would have continued for longer as the devotion and attention I gave to the improvisation was so intense that it looked so realistic.

Following this, I researched how to stop that feeling of self-consciousness. Meisner talks about ‘Public Solitude’ which is the ‘*concept of maintaining a state of emotional truthfulness and focus while performing in the presence of an audience*’ (The Drama Teacher, 2023). Within this is Cognitive Re-framing, where the image of a ball on a string is used. You recognise the audience, or yourself becoming self-conscious but push the ball back along the string to the other person – in this case being the mirror.

In conclusion, through the research and application of different practitioners methods I've become more comfortable and skilled in improvisation.

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