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BA Musical Theatre
ADPA6003

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For this process, we did a production of 'Alice by Heart'. In this essay, I will be reflecting on my performance throughout the process. The musical was originally set during the London Blitz. Our director wanted to explore a different direction. Their idea was to set the musical as though a war were happening in the current times. With them, we developed the timeline and context for the musical, making the storyline clearer for us to work with.

The first step we took in expanding this idea was for everyone to workshop and develop our characters. I was originally cast as a mock turtle and a child. The purpose of having multiple roles was to link the real world to Wonderland within the story. As the process continued, the list of characters I portrayed grew.

At first, we were asked by the director to approach the rehearsal process with the work of Mike Alfreds and how he uses actioning. As written by Alfreds, "What we first need is facts from which we can start to put together an idea of the play's inner life. What the characters do and say constitute those facts. What the characters do cannot be questioned" (Alfreds 2007)

We spent two sessions, discussing in pairs with each cast member the relationship between our characters and discovering details about our own. As a child character, I was given complete creative freedom to build my own character. I decided to name my character Grace, who is a nine-year-old orphan. I found an interesting concept within her being coddled and spoiled, to being stripped of this due to the outside circumstances of living in a war. I found many connections for this character with other cast members. For

example, her relationship with the other young children within the space. Also, one of the named characters, Clarissa, had similarities to the context I created. Therefore, we found an easy connection between the two. For the Wonderland characters, I carried out research on how turtles and lobsters move and sound to correlate with the mock turtles and baby lobsters.

Our music calls with the music director were very fast-paced to begin with. This was due to the creative team holding us as a cast to an industry standard. I struggled with this at first as I was unable to retain harmonies straight away, especially those that were not associated with harmonies. This caused some frustration for the music director, but after revising the notes outside of rehearsals, I was able to apply the harmonies and correctional notes we were given to the space.

The choreographic process, contrasting to the music process, was slow-paced and experimental. The style of choreography that the choreographer aimed for was quite contemporary and physical theatre based. This was a challenge for me as I had no previous experience in this genre of dance. I feel as though I could have been more open to the style and been more focused whilst experimenting with movement.

When it came to blocking scenes with the director, I found the process to be extremely meticulous. The director was expecting all actors to know their characters given circumstances. You could almost say there's only one basic purpose behind the process of accumulating the GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES and breaking down the text into BITS of action: it's to unlock why the character does what he or she does in the course of the dramatic action. You can't really go on stage or in front of the camera unless you know what it is you're doing (Merlin 2014). This also slowed the process as run-through's were stopped frequently. This required a lot of focus for our energy to remain consistent whilst running scenes continuously. I believe I achieved the level of focus that was needed; however, due to my part, I was unable to contribute as often as I would have liked. During ensemble moments, I put in effort to step forward and make offers to the director. An example of this would be a suggestion I made for everyone to hold their hands over their hearts to further signify the queen being the queen of hearts. The director said they liked the idea, but it was too close to the real world rather than Wonderland.

Throughout the process, the set would progress as we developed the show to give us the opportunity to adjust to any obstacles surrounding us during movement. The use of props in the show caused our surroundings to change constantly as we were set to throw our

props around with the intention of making a mess. This could cause accidents, so I had to be consistently spatially aware.

In the performance, I did several things well. This includes my characterisations. Even when things went awry, I remained in character. An example of this would be when I accidentally threw my prop towards an audience member and remained on stage without breaking character. I also believe I maintained throughout the performance. And finally, I bounced off my castmates during the performance. "Once the production is in performance, my goal is to ensure it remains flexible, that the actors are constantly 'in the moment', alive and living, open to change, and never drifting onto auto-pilot." (Alfreds 2007) For this, I referred to Meisner techniques.

In the mock turtle number 'Shell of Grief', for every performance, we went off time by the end of the song. This created a challenge for me to get back on track. I also found it challenging to remain present during the scenes where we were hidden within the performance space. This is partly due to the traverse staging and how we were blocked to be sitting behind the audience for minutes at a time. The staging came with another challenge, too. I had to constantly be aware that I was not blocking the audience's view through spatial awareness.

In conclusion, the beginning of the process was my biggest challenge, but once I overcame that period, I became more confident with the material and was able to reach the stage where I was able to play as an actor. Having a stricter creative team pushed me to improve and be more professional in the room.

Reference list

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

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