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## **Personalized Training of the Voice and Body for Theatre: 4<sup>th</sup> Year Award Outcome Report**

### Overview

With my fourth year arts award, in order to enhance my training, I wanted to supplement my UVA drama course load by pursuing classes and opportunities which pertained to the many areas of my musical theatrical interests. Initially, I planned to put the grant towards two semesters of voice lessons through the UVA music department, either a summer musical theatre intensive or a selection of dance classes in New York City, and new dance/theatre materials and tools (ex: shoes, tights, etc.). I intended to seek out training experiences which would push me both as a performer and as an individual, discovering new things about myself that would expand my technique and range when it comes to musical theatre. Some of the specific goals I had in regards to the voice lessons and dance classes were to broaden my vocal range, strengthen my technique, enhance my breath support, add new songs to my repertoire, and learn dance combinations to have in my back pocket. While the specifics of the project shifted as conflicts arose here and there, thanks to the guidance of my faculty mentor, Tovah Close, I feel as if I have spent the past year delving into different areas of this craft, discovering new interests and strengths, as a performer, along the way that I hadn't anticipated at the outset.

### Faculty Mentor

My faculty mentor for this project was Tovah Close, a lecturer in the drama department. My first year at UVA, Tovah was my professor for Acting I. This is one of the drama classes that has stuck with me and influenced me most throughout my time at UVA, and much of that was due to Tovah's teaching. Whenever we did exercises or scenes in class, Tovah would prompt me with new choices that hadn't been obvious to me during my first attempts, or she would encourage me to approach the work through a new perspective, constantly nudging me to be more creative and thoughtful as an actress. Since she has been such an influential figure in my acting training, I knew that she would make a wonderful mentor for this specific project, and that she would have great insights into ways that I could adjust my plans if need be. At the beginning of the fall 2022 semester, I intended to take voice lessons through the UVA music department. After I had submitted an audition to be placed with an instructor, I was informed that there was no studio space left in the department. I was very sad about this and didn't really know where to go next since voice lessons had been a cornerstone of my project proposal. When I informed Tovah of this development, she immediately suggested a local voice instructor, Christina Fleming, to me, whom I reached out to about lessons. Ultimately, I began taking lessons with Christina and have been doing so ever since, which has been an extremely gratifying experience and relationship, which I owe entirely to Tovah. Without her advice, I wouldn't have known how to adjust my project, or where to look for positive alternatives.

### My Project

The first step of my project entailed figuring out which course of action would suit me best out of the two I had suggested in my project proposal. The first option coupled voice lessons

during the school year with a summer musical theatre intensive. As I started to figure out my summer plans, I realized that I wouldn't be able to follow this course of action, because I was hired for the job that I had wanted, and I decided that I wanted to prioritize working over the summer after I had been abroad during the spring. Therefore, the next step of my project came around when the school year began, as I started to figure out voice lessons. As described above, I had to adjust the plan that I had initially made due to lack of space in the music department studios. This is how I began taking weekly voice lessons with Christina Fleming in October 2022. Christina has been a wonderful match for me this past year, as I have worked to expand my vocal training. In addition to being a voice teacher, Christina is certified in Alexander Technique, which focuses on how body placement and movement can be adjusted to relieve tension and to best support our voices. Christina is always folding Alexander exercises into our lessons when I need a little more focus on settling into my body and connecting through my body and voice. As a dancer, I have always felt especially tuned into my body, and have felt a significant connection to my body when I sing, act, and play the flute. This year, Christina has been working with me on tuning into movements and placements that I fall back into when I sing, and on becoming more intentional in these physical decisions in order to support my breath support and vocal quality. It has been thrilling to learn about these relationships and to see how I can adjust and relax my body in relation to singing, something I would not have gotten had I not studied with Christina.

Another one of the most exciting and constructive aspects of these lessons for me has been the vocal warm-ups and exercises that I have learned. Christina is always teaching me new warm-ups which allow me to explore various aspects of my tone, and to expand my upper vocal range, which has been a long-time goal of mine as a singer. The warm-ups often aren't very intuitive or obvious to me as things that I would do to warm-up my singing voice, but I always have so much fun trying them, and often discover that they allow me to place my voice and sing in a way that I had never done before. Similar to this, I feel as if I have covered a fun range of genres in my lessons, from contemporary theatre, to more classic Broadway, to jazz. I have always loved jazz and been very attracted to the style of female jazz singers, so it has been really rewarding to be able to work in this style and try something I have always been drawn to. Another exciting aspect about working with Christina has been that I have gotten to do some gigs in the community through her studio, working alongside new accompanists and other students of hers. This has been extremely enriching as it has given me different kinds of performing experiences, and allowed me to meet new people, which is something I always learn from.

The second portion of my project didn't end up going as planned due to various conflicts, but I adjusted accordingly and have still learned a lot. I had planned to go to New York City for a week over winter break to take dance classes at Broadway Dance Center and Steps on Broadway, but I didn't end up having a continuous free week during this break, and only ended up going for a short period. During this trip, I took a musical theatre jazz class at Broadway Dance Center (BDC), which was an incredible experience. I didn't know what to expect, and was therefore really nervous, but the class ended up being really fun and I learned a lot. We did a thorough warm-up and then learned a wonderful combination which we kept performing over and over at the end of class since it was so addicting! The class was small, so I got a lot of encouraging and

constructive personalized feedback over the course of the class, which I always appreciate. Over the course of the class, my confidence grew and I felt very free to explore a character while dancing the new choreography. I came out of the class exhilarated, right into the heart of Broadway and Times Square, which is a kind of experience I have dreamed of since I was a kid. While I was only able to take one class, rather than the slew of classes I had planned on, I still think about that class and implement the strategies/pointers the teacher gave me that day when it comes to learning choreography fast in the context of auditions and show rehearsals.

The other aspect of my project involved buying new materials to support me in my musical theatre training, including new character shoes, jazz shoes, ballet slippers, and tights. Having functional and high-quality clothes to work in in rehearsals, workshops, and auditions is an important aspect of being successful and confident, so I have been excited to update my current supply and to purchase high-end products that I have considered getting for many years. Since I had more room in my budget than I had anticipated, I decided to buy some books that my classmates and I worked with in my acting classes in London last spring, which I had found really informative and eye-opening in terms of different ways to approach acting and performing. I hadn't gotten to read these books in their entirety, so I wanted to buy them so that I could explore them deeper and continually turn back to them as I move forward in my musical theatre pursuits. Overall, these materials have helped me to continue my learning in yet another way. I have always been very curious and I love to teach myself about random things outside of my school work, so studying acting resources in depth outside of a classroom setting is a positive experience for me as it allows me total freedom to focus on what I want and to explore different approaches comfortably.

### Outcome

The main outcome of my project has been that I have become more grounded and confident in my foundation as a performer. While I know that this isn't an experience that all singers and professionals have, I was always kind of insecure about the fact that I had never really had formal vocal training. Getting to take voice lessons this year and explore my voice in a private, totally personalized context has been an extremely gratifying experience, and I have found myself falling back in love with all of the things that the voice can do and with the process of exploring new vocal approaches. I have discovered that my voice has a lot more to it than I gave myself credit for, and that a lot of the "limits" I always assumed I had were mental. I am still working through those and relearning how to use my voice in order to access that new ground, but I don't know if I ever would have gotten there without private lessons, so I am extremely grateful. Through my BDC experience, I have also learned that I can hold my own in a new, challenging space better than I thought. As long as I approach the work knowing that I am capable, and willing to explore a character in the short amount of time we are given, I will be successful in my pursuits in that I have put my best foot forward. I am extremely proud of the growth I have made this year, and I am excited to continue implementing these lessons moving forward. I am forever grateful to Miller Arts for making these experiences possible and allowing me to continue following my dreams; this project has greatly enhanced the quality of my year and the depth of my training.

Final Budget

<b>Expense Category</b>	<b>Expense description</b>	<b>Expenses</b>
<b>Voice lessons</b>	Christina Fleming studio; lesson dates: 10/28, 11/4, 11/11, 11/18, 12/2, 12/9, 1/18, 1/25, 2/8, 2/15, 2/22, 3/1, 3/15, 3/22, 3/29, 4/5, 4/12, 4/19, 4/46, 5/3, 5/10	\$80/private lesson
	Total amount:	<b>\$1710</b>
	“Fly Me to the Moon” sheet music	<b>\$7.79</b>
	Pianist accompaniment fee (with Kevin White)	<b>\$25</b>
<b>Workshops</b>	Broadway Dance Center Musical Theatre Jazz class (12/15)	<b>\$25</b>
<b>Transport</b>	GoBuses to NYC over winter break	<b>\$93.99</b>
	Metro North → 2 ways	<b>\$10</b>
	Grand Central → Times Square subway	<b>\$2.75</b>
<b>Food</b>	Food & snacks during the day I was in New York for the BDC class	<b>\$43.78</b>
<b>Tools &amp; materials</b>	LaDuca character shoes	<b>\$263.50</b>
	<i>The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre</i> by Peter Brook	<b>\$12.60</b>
	<i>Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor</i> by Mike Alfreds	<b>\$21.44</b>
	<i>The Actor and the Target</i> by Declan Donnellan	<b>\$17.60</b>
	Tan Capezio jazz shoes	<b>\$48</b>
	Black Capezio jazz shoes	<b>\$40</b>
	Bloch ballet slippers	<b>\$18</b>
	3 new pairs of tights	<b>\$50</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$2389.45</b>