

TASK 2: WRITTEN JOURNAL

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Assassins as a process taught me many new professional skills and challenged me, but mostly the process reflected all the skills I have gained since my two years on the course and how I now apply them in a professional setting. This essay is a summarised journal of my process with the skills I learnt as well as the challenges I faced and how I overcame them.

After coming out of Rent, I was able to see that a key stage in my personal process is context and research. I have to have an understanding of a piece and the events and topics within it for me to feel confident going into an audition. However, I try to steer away from watching other productions of the piece before an audition because as a performer I love being able to interpret a character originally and what feels right to me without the influence of other people's work. Therefore before our first week of rehearsal/audition I did general research on the piece, and I found out that the stories told within the musical are based on real people and events. The musical is a dark comedy and this made me nervous. As I have grown older, I have tended to steer away from comedic pieces and discovered my comfort zone is vulnerable and emotional pieces. I also discovered that the piece is written by Sondheim which scared me a lot as over the past two years I have realised a big problem area of mine within musical theatre is timing and Sondheim's work is complex and you have to be self-disciplined with the timing. However, discovering that Assassins is not completely sung through and that there are acting scenes gave me comfort.

With all the anxiety of the piece being quite challenging to me I went to the audition feeling pretty vulnerable and lacking in confidence. This did not stop me from wanting to learn and give a 100%. As I learned from my Rent audition even though I was disappointed in myself and I made mistakes John and Robbie were impressed with my determination and professionalism. So even though I felt a lot of anxiety going into the Assassins audition I went in with determination and an open mind. This paid off as I was casted as The Balladeer with Mia and Fflur. When I found out about this, I was shocked and grateful for being given such an amazing role, however the character is completely sung through with challenging songs. I knew early on that this role was going to be difficult for me, but I was ready for the challenge and to learn new skills. As I have learned with Rent you need to be pushed out of your comfort zone to be able to grow as a performer and to try and attack difficult roles with positivity and hard work.

The first week of rehearsals I used to gain an understanding of the piece and the world of the musical as well as getting to know our production team. It was a great experience working with a whole new production team and developing skills and relationships throughout the weeks. Although I love working with my tutors continuously, it starts to build a sense of safety and comfortability. Working with James and Barney was nerve wracking at first, as they were strangers and I had not built up the trust to make mistakes in front of them and know the way they work. However, the process made me develop people skills as well as professionalism. It gave me a taste of the real world; I could not rely on previous work with them or me as a person, it was based on an audition and how I presented my work and the way I worked in the room.

Quickly I learned that I had to let go and not to be afraid of mistakes and ask questions, otherwise James and Barney would not understand the way I work as well as I would not

understand how they work and approach things. Over the past two years I have learned that I have a slight issue on not having control on things, and I get really frustrated as well as a lack of patience with myself when I do not understand things with a click of a finger. With this process I struggled with this, especially as the way James approached his concept of the piece was to develop the idea continuously through the process. I found this difficult at first as I like security and to know that I'm on the right path with my performance otherwise I will doubt myself and think everything I'm doing is wrong. However, James' process has taught me so many skills, for example how to be creative and trust my instincts, he's also taught me to be more independent as a performer, but most importantly to trust the process.

Week two I started to focus on learning my songs. This was hard as we had the difficult challenge of splitting the role between three females when it was written for one man, so with the challenge of this and the fact I don't have natural timing, I struggled. The first challenge we faced was that all three of us are very different vocal types and ranges, so it was difficult to find the correct key for all three of us. However, singing with the girls over the weeks extended my range especially my alto range and all three of us were able to support each other with our problem areas. Working with Barney has given me skills that I will carry out forever, as at the start of the process I really thought I was never going to be able to sing my songs correctly. Throughout the two years of dance classes in my degree I have found when picking up choreography and timing that it can take me a while to pick it up, but once I have it, it's there forever. Similarly, this happened with this process but only because of Barney's patience and teaching and my determination and not being afraid of making mistakes we were able to make it work. Ways Barney taught me to overcome my fear of timing was by claps. He would get me to clap how many beats there were in-between each line every time we ran it until I knew it in my body and head. This is a kinaesthetic style of learning, and I will definitely be keeping this for the future.

Week three I used to develop and understand my character. Whilst doing Rent I did this early on in the process and I found it being super helpful and a key part of my process. With Assassins I couldn't do it at the beginning as we were developing the concept throughout and my character wasn't what was originally written. So, the bones of what James said about my character was that the Balladeers were the It girls of the school and we poked fun of the assassin's and the history of it, but we represented the American dream. With this information I was able to go further and create a backstory and a character profile. When I originally researched the musical, I discovered that the role of the Balladeer is an optimist who is like America's subconscious.

As a performer I am quite logical. I have to understand why a character is the way they are and why they react to things the way they do. So, I started to look at the songs and why the balladeer was necessary. In the three songs about the presidents the Balladeers' role is to narrate and move the story along. So, in the context of the Balladeer's being the It girls I felt the reason why they were narrating was because in the school hierarchy chain they would be at the top, therefore classmates would listen to them but also because they would think they know better than everyone else. I used this in the performance as a characterisation of my character, this helped me understand my reactions to the assassins. As the It girls they

would judge their fellow classmates on what they believed were bad decisions as they would with the assassins. I had noticed that a lot of the Balladeers lyrics are representing an American dream 'The mail man won the lottery' 'The usherette is a rock star' so I had to reason why the schoolgirls would be preaching optimism and the American dream, therefore I did some research. The American dream is the concept that no matter your background or who you are or where you're from every American has the equality of opportunity to achieve the highest goals. I also looked into what Americans believe is the American dream life and these are some examples of what I found. Owning your own home, starting a family, having a stable job or owning a business, personal freedom, the pursuit of happiness, social mobility etc... After doing research I believe that I could reason why the Balladeers preach the American dream. I believe the schoolgirls preach it because they come from families who from the outside are living the dream, they are privileged and naïve.

In week four I was able to experiment with a fully developed character and a better confidence in my songs. From Rent I learned that I had to use runs to my best advantage and experiment vocally and in performance. I started to discover new things within the piece and I found that by the end of Another National Anthem my Balladeer realises she has also been lied to by the American dream like the assassins. I was also experimenting with the style of country in my song. Over the past two years I had never sung in a country music style in any performance or assessment. Even though throughout this process I was nervous about the singing, performing songs in the country style gave me comfort as I have been raised in a household of Dolly Parton and Johnny Cash lovers. I loved being able to perform in this style and experiment with it.

End of week four going into week five is where I was tested with my personal life and practiced professionalism in keeping it out of the room. With having a rather difficult challenge of dealing with keeping personal life out of the room throughout the whole of Rent, it made me well equipped for week four. When life starts to get hard whilst in university, I always remind myself that this is what I want to do and it's my happy and safe space. I kept comparing myself to the girls and I started to over think if I knew or could do my pieces. How I overcame this was by reflecting back on Rent when I felt the same way and I told myself there is a reason why I have been given the role. James also gave me comfort in telling me he's proud of how I have approached my challenges of the songs and made the songs sound as if they are mine, he also told me if he says nothing what you're doing is right. This gave me a lot of security but also taught me that all directors are different and approach processes differently.

With all my anxieties of singing the songs when it came to the performances, I didn't make any mistakes and in one of the performances I fixed a mistake by one of the girls and got us back on track. I realised how much I have grown from doing this show but also to trust myself, as when I perform, I'm so focused on the performance and on being in the moment, I don't overthink what I'm doing anymore and I trust that know it. This show has challenged me and given me the skills to overcome roles that are not in my comfort zone. Over the past

two years I gained so many skills and knowledge but I have grown as a performer and I look forward to continually growing with the Masters.

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