

Behind the Curtain: Embracing Playfulness as a Performer

Introduction

Have you ever heard of someone majoring in Musical Theatre? Well, I am, and that is not a common answer. When people learn I am a musical theatre major, it always ends with an awkward exchange of “oh, what are you going to do with that?” or, “so you don’t have any homework?” Although misconstrued, theater is my lifeline. Where the air is buzzing with adrenaline, and every note sung carries the weight of a thousand emotions. People often have no interest in theater, but I am here to disprove that and help you understand the true power that it holds. In the world of theater, “play” isn’t just a word– it’s a way of life. Go through the journey with me as we explore the captivating experience of performing in a musical, where passion meets practice, and every moment on stage, and off, is filled with joy, laughter, and dedication.

The Actor’s Playground

Outsiders looking in often think that actors are just performing the same piece eight times a week. It is actually the total opposite. In the world of musical theatre, every performance is an opportunity to step onto the stage and play. From the moment the lights dim and the curtain rises, performers transport audiences to worlds of imagination, emotion, and curiosity. You may be asking yourself, what happens behind the scenes? What fuels the magic that captivates audiences night after night? Show after show? The answer to that is play. Performing in a musical gives you the opportunity to play, both in rehearsal and onstage. The last show I was in, Lulu in Cabaret, was the best play I have ever participated in. In a trio with my two friends, entitled “Two Ladies,” our song was never the same. Throughout the four shows we performed, the song was different every night. Although audiences think every nuanced move is choreographed, a lot of the choreography was just us playing with each other and having fun.

Setting the Stage

Picture this: a rehearsal room filled with actors, musicians, and creatives, each bursting with ideas and an eagerness to participate. The journey begins in rehearsal, and before that even. Rehearsal is not just for memorizing lines, perfecting choreography, and learning harmonies. Rehearsal is time to play with the script and score. My past and present directors always say to make big choices in rehearsals because that is where they can be truly explored. Rehearsal is the time to push boundaries, take risks, and make unexpected choices. I have always been told that an actor's job is to “make big choices.” As performers, we thrive on the thrill of the

unknown, constantly staying in the moment and enjoying the adrenaline of experimentation. You will always hear an actor say that they hope someone falls or forgets something on stage because that is when a show takes an exciting turn. In rehearsal for *Cabaret*, it was a constant time for play. I was a part of an 8-person ensemble, and all we did was fool around and improv. This process was the best rehearsal process I have ever been a part of because of the willingness to play and experiment with each other.

Rehearsal to Curtain Call

I touched on this subject previously above, and I want to delve in deeper. Rehearsing the same show over an extended period of time can feel repetitive, but it is during these moments that play becomes immensely essential. Each run-through of a show offers new opportunities for play, offering performers a chance to explore their character and any profound choices hidden beneath the text. Whether it is finding fresh interpretations of familiar scenes or improvising during downtime, the rehearsal process is where all the magic takes place. From rehearsal to curtain call, not a single song stays consistent throughout.

Balancing Discipline and Play

Although play is essential to the creative process of starring in a musical, it must be balanced with discipline. Musical theater is a hard industry, demanding precision, technique, and unwavering dedication. You do not want to be hard to work with; thus, it is important to understand the time in which play is appropriate. While learning blocking, music, or choreography, it would not be the best time for play. When rehearsing privately with castmates or doing a run through of the show, play is definitely praised. In rehearsal for *Cabaret*, I was always quiet and attentive while learning from the director. During my downtime, I would go with my trio outside of the rehearsal space and play with our song. We would try so many things, improvise so many things, and just laugh at ourselves for being silly. I believe that I balance discipline and play extremely well. I am not afraid to have fun and try something new, but I am also very observant and diligent during any rehearsal process. On another note, believe it or not, but performing in a musical is extremely stressful. Coupled with being a full-time student all day, it can be very difficult to be present during rehearsal somedays. This is another instance of when discipline is essential. When I am performing in a show, I need to be on top of my schoolwork to ensure I will have an open and free mind for the rehearsals and performances.

Beyond the Script

Believe it or not, the best thing about musical theater is that the musical does not end when the final bow is taken. Offstage, the bonds created during the rehearsal to performance process forms a tight-knit family. Cast is like a family. These relationships stretch far beyond the stage, providing support, camaraderie, and endless amounts of play. I see all of my cast members everyday and all we do is joke with each other and reminisce on our funny moments during the show. Just as the Addams family says, “it’s family first and family last, and family by and by.” That is exactly how it is for a cast family. We put each other first. We saw each other on our best days, our worst days, our sick days, our joyous days. From inside jokes to impromptu sing-alongs, the spirit of any musical I perform in lives on in any additional theatrical experience.



Photo Caption: Embracing playfulness offstage with fellow cast members making TikToks.

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- Musical Theatre
- Performance and Play
- Rehearsal Fun
- Family First and Family Last
- Performer
- Triple Threat

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Reference Links:

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2. [TheatreMania](#)
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