

Learning in the Digital Era
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Essential Skills for Study and Employment in the Creative Industries.

Within the performing arts and creative industry, there is an array of unique skills that are not only required to succeed in the industry, but to also develop yourself as an artist capable of demonstrating originality and therefore desirable as an employee. As an aspiring performer, I recognise that it is crucial to continue to evolve these skills so that I can set myself up for success in the creative industry.

In the performing arts industry, one essential skill is the ability to network. "Lots of people working in the performing arts industry need to audition to find work, so it's vital that you're able to sell your abilities to potential employers." Higginbotham.D (2023). In addition, networking in this industry is important so that you can gain contacts with agents/employers who may consider you for work.

Furthermore, another skill set required as a performer is determination and resilience. In this industry, rejection is common and also essential in order to maintain the desire to improve. Therefore, it is crucial to keep a positive mindset and remain resilient. "Keeping your literal sights on your goals and envisioning yourself making the decisions you need to accomplish them makes you more likely to take the steps that will help you to reach those goals." Tollefson.K (2022).

Additionally, as with any job that involves working collaboratively, teamwork is essential. "Teamwork is the backbone of every successful organisation. It brings together diverse skills, ideas and experiences, fostering a collaborative environment that leads to increased efficiency, innovation and growth." Tom.N (2023). As a performer, you will be working with a variety of people in different job roles so teamwork is fundamental.

Finally, possessing the ability to be organised is essential as a performer. "Successful performers are often required to work on more than one project at once. Thus work schedules can become hectic. Strong organisation and time management skills are therefore a must." Kolahal (2021).

323 words

Reflection

After uploading my essay to the Turnitin similarity checker, I received a score of 39%. I realised this was because I had included large quotes to support my findings while researching. To improve, I will consider paraphrasing my quotes and also look at finding shorter quotes that I can elaborate on instead.

If I were to give myself a mark out of 100% for this task, I would grade myself 70% as I was able to complete the task showing relevant research and evidence to support my points. To improve, I think I could delve deeper into my research to find less obvious information to make my essay more interesting.

110 words

Live Performance Review: Greatest Days

'Greatest Days...Was it the Greatest Show?'

'Greatest Days' is a jukebox musical written and co-directed by Tim Firth (alongside co-director Stacey Haynes) showcasing iconic songs from the British band 'Take That'. The show is renowned for its high-energy performances whilst following an emotionally intense and nostalgic narrative. I recently saw the musical at the Bristol Hippodrome. In a nutshell, "The musical follows five boy band-obsessed best friends in the 1990s, who reunite 25 years later to see their heartthrobs one last time in what could be the Greatest Days of their life." Norwich Theatre (2023). The musical explores themes of friendship, memories and the trials and tribulations of life and I would say, is a feel-good musical that can be enjoyed by anyone.

I watched in anticipation as the musical opened with a reminiscent monologue from leading lady Jennifer Ellison, who plays the character 'Rachel'. This monologue initiates a flashback where the audience is introduced to the 5 best friends as teenagers. The girls are cleverly cast as younger versions of themselves and have contrasting personalities however, they all share a love for 'The Band'. The Band consists of 5 boys and although they are heavily featured in the musical with song and dance numbers, it was interesting to me that the boys have no speaking roles. Unlike the girls, the casting of each boy doesn't change with time or flashbacks to represent age. During the flashback, the girls are headed to watch The Band and the storyline encompasses a feeling of carefree girlhood. However, this feeling is short-lived due to a tragedy that occurs while the girls are on their way home. Unfortunately, one friend, Debbie, is killed in a road accident. This inevitably creates a rift between the girls. The flashback ends and leads to older Rachel who has won 4 tickets to see The Band on their reunion tour. She invites her old friends, despite not seeing them for 25 years. "Twenty-five years later, however, those wide-eyed girls have become world-weary adults; the dynamic shift is realistic and relatable." Baughan.N (2023).

Personally, my favourite part of the musical was the choreography by Aaron Renfree. Renfree, in my opinion, cleverly intertwined choreography into the musical by creating dynamic dance numbers while combining visually impressive choreography that complements the iconic music. According to Rebecca Donati, a writer for Theatre Scotland, "The choreography was 90's fun-loving, boy band moves! There was a good balance of simplistic steps which could be copied by the everyday fan and some more intricate dance moves that wowed the audience." Donati.R (2023). I believe this statement sums up a typical audience member's view of the choreography and from my perspective, the choreography is captivating without feeling out of place.

I would describe the musical's set and costume design by Lucy Osborne as simplistic which has proven to be controversial among other viewers. Rather than relying on extravagant sets, the production focuses on creating a character-driven experience. Some argue that this is an effective design choice as it allows the audience to use their imagination to create their own details of each location, therefore creating a more personalised experience. However, others (myself included) argue that the set created an un-relatable atmosphere with nothing to familiarise the audience with any specific location. In support of this opinion, Tom Layton states "The overall brutalist aesthetic might not resonate with all viewers, potentially affecting

their immersion in the story.” Layton.T (2023) To contrast, the costumes reflect each character's personality while also representing the 90s style. “The costumes acknowledge the contrast between each of their characters in their teen and adult eras - whilst also sticking to their signature colour.” Emmie (2023). While the outfits are brightly coloured, this doesn't distract from the performance and instead, symbolises the individuality of each character.

The jukebox style of *Greatest Days* differs from typical jukebox musicals. The songs aren't just covers of Take That songs, instead, the score consists of various musical styles and each song is reimagined to follow the storyline. “Take That's well-known songs are cleverly adapted by Steve Parry to have a more musical theatre feel to them and this works well to create emotion onstage. The show manages to show off some of the glorious harmonies and melodies of Take That as well as impressing with the concert-style large numbers.” Muir.A (2023). Each song has been modified and strategically placed which kept the storyline captivating.

I believe that the casting of *Greatest Days* was effective but occasionally, I found the performers underwhelming. This could be because the audience was small and I attended on a Monday night. There were some jokes which didn't land and a few slightly disappointing vocal performances, however, these moments were rare. Overall, the cast was amazing and particularly, the connections portrayed between the older and younger versions of the girls were very moving. Alan Stocks as 'Dave' stood out to me as a significant role. He multi-rolled for various small but key parts of the storyline. “Alan Stocks as Dave showcased versatility at its best, his commitment to his characters was stellar. Although his characters were repetitive and similar in nature, his use of accents, body language and humour kept them interesting for the audience.” Donati.R (2023). In my opinion, he was the most comedic character, every line landed successfully and made the audience laugh.

To conclude, initially, I was weary about watching this musical due to the stereotype that jukebox musicals tend to be cheesy, however, I thoroughly enjoyed the show. I do admit that due to being a Take That fan, my opinion may be slightly biased but on the other hand, both the music and the storyline are compelling and engaging. I believe that the production was, for the most part, successful. The energy was incredible and the musical evoked nostalgic feelings which fulfilled the intentions of the musical. The show received a standing ovation which suggests the audience enjoyed themselves, furthermore promoting that the production was a success. I think the production is 100% worth seeing. For me, it was fascinating to analyse the performance and learn how the performers adapted pop songs into musical theatre songs. I think it is a worthy watch for general members of the public as it was an entertaining show and there's something for everyone to enjoy and relate to. One final thought, I believe that the show was an excellent display of jukebox musical theatre and I would recommend it to those who have not yet seen the show.

Reflective Essay

Jazz Dance Class

Over the course of my first term at WAVDA, I have been learning about various different aspects of jazz dance. Dance is something I am very passionate about so it has been interesting to learn the different techniques involved throughout the style and to also study my own movements in detail to improve. In my jazz lessons with teacher Justin Sparkes, I have been preparing and learning specific exercises to help me improve my understanding and knowledge of different specialised and stylistic dance steps. During these classes, I have noticed a significant improvement physically and I feel that I have also gained a wide range of knowledge surrounding the intricacies of dance genres and technical elements.

During our dance classes, we have been learning a Fosse-inspired dance piece to the song 'Too Darn Hot' for our assessment. Bob Fosse was a significant dance practitioner whose choreography is used and idolised throughout the dance industry. "Visionary, intense, and unbelievably driven, Fosse was an artist whose work was always provocative, entertaining, and quite unlike anything ever before seen." B'Way (2017). Initially, Justin introduced us to Fosse-styled arms and hands, in particular looking at splayed hands and broken wrists. Due to my previous training, I am accustomed to demonstrating technical blade arms so Fosse-inspired hand movements didn't come naturally to me. To improve this, Justin taught me various arm exercises incorporating the use of splayed and broken wrists. I was struggling to maintain the techniques used for these arms so Justin gave me a cue of imagining laser beams coming out of my fingers which allowed me to visualise the exact positions my hands needed to be in. We then started to incorporate these arm exercises into more complicated sequences from the corner which embedded these actions into a combination whilst also travelling across the room using intricate footwork. I feel this exercise also helped to develop my coordination which is an essential skill for dancers. "Good coordination also helps dancers refine their technique by helping them keep track of both arms and legs during complex steps as well as allowing them better control." London Dance (2024) I feel this drill significantly improved my arm gestures as I was able to use muscle memory to retain my understanding of the style.

We then started utilising Fosse's style and incorporating it into a dance routine. The piece contained technical moves alongside the Fosse stylistic steps. While learning the routine, I noticed that I was finding pirouettes difficult. I realised that I was falling out of my pirouette and struggling to land cleanly out of it. To overcome this, I worked with Justin to try and find the route as to why I was finding them so challenging. Justin broke down pirouettes from the basics and we analysed each step to completing a successful pirouette. Justin and I discovered that I was leaning slightly to my left which was throwing me off balance. Justin identified that the reason I was leaning to one side was because I wasn't engaging my core enough which was resulting in my left oblique contracting and therefore, I was leaning to the left. I decided to study this further by additionally reading Dance Anatomy. "All of your turning movements require power through your torso; therefore, strength throughout the abdominals and obliques helps you accomplish more refined turns." Haas.J (2018). After relaying this information to Justin, he agreed with the extract and to conquer my pirouette stability, Justin gave me a core engaging exercise which involved laying on the floor in a pirouette position

and completing small crunches. This exercise is influenced by dance practitioner Rebecca Davies (RADAR Technique) and is designed to strengthen the core muscles whilst also perfecting muscle memory in a pirouette. "Rebecca has pioneered a technique and style of dance coaching which enables young dancers through to professionals to find their strengths and limitations, and to improve and enhance them." Davies.R (2022). After completing this exercise and also practising it at home in my spare time, I observed a significant improvement in my core stability whilst completing a pirouette.

After dissecting my pirouettes further, I realised that I was struggling to stay up on a high relevé which was hindering me from completing multiple turns. To tackle this Justin suggested some calf-raising exercises to help strengthen the muscles surrounding the ankle. He informed me that the gastrocnemius in particular was an extremely important muscle to strengthen to ensure a high relevé is maintained. "Since a pirouette is executed on one leg, it is crucial for a dancer to have strong ankles and calves to support their body weight. Strong ankles and calves help increase the stability of a pirouette tremendously." Amerson.T (2015). Over time, I felt that the calf strengthening exercises significantly improved my support through my ankles and consequently I was able to execute sharper turns.

To conclude, correcting my pirouette technique massively enhanced my overall performance of the jazz routine and Justin expressed that due to improving my pirouettes, he noticed that I was able to dance with more fluidity as I was no longer over-concerning myself with hitting the pirouette and was more at ease with performing the piece.

868 words

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