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Artists Minigrant Outcome - Fall 2018
“Researching British Acting and Directing Techniques”

Over the period of January 7 - 12, 2019, I travelled to London to see a total of five professional theatre productions on the West End and at the National Theatre. This experience turned out to be tremendously impactful on my perspective as an artist in theatre and will definitely help shape my work as a director. As stated in my original proposal, the main goal of this project was to study the techniques of professional theatre artists in Britain, specifically those of each production’s director. This goal was very successfully reached and I can say that having seen and studied each of these productions, I now feel more confident moving forward as a director.

My findings

On January 8, I attended a production of the new musical *Hadestown*, which was directed by Rachel Chavkin. I had actually attended another of her productions before, and that production used immersive staging, which was wildly inventive, so I didn’t quite know what to expect from this production. While this production was not immersive, the first thing I noticed was that the staging and design choices gave the show an intimate feel, which was extremely effective considering the show took place in a New Orleans Jazz Bar. I also noticed that Chavkin had used staging choices that bordered on choreography and in fact seamlessly moved into choreography when songs began. This helped to keep the show lively and exciting, which worked extremely well with the music and setting of this show. For a show that requires the audience to feel continually engaged, these staging and choices proved very effective, and when directing a similar style show, I intend to practice the same techniques.

The next day, I attended the new two-part, seven-hour play *The Inheritance*, which was directed by Stephen Daldry. I had only ever encountered Daldry’s work on TV and film before, so I was interested to see how his techniques translated to theatre. Daldry’s directing was a stark contrast to Chavkin’s. He used a very minimalist, expressive technique on this show which worked very well with the script, which constantly changed settings and timelines. It was clear that Daldry felt the most important aspect of this show that would draw the audience in was raw emotion, and his staging choices brought this to the forefront. He essentially rejected realism entirely, and rather made choices that, while not noticeable to the untrained eye, were designed to make the audience feel the same emotions as the character. One of his most impressive techniques was how he made the audience feel the same loneliness that the main character felt simply by creating a crowded, busy stage, and then stripping it all away in a matter of seconds. Overall, Daldry’s expressive staging was very effective and gave me important insights into more modern staging techniques which I plan on exploring this spring when I direct a production of *Constellations* for Virginia Players.

Thursday I attended two productions. First, I attended a matinee performance of a revival of the play *True West*, directed by Matthew Dunster. In extremely stark contrast to the expressivism of *The Inheritance*, this production practiced “kitchen sink” realism. This choice made it more difficult to pick out individual directorial choices, but it was very clear that Dunster was very interested in the play’s theme of Western chaos. Every design choice became more and

more chaotic as the show went on, and even the characters' blocking, which begins slow and simple, becomes faster and more random as the show progresses. Overall, Dunster's decisions as director showed that directorial choices can be extremely subtle while remaining effective if done correctly.

Later that day, I saw National Theatre's production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, directed by Simon Godwin. This production set the classic Shakespeare play in modern day Italy and Egypt, with the characters acting as the world's wealthiest elite. This made the production visually stunning, which was necessary since the text of the show could easily be boring to some audience members. Godwin also used staging techniques that showed the clear power dynamics at play throughout the show. Specifically, he would only have characters move very intentionally and one at a time, which exaggerated the tension of the show and made it reminiscent of a chess board. Overall, Godwin's techniques worked well for a Shakespeare play of this kind and translated well for a modern audience.

Finally, on Friday, January 11, I attended a production of the play *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, directed by Marianne Elliott. I had seen Elliott's production of *Angels in America*, so I was interested to see what she did with this show, which was far more surreal than *Angels* was. The directing style in this was extremely effective at showing the inner workings of the main character's mind, which was especially important for this show since it was meant to give insight into how the mind of an autistic person can differ from a non-autistic person. In that sense, the staging and design choices for this show were aggressively visual, with every wall acting as a gigantic video screen, and props being used both for practicality and symbolism. The movement in the show was also very choreographed, which worked well to give the audience a feeling of order and chaos at different points in the show. Overall, this show gave me valuable insight into how one's directing style needs to vary based on the goals of the show a director is working on.

Overall, these five productions were extremely helpful in showing me how different directing techniques are used practically in professional theatre. I also learned especially how directing technique can, and should, differ based on the needs and of each show. I've also learned which directing styles most interest me and which I most want to experiment with myself. I intend to take all of this into account when I direct *Constellations* this coming semester and in all of my future projects and studies.

Expenditures

All prices in British pounds have been converted to US dollars.

Item	Cost
Show Tickets	
The Inheritance, Parts 1 and 2	\$114.39
Hadestown	\$69.90
Antony and Cleopatra	\$86.42
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time	\$22.88
True West	\$50.20
Subtotal	\$343.79
Lodging (4 nights)	\$91.51
Food	\$181.30
Travel	
Flight	\$500.80
Train, Stansted to London Central (Round-Trip)	\$51.44
Oyster Card Travel	\$22.13
Subtotal	\$574.37
Total	\$1,190.97
Anticipated Income	
Miller Arts Scholar Minigrant	\$500
Remaining Cost	\$690.97

The Arts Scholar Minigrant was used to cover the tickets to shows, lodging, and a portion of my flight cost. I am extremely appreciative the help of the Miller Arts Scholar program for making this opportunity possible.