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Artist Minigrant Outcome - Spring 2020

“A Study in Singaporean and Australian Theatre”

This past semester, I set out to learn more about international theatre by seeing two shows in Singapore, where I was studying abroad, and three shows in Australia. So I applied for an Artist Minigrant to help me do so. Soon after that minigrant was approved, the entire world went into lockdown because of the pandemic. Thinking (probably naively) that the world would somehow be out of a lockdown over the summer, I added an addendum to my original proposal stating that if I couldn't see international theatre, I would use it to see theatre in NYC. Obviously, that was not possible, and will not be possible anytime soon.

In an effort to use my minigrant for its original purpose, I used the funding provided by Miller Arts Scholars to buy tickets to see high-quality online theatre productions. This actually turned out to be very helpful, since I've now been forced by the pandemic to do my fourth-year directing project (also partially funded by Miller Arts Scholars) in an online format, so seeing professional online theatre gave me some ideas for my own project.

Project Findings

The first online production I saw online was Old Vic's live-streamed production of *Lungs* in mid-June. This production was interesting because it made a concerted effort to give the audience a similar effect to that of a theatre. There was a limited number of tickets available and although it was over Zoom, they made announcements about the show as if you were in a theatre. The actual production was live-streamed from the Old Vic in London, but with the audience being the backdrop and a stripped down set. The actors also stayed socially-distanced throughout the whole production, which made intimate scenes particularly hard to convey. The most “digital” aspect of it was that there were two camera angles that were visible at all times, with one camera on each actor at all times. This allowed for the director to zoom in and out on the actors to make it seem like they're closer together than they actually are, which I think was very effective. Overall, *Lungs* was as well done as it could be given the circumstances.

I then saw an online production of *Recovering Misogynist*, which was put on by Cambridge Junction. This production took a very different approach to online theatre. Instead of live-streaming from a stage, this show tried to adapt to be more film-like. *Recovering Misogynist* is a one-woman show, so the text actually became narration over black-and-white film. The B-roll complimented the words being said but didn't try to act them out, which I think was really effective, because it gave the viewer something to focus on visually during a primarily audio-based experience. The play was also very well-written, which definitely helped. I also noticed that the production didn't stick with one story for more than a few minutes, which makes sense for an online experience where people's attention spans are much shorter.

Finally, I saw three productions that were part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which was pushed into an online format. Rebranded as “Shedinburgh,” all of the productions were one-person shows performed from inside an indoor shed and were live-streamed over Zoom. The first two productions, *Status* and *Woke*, were one-person shows which were shortened for the online format. The final production, *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, was not shortened and ended up being pretty long for an online production. I found my attention span running out around 45 minutes. Overall, the big takeaway from these three experiences was how difficult it is to keep the audience’s attention during an online production, especially if there isn’t anything visually exciting about the production.

I have also bought tickets but haven’t yet been able to watch the Olney Theatre’s online productions of *The Humans*.

As I begin directing online for my upcoming fourth-year directing project, my reflections on these productions will prove to be very useful. I’ve definitely learned about what does and what doesn’t work for theatre in an online format.

Expenditures

Item	Cost
Show Tickets	
Lungs	\$72
Recovering Misogynist	\$20
Status	\$45
Woke	\$45
White Rabbit Red Rabbit	\$45
The Humans	\$35
Total	\$262

Online productions are notably cheaper than in-person productions, which is why the ticket costs are so much lower than I initially budgeted. I also didn’t have to pay for any other expenses, like lodging or travel, leaving a surplus. I plan to use the remaining funds to see more online productions over the next semester. I am extremely appreciative of the help of the Miller Arts Scholar program for making these opportunities possible.