NAME; ASOGBON OLORUNJUWON

MATRIC NUMBER; LCU\UG\19\10066

LEVEL; 400 L

COURSE CODE; PER 411 COURSE TITLE; PRODUCTION WORKSHOP

LECTURER-IN-CHARGE; MR OLUWASIJIBOMI AKINSANMI

The Pre-Production

‘Once upon four robbers’ was in all an intriguing, and a completely impactful production, I learnt so much as an actor and as a directing student during the whole process. I don’t really know how it was for other students, especially for students in my level who have other courses as their major, but, for those of us whose area of specialization is directing, each of us were first asked to write and submit a pitch to the lecturer in charge, stating how we would have directed the play if any of us were picked to direct it, and that was the point my learning first started. It was my first time writing a pitch to direct a play, I had no idea how I was meant to do it, as a result I had to go out of my way to learn what it means to write and present a pitch, which is definitely a plus for me. It was in that process I learnt that writing a pitch is more like marketing yourself, your perspective and your creative ability as a director. Tenderlyn Iyamu, a 400-level directing student was picked to direct the play after we all wrote and submitted the pitch, and I lie not, it was great working with her. We started with auditioning, all students involved were asked to get copies of the script, read it and come back to audition for a role they would love to play. I first auditioned for the role of the leader of the thieves, he appears only in the first scene, was killed and that was his end in the play. That wasn’t the kind of role the normal me would have auditioned for, but because I was looking for a role that would give me a chance to focus well on my final year directing project, I picked it up for auditioning, I ended up playing another role because the lecturer in charge did not approve of it, he asked that I picked another role to play, and I chose and auditioned for the role of AAFA, which I ended up playing in the performance. We started the rehearsals process by reading and analyzing the script and the characters. The first two meetings we had were for script reading and analysis, and it occurred to me that, no matter how many times you’ve read a play, the general script reading that involves everyone including the director will always be of great help, especially in understanding the play and the characters better, and this is done, the better our understanding of the play, the better our understanding of the play, the better our performance. Rehearsals started on the 3rd of April and ran till the middle of June, and as we went on with the rehearsals, I understood the role I was to play more and more, and I got to know the character better. Playing the role of AAFA was fun and educative, but it wasn’t so easy. It was fun because the group of persons I acted with on-stage, the level of energy they gave right from when we started rehearsals till the day of performance really helped me on stage. It was educative because it gave me a knowledge of how the Muslims do their prayers and why they do it that way, before then, I had no knowledge on how their prayer is done, and that, I would say was one of the challenges I faced. Having to learn their prayer gestures, what comes before what and what comes after what, their prayer position and all was quite challenging. And to mention that I learnt it just a day to performance, but, in all, it was still fun. The character of AAFA doesn’t have a stable or a defined personality, one can hardly say what side AAFA really belongs. Sometimes he is white, sometimes black, sometimes black and white. When the four robbers meet him, he starts by disapproving their act, but ends up helping them become better and more skilled at robbery. He is dressed as an AAFA on the outside and dressed as an herbalist on the inside, he has his praying materials as an AAFA on the outside, but also has a praying material as an herbalist somewhere on his body. He judges ALHAJI for the exact same thing he does and calls her a hypocrite, meanwhile, he also is a hypocrite. As I learnt and saw these things in AAFA, the character became more interesting to me, because I knew it would contribute to my growth as an actor, and this is because I have learnt, as an actor, that, playing characters that are a little complicated helps one in becoming better at acting, it always has a way of making me stretch myself beyond my normal capacity as an actor. I also had to learn how to properly pronounce some Muslim terms, which was not really a challenge because I didn’t have to say much of them, the character of AAFA is not an ideal one anyways. One of the factors that also contributed to the passion in my performance is the central message in the play, I remember we had the opportunity to meet the playwright ‘EMERITUS FEMI OSOFISAN’ one on one while the rehearsals process was still ongoing, and we had the opportunity to listen to him speak too, one of the questions a student asked was for him to tell us what was in his mind when he wrote the play, and I wasn’t surprised when he answered and said the exact same lessons I had learnt by reading the play, he explained how the situation in the country, then, inspired him to write the play, how there was a very high level of robbery in the country, how thieves were taken to the bar beach to be killed nearly every weekend, and how the constant killing didn’t stop the reign of robbery in the country, but made it rather worse. I remember he mentioned that, while everyone would have gathered, and while the soldiers would be getting ready to pass the judgement of death on the thieves, right there and then, the people who have come to see the thieves as there were being killed would have their pocket picked. Then he said that he wrote the play so people, the country and the government would understand that what would bring solution was not going to be the killing of the thieves, because apparently, there is not one person that is not a thief, including those who pass the judgement of death and those who made it a law that the judgment of death should be passed on those who steal, none of them were innocent. He said if there would be a solution, it would have to start from the top, if stealing stopped from the top, it would stop among the masses. As I listened and as he said those words I became really passionate about the role I took and the performance generally, I saw it as my only way of amplifying the playwright’s message and the director’s perspective which I honestly would love the whole world to hear.

The Production

This play was staged on Friday, 16th of June 2023, in Adeline Hall at 4pm. The initial time was 2pm, but we had to start at 4pm, because as at 2pm, we were not ready and we still had certain important things to put in place. We (the casts) were back stage for over an hour with the crew members before the play finally started at some minutes past 4pm. I remember a large number of us were not organized, and there was so much pressure before the lecturer in charge and the director called us together and addressed us. We all went to take our cues as the play started. It started well and was going well with me, but just as it was about time for me to go on stage, there was power failure and it almost affected my morale (because light really aids my confidence while I am on stage), but I didn’t allow it, I was determined I won’t let it affect my performance in any way, it was quite challenging as there was no longer the awareness of the theatre illusion in my mind. In other words, I was almost losing my ‘illusion consciousness’, it felt like I had lost the ability to make the performance appear real to the audience no matter what I did, I had to fight it. It probably was the reason I skipped a part of my character’s lines, I didn’t even notice I did until we got offstage and one of the actors whom we had just left the stage together told me, I felt really bad because the part I skipped is a very crucial line in the play, moreover, I hate to skip lines, I believe that every line that the director had dimmed fit to allow till the day of performance is a really important one and should be appropriately delivered. Just a few minutes after I got offstage, the power came back and I was super excited! I felt like I wasn’t the only one who had an issue with the absence of light on stage, and I can’t be the only actor who light aids his confidence on stage, and as a result I just couldn’t wait for the light to come back, and when it finally did, I could see the excitement not just on the actors’ faces but also on those of the audience, it was as though the illusion that had gone came right back. According to the playwright, AAFA is supposed to appear three times throughout the play before it ends, AAFA is the one who starts the story as a narrator, act (appear in a scene) as the story goes on, and then, come back as a narrator to end the story, but he only appears twice after the director’s interpretation. Another character (the leader of the thieves, who is killed at the beginning of the play) was given to do the narration at the beginning before he is killed, so, AAFA appears just twice on stage but says quite a lot. He appears in the scene where he scolds the robbers and still helps them, then he comes back at the end as the narrator to end the story. When it got to the part where I was to come on stage as a narrator and end the story, I started thinking; ‘what happens if the audience don’t respond’, because I was supposed to engage the audience and make them air their opinion about the play that is about to end, the playwright puts the audience in a position where they will have to choose between the robbers and the soldiers, the narrator is supposed to take their opinion and end the play according to the decision of the majority, but the director wanted us to end at just taking their opinions, and that was what I did, we ended the play where it was, after taking audience’ opinions. I got three responses and that was it. We ended the play. The audience cheered us and were asked to leave by the lecturer in charge as we started getting ready to be examined and corrected.

The Post Production

After the performance, first, there was this joy in my heart, knowing that the stress is now finally over, it has been over two months of consistent rehearsals and I just couldn’t wait for when it was all going to end so I can finally have little time to rest before exams, and immediately we ended and gave our bow, I felt so relieved on my inside. We all sat on the apron before our examiners. This part is usually the most interesting for me, and like our HOD said, it’s the most important. It’s the most interesting for me because I get to learn a lot when corrections are being made, and it wasn’t any different this time. I literarily learnt about every part of the theatre because every part was touched, directing, acting, stage management, set design, costume and make up, and casting. This is because corrections and complements were made on every part of the play. The examiners gave their comments, some of the actors were asked questions, the director was called upon and was asked a few questions, but the part that really stood out for me was when one of the lecturers mentioned that the HOD told him, while the play was ongoing, that he once acted as one of the soldiers in the play many years when it was staged in the university he attended, I wasn’t surprised, I found it rather interesting. The he told us that he was waiting for what the response of the audience would be when we asked them to choose between the thieves and the soldiers, he said if the audience had chosen either of both, that, that would mean that we did not communicate the central message of the play properly, he said if the audience can not pick any of the options we give them, then we have successfully staged the play. Fortunately for us, when AAFA asks the audience what side they would pick, I remember an audience replied and said ‘EVERYBODY’, and that was what saved the production, according to the head of department.

FUNCTIONS OF MY ROLE. (ACTING)

1. Interpretation of the storyline through the enactment of a character
2. Bringing alive the director’s vision and mental picture
3. Connecting the audience to the director’s mind
4. Audience entertainment
5. A storytelling tool for the director

HOW I CARRIED OUT THESE FUNCTIONS (Pre-production, production and post production)

1. Having an adequate understanding of the script and the character I played (Pre-production, production)
2. Availability for all rehearsals schedule (Pre-production)
3. Cooperation with the director (Pre-production, production, post-production)
4. Listening to the director (Pre-production, post-production)
5. Flexibility in the hands of the director (Pre-production)