

Holly Brain

2405076

Theatre Laboratory (ADPB4007)

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This module has been incredibly beneficial for me as a performer. I have gained skills that will help me pursue a future in musical theatre. We have focused developing ensemble singing through rehearsing and performing various theatre styles. In the first Theatre Laboratory, we focused on the styles of the Golden Age and Pop and Rock whereas, in the second Theatre Laboratory we focused on Sondheim and Pasek and Paul. The style Golden Age is something I am not so familiar with it dates around the mid-1940s to mid-1960s. These songs have defining characteristics of their emphasis on telling a story, and memorable melodies and are common for having a verse and AABA chorus structure. This alongside Pop and rock which involved catchy melodies, verse-chorus structure and standard chord progression. The second Theatre Laboratory had Pasek and Paul whose songs have emotional depth, harmony complexity and character-driven lyrics alongside Sondheim who had overly complex melodies and harmonies as well as his songs were also very character-driven. Although I found the songs in the second Theatre Laboratory much more enjoyable, both challenged me and gave me insight into a variety of styles. There were many skills that we needed for both, some I struggled with more than others however throughout this entire process I have made considerable progress.

Throughout the First Theatre Laboratory, many struggles came up one of the first ones came from sight-reading. I had some prior knowledge of sight-reading due to previous teaching, and I was familiar with the basics, such as note values, rhythms, dynamics, and key signatures. However, I was not skilled at reading music while singing, as I had never practised it before. Sight reading is a particularly useful skill because it “helps the ability to feel the rhythm and get the general direction of the melodic notes and harmony” (Makemusic Official, 2023). This therefore means it is a beneficial skill to learn as it will help quicken the process of learning harmonies for a new song and improve accuracy. Initially, I found it challenging because it was so new to me. Having to read the music at such a quick pace while then singing was a challenge as I was not able to keep up with the speed of it and was not able to focus on both simultaneously. However, with my foundational knowledge and continuous practice both in and outside lessons, I have significantly developed this skill. Now, I use sight-reading constantly whenever I am learning a new song.

Furthermore, I also struggled with Commitment in the first term because I felt overwhelmed and unmotivated. Everything was entirely new to me, and I found it challenging to keep up. I often felt like I was falling behind, as the hours I was putting into my studies were not sufficient. Golden Age songs are not a particular strength of mine, and I struggled to find the motivation to listen and learn. This mindset was far from ideal for this module and significantly hindered my progress. However, when the second term began, I decided to change my perspective. I adopted a more positive mindset and focused on the benefits. I now recognise that each song presents a valuable learning opportunity and a chance to improve my ensemble skills. Throughout the past two terms, my commitment to my attendance has been something I am proud of as I have been consistently coming in even when I was not solid with my harmony. I did struggle when facing a lot of illness in term one however, this did not stop me from coming in and even if that meant I was unable to sing I still made notes and took recordings of anything that needed to be learnt. Lack of commitment has also contributed to my struggle with memory skills. I was not retaining information well, especially when it came to learning lyrics in songs. One song I found particularly challenging was "One Brick at a Time" by Cy Coleman. This was partly due to my lack of motivation, as I found the style of this song less engaging compared to others we were learning, where I was more efficient in memorising the lyrics. However, my motivation has significantly improved in this module, due to it heavily being based on teamwork. Although I may not enjoy every song, it is important to work together and be prepared so that as an ensemble, we can progress effectively as "balancing the needs of the group with those of the individual is a fundamental requirement of group work" (Timmers et al. Pg.3, 2021). I can agree that is true as balancing the needs of the group with those of the individual allows teamwork and effective collaboration whilst each individual feels valued and heard. If not balanced it can mean disruption in progress if an individual focuses solely on themselves and not on the group but also can lead to an individual feeling overlooked if focusing too heavily on the group. Overall, I now feel more confident in my ability to commit towards a project to get the best outcome.

At the start of this module, we conducted a vocal check to identify our ideal vocal group. I was informed that I would typically be a soprano one or soprano two. Throughout this module, I have explored various vocal groups, which has been a valuable learning experience. I discovered that I find soprano harmonies the easiest, so tackling harmonies meant for altos has been challenging. I particularly struggled during "Prelude: The Ballad of Sweeney Todd: Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd" by Sondheim, where I had to sing as a tenor for part of the song. While I could learn the tenor part individually, when it came to performing in an ensemble, I found myself singing along with the soprano harmony. Figuring out a way to practice this effectively was a struggle for me though as "there is no empirical evidence or consensus on the most effective rehearsal strategy for optimal

individual learning” (Brandler and Peynircioglu, 2015, p.3) which means that it is up to you to decipher the ideal way. Reflecting on it made me aware that I should have put more practice into doing it alongside another harmony whether that be with a recording or with my classmates as this is the most optimal way of practice for me. This experience has been important, as it highlighted the importance of knowing your harmony well enough to avoid distractions of other voices around you.

One strength I had and was able to develop throughout the entirety of this module is my listening skills. Active listening is an essential skill to have as it allows you to fully understand and interpret a song as “students may be familiar with a piece, and may even know it well, but have they thought about it?” (Thomas, 2015). I agree with the importance of it as I feel that I have been a lot better at understanding the meaning behind a song and putting this into my singing. Throughout this module, I have continuously been actively listening to others when singing to ensure that our voices blend cohesively. Through listening I have also been successful in picking up harmonies. I have been pleasantly surprised with how well harmonies came to me and although not every song has been equally successful, I have done a lot better than I originally thought I would. The second term has been the most surprising to me where I have found that I have progressed hugely from where I started and am working at a much more efficient pace. A piece that stands out to me is the medley from ‘The Greatest Showman’ which includes a variety of songs by Pasek and Paul. I found this medley to be one of the easier pieces to learn. During the first few weeks, when everyone was struggling, I made sure to dedicate time to learning it, which then led to me being confident in it. Although the song was quite complex, I was able to put time into it and learn it well.

Overall, this module has been a valuable learning experience for me in terms of working within an ensemble. It has not only enhanced my collaboration skills but allowed me to develop a variety of new skills. I acknowledge that I could have invested more time during the first term, which has taught me an important lesson about commitment. Moving into the second term, I have dedicated more time and focus to the module. As a result, I now feel much better prepared to collaborate effectively with my peers and look forward to applying these new skills to future projects. Reflecting on the performances, I noticed that the final performance in term one was quite challenging for me. I felt unprepared, and despite knowing the harmonies, my nerves impacted my confidence in my singing. However, in term two, I experienced a noticeable improvement. I approached the final performance with much more confidence, which positively affected my overall delivery. Although we had less time to prepare the songs, I had learned skills from the previous term that allowed me to pick them up much more quickly. In the final performance for term two, I can say I was immensely proud as I was able to remember my harmonies and vocal techniques for each song and I felt

confident going into it which made for a successful performance. Overall, I can confidently say I have made considerable progress, and this module has been massively beneficial to me as a performer.

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