

Major Production essay

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For our last Major Production, we were given the opportunity to perform and work on the iconic goth thriller musical: *Jekyll & Hyde*. *Jekyll & Hyde the Musical* is a stage created by Frank Wildhorn (music) and Leslie Bricusse (book and lyrics), the musical offers a dramatic and thrilling interpretation of the classic tale. The musical follows Dr. Henry Jekyll's experiments to separate the dual nature of man, resulting in the creation of his evil alter ego, Edward Hyde. As Hyde's actions grow increasingly violent, Jekyll struggles to maintain control. It was first presented in Houston, Texas in 1990, it became so popular after breaking the box office record and went on to have an extended run twice. The musical is an adaptation based on an 1886 novel "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by Robert Louis Stevenson. When the production was in the making, they really wanted to capture the essence of Robert Louis Stevenson's gothic tale, which they eventually did and that's one of the reasons the show is as popular as it is now.

The themes explored in the musical include the duality of human nature, the struggle between good and evil, and the consequences of unchecked ambition. The musical dives into identity and morality. The musical's main theme is the duality of human nature, which is the idea that every person has a bit of good and bad within them. We see this embodied in Dr Jekyll's character, when he couldn't control his alter ego Edward Hyde while trying to do good. Another big theme that I researched into before getting into it was good vs Evil, the musical delves into the struggle between good and evil, both within a single person and in society, we see this again with Jekyll's transformation into Hyde and we can also see this behavior in the Red Rat Dregs. The musical also takes place in Victorian London, which reflects the strict moral and social norms of the day. Researching into the play's world gave me the understanding I needed to tackle this project, as I wasn't aware of certain themes and context of the show.

Within the project, I was given the opportunity to multi role. I portrayed the characters Gwenny, Dawson and Susan Stride (Lead Governor). Gwenny is the Manager of the Red Rat Dregs, a role just below her boss (the Spider), the Red Rat Dregs is a nightclub with dancers and prostitutes. Exploring into Gwenny was quite hard at the beginning because in many existing productions Gwenny does not exist. To figure out Gwenny as a character I read about her and read the script and it gave me the opportunity to build upon that, one of discoveries that stuck with me is that she seems like a hard shell and tough with Lucy but in reality, she's caring, considerate and in a sense lost. You can see within the musical that there's a big difference between business Gwenny and personal Gwenny, she will choose business and money over friendship because she's always got Spider breathing down her neck. During the rehearsal process I started making more self-discoveries within the character, I realized as much she cares for all the girls, she cares more

deeply for Nellie than anyone else. The bond she started to feel for her was motherly or big sister.

In this production, Dawson was a tough character to deal with at the beginning as it was one character spilled into two, Poole and Dawson. Within the first rehearsal of Dawson, I found it hard to know what Kev wanted. I originally played the character like the stereotypical butler with a few independent quirks but after having a conversation with Kev I realized that he wanted it to be a little bit on the comedic side. I started to experiment with the character as I got on, and as we started to rehearse more, I found some pauses within the script where I could showcase their comedic quirks. I didn't trust myself at first, but as I got more confident within myself, I gained confidence as the character. I started to envision Poole and Dawson more as really good friends that liked a good gossip which made the whole experience much easier and comfortable to play-off against one another.

Susan Stride is only in one scene in the first act but made a big impact. I knew I needed to embrace her independence and strength within the scene, Simon Stride is the lead Governor in the original productions but because the role had been cut down and being casted gender blind, I could only go off what was written in our production. Playing Susan Stride was fun and different because I could experience a new attitude and think a little outside the box.

We had the privilege of working with Kev McCurdy for this production. Working on this project with a different director came with some challenges. The first thing Kev told us is that he wanted us to forget our training, not in a way of it being useless but he wanted us to be as realistic as we could be. The challenging part was that having done Meisner for the past three years and that technique being all about naturalism it was hard to approach realism in a different way. As much as Kev wanted us to forget all of that, I still tried to keep it real within myself and channel what works for me the most. As time went on and rehearsals continued, I started to understand Kev's way of directing which made everything easier and it made me feel more to solve any problems that headed my way. Every morning and after lunch during rehearsals Kev made us do a workout and that would be circuit training and cardio, this helped us gain stamina for all the fight work and the running around the stage we would be doing. I haven't experienced such intense workouts during long rehearsal days before, so it was great to experience a different type of atmosphere and work method. Doing all the workout helped more than I thought, because I didn't realize how physical the show was going to be as it's not originally such an intense production.

At the beginning, a challenge I found during the process of Jekyll & Hyde was getting into the different characters I was playing. In the first act I continued to switch characters within a short amount of time, I felt flustered and defeated very early in the rehearsal space which was different for me because I'm always upbeat and positive. The reasoning behind why I felt this type of way was because I was in a different environment, and I wasn't quite sure how Kev worked in the process yet. Despite feeling flustered and defeated, I didn't let it drag me down. After a while

and as rehearsals went on, I felt a better understanding of my characters and myself. I learnt to trust myself and thought it was okay to make mistakes. I did keep my struggle and challenge to myself because I knew it was something that I needed to work on internally and I didn't want to take any time away from anyone's work, including myself. I have learnt that being able to multi role is an incredible skill and not a weakness and it's not something that I should be putting myself down for. Moving forward, if I am ever to be blessed with such a great opportunity of multi role I will trust myself, not to be afraid to explore the characters and also find each character's unique traits and play with that.

Another challenge I faced towards the end of the process was to do with quick changes. I haven't had much experience with quick changes before and having to do so many within a show got really difficult. I began to feel stressed and under pressure as I didn't have the costumes properly and time to run them until tech week. One of my quick changes was more of a worry than others, this one being less than a minute and the biggest change of them all. Coming into tech week I was very apprehensive and worried. I had expressed these worries with the stage manager, and they said that we will be able to go over it during the dress run. The dress run didn't happen until the Wednesday, the day before the show and because we had an audience for the dress run, it made me uneasy in case something went wrong. We were able to go over the quick change before the dress run during the tech, but I didn't have enough time between the scene changes. I had taken my concern to the director and asked if I could arrive later in the same as the beginning of the scene was a freeze frame, meaning it shouldn't have made much difference. Having found a resolution, everything ran a bit more smoothly unfortunately so worry he did not go away but made me proud that we were able to pull it off in every single performance. I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to achieve this certain skill and have experienced it within an educational setting. It's a skill I will certainly take on board as I enter the industry.

We had a different experience during the production because we had the opportunity to work with the first-year students as an ensemble. We started off by blocking most of the scenes within the first two weeks of rehearsals without the ensemble so when it came to it, the focus would be on the ensemble and what they need to do. We had a couple of music calls with them during the first two weeks which also made it easier when we all got together. A challenge I found early on having to work with the ensemble as they had a different schedule than us is that we couldn't work on certain scenes. One particular scene that we couldn't go over for the first few weeks was the 'Board of Governors' scene, it was my only scene as Susan Stride and my only song in the first act, having to wait for the ensemble to be in made me feel stressed. The reason I felt stressed was because I was afraid that I would be unprepared and hadn't had enough rehearsal time on it. I didn't express my concern with the creative team, the reason being it wasn't anyone fault in particular and there was nothing that

could've been done about it. Luckily, when we all came together as a group, Kev and Charly prioritized the group number and the big scenes, which made me feel at ease and solved the issue. When it came to the tech week, I felt very confident with it. We had to be off book very

early in the process to be able play around with the scenes and feel confident, I didn't find this difficult. It made me discover many different aspects within the scenes and then I really got to know my characters.

I felt like I brought my own ideas into the room. At the beginning I felt that the process wasn't very collaborative as the director had his own ideas and a vision in mind, it became difficult to find a technique that worked for me within his vision. After spending more time in space and getting to know Kev, I started to realize what he wanted and then I built from that. It started to get easier and when I started to feel grounded within space, I started to play around much more with the characters and the way they would say things.

Having a West End fight director meant that the show was going to be very physical. I'd never been involved in stage combat before, so when we were told we'd be doing a lot of it, I got excited, the warm-ups we were doing with Kev each day helped. In the first week we started on the prologue fight, which involved me, Tomos and Vicky, we got into the routine quite easily because we'd watch and listen to each other. We'd always check up on one another and make sure we weren't injuring each other. Another fight scene I was involved in was 'Murder, Murder', this scene involved a death. I was the first to be murdered by Holly, the way the death worked, Holly had to stab my back three times and then a knife to the throat. After the death I had to hold Holly's arm and make sure that I tensed my core. I found the scene difficult because I wouldn't always feel the knife hitting my back, which made it difficult to know my queue for the screams. I didn't bring the concern up because a lot of the times she was aware that she wasn't doing it properly and other times I didn't want to upset her because the pressure sometimes got to her. Another fight scene that I was involved in was confrontation which was the biggest and most important scene. During the fight, I had the opportunity to be physical with someone and vice versa. I had to make sure that I was in control of my fall, so I wouldn't get injured. In one rehearsal, I jumped on the table when it was far from me and ended up with a big bruise on my arm. I learned that you must always be in control of yourself even if it isn't you doing the action.

When we received feedback, I thought that I took them quite well. When we received feedback from the runs, I always made sure to have them in mind the next time we would go over that certain scene. I received some notes within tech week, I started to get worried in case I wouldn't remember to apply them, but luckily, I had remembered. When receiving notes, I always find it fascinating how the character develops and the new discoveries we also find. One thing that I found difficult to maintain was the song for Board of Governors because I learned

it a different way on the track, not being able to apply a certain note for the longest time made me feel very frustrated with myself to say that I am usually quite fast. After a week of listening and listening to the voice recording that I'd asked Chris to record, I eventually got it. Once I was confident with my part, I was able to play around and find different motives within the scene.

When it came to tech week, the anxiety wasn't there. We started with the sitzprobe and got off to an exciting start, even though I wasn't into many songs it was a great way to start the week. The teching process went really smoothly and everyone was on the ball, we were able to go over certain scenes that we weren't comfortable with and had previously gone wrong. I learned a lot during tech week, the most useful skill during weeks like these is time management, even though we had a stage manager, who made sure we had a precise schedule every day, we still needed to make sure we didn't lose track of time when getting ready and on dinner breaks etc. Once we got into the space, everyone's commitment and concentration level were through the roof.

This whole process has taught me so much, I've developed many skills over the last three years that prepared me for this show and had the opportunity to develop them further in a different environment. Being a part of Jekyll & Hyde has given me the push I needed to go into the industry. At the beginning of the process, I was worried about being an extension of the ensemble, but it turned out I was treated the same way as the others. The last show felt fact compared to the others; walking off stage after our final bows made me sad but also proud of us all.

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