

Reflective journal – tech week & performances

The final week of our production of Crazy for You was spent on the technical set up of the show as well as dress runs and, of course, the final three performances.

This time during a show's creative process is always magical to me, as all the different components start to come together and help me discover new things about myself as a performer and my character. Often the last few full runs before a show opens can really change something elementary in the way I approach the show – and this was the case once again.

During the course of our rehearsal period, I had approached my character, Perkins, from numerous perspectives, ranging from status work to hot-seating. Through our hot-seating work conducted with James on week one, I had gone quite deep and analytical, trying to figure out the motivations of my character. But as the show drew closer, I felt like this approach did not work – after all, we are all complex human beings and overthinking someone's personality, motives and full life story can leave your head spinning. I felt somewhat ambiguous about my character and could not tap into the comedy I knew was embedded in her. That's why I decided to take a more straight-forward approach and make clear choices with the help of psycho-physicality.

Merlin (2014, p.10) describes psycho-physicality as follows: "whatever is going on inside us impacts on our physical expression, and whatever input we receive from the outside world impacts on our inner life." I naturally tend to navigate towards letting my inner life guide my performance, but as it did not seem to work this time, I spent tech week runs trying out different ways of physical expression, both for my character Perkins and for my ensemble-role as a follies girl. A big challenge for me during the rehearsals had been the fact that as Perkins, I would actually be pushing around my boss in a wheelchair at all times – but we did not have access to the wheelchair until tech week. When I finally got to try acting with the wheelchair, I felt devastated: it was very hard to steer and gave my character an element of clumsiness I had not accounted for. I had imagined the character to have a good posture signalling a high status, but suddenly I had to crouch over a wheelchair with handles too low to make it easy to steer. The wheelchair also affected the timing of exits and entrances a lot, making me nervous of being late on stage.

I decided to solve this by grabbing the wheelchair by its seat, allowing me to steer it from a more upright position. This was actually a great choice, as it gave me a sense of control, which in turn made me less nervous – and affected my relationship with both the wheelchair

and Cody's character, my boss Mrs. Lottie Child, who I was wheeling around. Early on in rehearsals, James had hinted that the relationship of Perkins and Mrs. Child would have similarities with the cold and hostile relationship of the two protagonists from the 1962 film "Whatever happened to Baby Jane?". Somehow as the weeks had passed, I had lost the sense of that relationship, but now that I had control over the wheelchair, and thus over Mrs. Child too, I started to regain the sense of the relationship. The physical change in my wheelchair use gave me a more sinister tone to my character and confidence to milk out the comedic moments by eg. moving slower. On the other hand, the inner work I had done during the previous weeks came to good use as well; the way my otherwise cold and hostile character acts in the end of the show, approving of protagonist Bobby's marriage, would not have made sense to me if I had not thought through her motives to begin with. All in all, learning about this character was a great exercise in the use of psycho-physicality!

When it was time for the actual performances, what really lit up the show for me was the audience. I do suffer from stage fright from time to time, and having the audience there can make me self-conscious – and, as Harvard (2013, p. 19) puts it, "self-consciousness is the roadblock to all progress in acting." Luckily, this did not happen, but instead I was able to draw energy from the people watching us. Crazy for You is a show about putting on a show, so having the actual audience there to share the excitement, nervousness and disappointment the characters go through really made the shows magical. Alfreds (2007, p. 46) maintains: "Theatre's the truly interactive medium. Interaction is part of its condition. Just by sitting, observing and responding in the most natural way, an audience creates interaction with the stage" – and this was exactly what I felt, more than in any show I've been in before.

References

Alfreds, M. (2007) *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Harvard, B. (2013) *Acting Through Song: Techniques and Exercises for Musical-Theatre Actors*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Merlin, B. (2014) *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*. London: Nick Hern Books.