# Learning in a Digital Era
# (ADP4001)
# 2306685
# Menna Jones

Contents

Written Summary.....pg 2

Reflective Essay.....pg 3-4

Live Theatre Review.....pg 5-6

Bibliography.....pg 7-8

## Task 1- Written Summary

The skills required to be a professional full-time performer are multifaceted and essential to the development of your craft, yet are often overlooked or undermined. The world of professional theater is demanding and ever-changing, meaning that performers are expected to meet these expectations and high standards of work ethic encouraged onto them. I will be exploring these key skills in my essay.

I, myself as an aspiring musical theater performer, have been encouraged to broaden my skill set in order to be marketable and stand apart in the industry. A huge aspect of being in the theater industry is your ability to efficiently manage your time. For instance, there will often be times where you will be in a show while also in the audition process or rehearsal process of a different show, or filming self tape auditions, therefore it is vital that a musical theater performer knows how to manage their time and prioritize certain tasks. It has been scientifically proven that the introduction of 'learned organization' can create a better performance in a person's career. (Prof. A.R.Ortenblad, Oxford University, Dec 2019)
This makes it an essential asset to the career of a professional performer.

Stamina and determination are also key skills required for a fulfilling career on stage. The life of an average performer on the West End consists of eight shows per week and rehearsals during tech week as well as maintaining a high level of physical fitness for a physically demanding job. Stamina is defined as the sustention of physical fitness and durability to maintain energy whilst in a demanding situation (A. Fennell, standout.com, 2021) this is comparable to being on a professional stage as actors must maintain a high level of energy for a prolonged period.

It is indisputable that the ability to work as a team is required in the theater industry. A supportive sense of community in the workplace leads to a more successful and overall happier environment as workers, or in my instance, cast mates and crew, are able to provide constructive criticism and support things that have been executed well. (Dr.A.M.Khawam, IJSBAR). As theater performers it is critical that we are encouraging and understanding towards one another.

### Reflection (after similarity checker)

My Turnitin similarity checker score was 7% due to the use of Harvard referencing and my bibliography at the end of my work. To improve on this in the future, I aim to use more paraphrasing to ensure my work isn't comparable to that found in any of my resources referenced.

## Task 2- Reflective Essay

Throughout my first term studying at WAVDA, I have received thorough and intensive training which has resulted in me developing my skills as a performer and gaining confidence in my abilities. My favorite lesson so far has been my one-to-one singing lessons with David Laughrne as I have noticed a prolific change and improvement in my singing technique, yet also my storytelling.

During my first lesson, I decided to sing through my audition song, "Once More I Can See" from 'Wonderland' the musical by Frank Wildhorn, the song tells the story of a grown up Alice, from the classic story, 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', as she recalls her magical encounters in a fairytale land. As I sang through the song so that David could get a glimpse into my vocal style, technique and acting through the song, it became apparent that I had fallen into a bad habit of moving my hands and looking down towards the floor when I sing.
As both of these were brought to my attention, we tried and errored a few exercises to help combat these habits.

Using hand gestures while performing and even speaking in a normal conversation is a utilized as 'A mechanism for emphasis and disambiguation of the semantics of a sentence' (Dr.S.Ghosh, McGovern Institute, Aug 2018) and it is scientifically and systematically proven that gestures play an integral role in how spoken language and that meaning of spoken language is developed. (S.Goldin-Meadow et.al, National Library of Medicine, July 2012). Therefore it only felt natural, as a person, let alone as an expressive and emotive artist, to gesture throughout my performance to make it as big and impactful as possible.

First off, we tried placing a noisy bracelet onto my wrists, so that i could be aware whenever i moved my hands without artistic intentions, however as we continued the exercise, we found it to be more of a distraction than helpful. As I brought the same song in the following week, we took an alternative approach in which I performed the song as though it were a monologue instead of singing it, as David believed I was becoming blinded by the music and relying on it to tell the story for me, rather than focusing on the lyrics. Through delivering the song as a monologue,  I found it much easier to connect to on an emotional scale, therefore we decided to try and keep the same level of acting and emotional connection, while now adding the music back in. Although the acting through the song had been enhanced through my facial expressions and through my now understanding the intentions behind the lyrics, we both agreed that the song looked too stoic and restrained. I then tried out an exercise in which I had to create ten different gestures throughout the song, large, overexaggerated gestures to symbolize how my character felt. After completing this task, I did find it effective in my storytelling as all my gestures had a motivation behind them, however we both agreed my gestures needed toning down so as to not distract from the lyrics and acting. To find a happy median, David told me to imagine I was performing the song to a group of young children, this encouraged me to use big gestures yet not too exaggerated as the children would not take me seriously.

As I performed the song in performance class with Angharad, another issue was brought to my attention, which is my eyeline when I sing. In our subconscious, holding direct eye contact with somebody or a group of people is used to gain control over them. (J.K.Heitman, National library

of medicine, Aug 2018). Through not maintaining a forward eye line and not making eye contact, it simply indicated that I was nervous and trying to make myself subordinate and small in comparison to my audience. I continuously looked down at the floor during my song, which resultantly made the audience feel disengaged and no longer focused on me as I'd lost sight of the genuineness of my performance. To combat this and perfect my eyeline, Angharad directed me to look at an inanimate object on the wall to give my mind something to focus on to keep my head up. After I took on this direction, she directed me to engage with the audience as though they were a group of school children and I was telling them a story. This made the storytelling feel more whimsical and magical, which accommodated the tone of the piece.

In conclusion, I discovered that through altering my psychological approach to a song, my physical approach changes accordingly, and often that less is more in terms of physicality during a performance.

**Task 3- Theatre Review**

On Friday the 5th of January 2024, I went to see an ameateur production of 'Les Miserables:School Edition' in the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, produced by Kinetic Theatre arts stage school. Overall, the production was very well directed and choreographed by Kris Crowley and musical director, Liz York.
*'Les Misérables* is by far one of the best overcome challenges music theater has ever witnessed.' (G.Nazara, first night magazine) . follows the tumultuous and riggering lives of Parisian citizens during the French Revolution. The story encompasses themes of hope, forgiveness and suffering through its poetic storytelling.

My first primary observation was the acting performances by some of the core characters in the show. The opening number, 'Look Down', gives the audience an insight into prison life during the revolution, and we are introduced to the main protagonist and antagonist of the show, convict, Jean Val Jean, and Javert. Val Jean's posture and facial expressions depict a disheveled and exhausted man, as also accentuated through the choreography of carrying out physically demanding labor. His facial expression used a scornful frown and sorrowful eyes as denoted through his furrowed brows. This automatically made the audience feel sympathetic towards our main character as he appears to be in need of salvation, especially after it is relieved that his 20 years imprisonment ties down to him 'stealing a bit of bread'. Javert's entrance immediately evoked a feeling of coldness and uncomfort for the prisoners, and resultantly the audience. Javert marches onto the stage with an arrogant and stern disposition, as conveyed through his alert posture, chest puffed out and head held high in a snobbish manner. The tension between these pair is chilling and intense, as Javert violently grabs Val Jean's arm to the point of physical pain and drags him across the stage, this accompanied through the prolonged eye contact and stoic facial expressions to each other creates incredible tension between the pair as you can see their disdain of each other; this also foreshadows their relationship throughout the show.

The most harrowing acting performance, in my opinion, was the character of Fantine, a struggling single mother reduced to a workhouse before prostitution in order to pay for her daughter, Cosette, whom she cannot even see. In the number, 'At the end of the day' we witness the downfall of Fantine's sanity and her character become disheveled and give up her pride. As the other workhouse women tease and torment Fantine, she has an abrupt, strong willed nature, as demonstrated through her fight with another worker over accusations made about her. This makes the audience initially feel apprehensive towards Fantine, as all the women on stage speak poorly of her and our first time witnessing Fantine, she is fighting another lady. As Javert appears to break apart this altercation, her demeanor switches and she becomes reclusive and sheepish looking. This is illustrated through her bowed head, fidgeting hands and lack of eye contact. While singing her voice cracks from holding back tears, this makes the audience sympathetic toward her as she is struggling to compose herself infront of those who already dislike her. Her eyes became watery and brows became furrowed, with her lips quivering as she admits this is true, which is truly heartbreaking for the audience to see. We witness Fantine decay both physically and emotionally, as by the end of their encounter she is hardly able to stand up by herself as she has been weakened by heartbreak. "The primary blueprint for all

psychological and physical work is the dramatic text – it is in the world and the words of the play that actors interpret the intentions of the author" (Z.Dunbar, Routledge; Stanislavski Studies, Vol 4, 2016)

It is evident through the character's performances through song, particularly Fantine, that this 'blueprint' that the intention of the original author and lyricist are utilised to forward the story emotionally, rather than losing themselves in the beautiful melodies.

"Theatrical costume constitutes a peculiarity in the theatrical performance because of its ability to communicate and communicate with the rest of the visual elements of the show in highlighting the intellectual and dramatic values." (A.Mahoud-Attia, DOAJ.org)

All costumes in the show were symbolic yet integral to the understanding of the characters. For example, Fantine wears a blue dress while singing, 'I Dreamed a Dream', and the color blue is used to allude to her loneliness and isolation in society and the sadness in her heart caused by Val Jean's unexpected departure.The second dominant aspect which intrigued me was the costume choices. Due to the show's period setting, the costumes were all historically accurate, through the use of tights, corsets, lace detailing, as well as culturally accurate as the lower social classes costumes were worn and tarnished, covered in dirt and holes. The costumes of the comedic relief villains, the Thernadiers, were symbolic of the poor's desire for wealth and power at the time. Thernadier himself wore a royal blue velour jacket with gold cufflinks and detailing, the use of royal blue has connotations of wealth and aristocracy, showing his desperation to be taken seriously and be perceived as wealthy despite being poor. The gold detailing further has associations of wealth and class, both of which Theradier does not possess. This makes the audience feel embarrassed and distasteful of him due to his deceitful nature. This is also reflective of his persona. Meanwhile, his wife, Madame Thernaider, wears a word down rugged dress with scruffy hair and no jewels or flashy attire. This is indicative of the fact women were not seen as equal to men and that women were unable to make their own money at the time. In Marius' solo song, "Empty chairs at Empty tables", he wears a red velour jacket. The color red plays a significant part in Marius' costume in this number as he is reflecting on his friends' deaths at the barricade as he previously sings about red being 'the blood of angry men', his jacket is symbolic of him being engrossed by the loss of his friends.

In conclusion, I thoroughly enjoyed the show and believe the creative team, actor and director did a phenomenal job to do the show justice.

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