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Honors Thesis

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Thesis Reflection

Learning the craft of theatre arts cannot always be academically quantified. The way an artist measures growth is not by an academic test or final at the end of a semester, it is a cumulative growth that develops with the ability for the actor to tell the truth. This concept of truth telling is the reason that audiences are captivated when seeing an excellent film or musical and it is a harder concept to execute and learn than you would think. This senior showcase is a demonstration to show that I have learned the proper techniques to tell my characters truth and story through whatever means I need to as an actor; in this case, the medium is through song and dance.

I began my journey by being in shows at a young age in which I didn't understand the work and research that is necessary to successfully execute any character. I would receive a script or a song, memorize and then immediately perform. The art of being a successful story teller is not a one step process. It takes time digesting the text and researching and looking up words that are unknown. We are taught that each of us has to develop our own process in order to successfully perform in any role. In terms of my showcase piece, I have worked my comedic song just as if I had been working a dramatic play. All work should be given the same attention to detail. A seemingly brainless piece like "I wanna be a Rockette" involves research and effort just like any classic play would. Comedy is often harder to execute well because it involves higher stakes within ridiculous situations. My song is comedic because I am five feet tall and will never make it close to being a rockette, but my character in the song really believes that she will

be the first five feet tall rockette. Keeping that objective throughout the whole piece while people are laughing is much harder than you would think.

The specific bookwork that goes into performing a piece depends on the actor. Over the years of taking university acting classes, I have synthesized the information and I use the concepts that work best for me. I always read the entire script before performing a song in order to understand the nuances, tone, depth of the piece. If one does not read the entire script before singing one specific song, you can miss huge parts of the story and the meaning behind the lyrics. With "I Wanna be a Rockette", I still read the entire script of "Kicks: The Showgirl Musical", even though I am not doing the song in the context of the show. In the context of the show, the main character is tall enough to actually be a Rockette and the show finishes with her performing with the rockettes. After reading the script, the next step is to analyze the music underneath the lyrics. Composers purposefully design music to further the acting objective of the piece. As an actor first, singers have to note parts of the music where the tempo should slow down or speed up, where there are pauses written in, and when the accompaniment changes keys or adds significant incidentals (sharps or flats). In my piece "I Wanna be a Rockette" the tempo is written to be slow and in the beginning in order to build anticipation and gradually increases as the accompaniment becomes fuller. Another example of basing acting choices off of the music comes when there are specific rhythms in the music that I match my body language too. Having those elements specifically thought out makes for an interesting and entertaining performance. Once I have analyzed the music, I move on to the text. Depending on the song, I look up word definitions or places and I decide where the song is taking place, when, and who the character is speaking to. This is all important information because once you embody a character, it is no longer your personal given circumstances, the actor must mold to the

circumstances of another person. Once I have figured out all of this analyses I begin to actually sing the song and to work out its nuances vocally.

Singing a song while incorporating all of the acting elements above also takes more technique than one would think. It is not enough to just open your mouth and follow the notes. The breath needs to be activated, and the voice, the instrument, needs to be warm and ready to go. My number adds the element of dancing, so I have to constantly train myself to take good deep breaths or I can't make it through the song. Breathing technique is training process that occurs every day when I warm up my voice and practice. If one practices something so often, it will become subconscious in any situation. This is truly the goal of great singing. To practice until the motions become subconscious in nerve-racking performance situations. Now, I do not have to think at all about breathing or placement of sound because I practice so often that it just occurs. That is how Broadway singers sound so flawless in person, practice does make perfect.

Dancing is the third element that my piece uses, and it is necessary do to the subject matter of the song. I had to research the kind of dance moves that the Rockettes do, and copy that style in my piece. I have grown up watching and ogling at the Rockettes with their straight lines and perfect kicks, so I used prior knowledge and knowledge from youtube videos to form the style of movement used. From a technical standpoint, I also wanted to show that I am an experienced technical dancer so I wanted to show of a few turns and high kicks to show my ability for technique. Putting in these standard skills will show the auditors that I have a high technical level of dance.

Putting the elements of acting, singing and dancing together, is what really sells "I Wanna be a Rockette". Without one of them, the piece would fall flat and would not be entertaining. Each element is independently important, but in most acting scholars opinions, acting is the backbone and most important part of any song or piece. If there is no depth and

story being told in a piece, it does not matter how many high notes you hit or how many crazy dance moves you can execute, it will be bad. When I performed "I Wanna be a Rockette" I realized very quickly there are always a few women who connect to the song on a very deep personal level because they themselves wanted to be a rockette but it didn't happen for them. Regardless of being a rockette, ever person has a dream that they may not have achieved, or may not be able to achieve in their own life. That is why people connect to "I Wanna be a Rockette", and that result would not have been possible without the three technical elements of acting, singing and dancing.