Top Class Theatre Studies

Christina Keen monologue transcript

*Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by Hugh Wheeler, from an adaptation by Christopher Bond.

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Monologue script from Act 1, pp.37-41

Spit it out, dear. Go on. On the floor. There's worse things than that down there. That's my boy.

Up there? Oh, no one will go near it. People think it's haunted. You see — years ago, something happened up there. Something… not very nice.

[Sings]
There was a barber and his wife, and he was beautiful.
A proper artist with a knife, but they transported him for life.
And he was beautiful...

Barker, his name was — Benjamin Barker. Foolishness!

[Sings]
He had this wife, you see,
Pretty little thing.
Silly little nit.
Had her chance for the moon on a string —
Poor thing.
Poor thing.

There were these two, you see,
Wanted her like mad, one of 'em a Judge, t'other one his Beadle.
Every day they'd nudge and they'd wheedle.
Still she wouldn't budge from her needle.
Too bad.
Pure thing.

So they merely shipped the poor bugger off south, they did,
Leaving her with nothing but grief and a year-old kid.
Did she use her head even then? Oh no, God forbid!
Poor fool.
Still there was worse yet to come — poor thing.

Johanna, that was the baby's name… Pretty little Johanna…
My, you do like a good story, don't you?

[Sings]
Well, Beadle calls on her, all polite,
Poor thing, poor thing.
The Judge, he tells her, is all contrite,
He blames himself for her dreadful plight,
She must come straight to his house tonight!
Poor thing, poor thing.

Of course, when she goes there, poor dear, poor thing,
They're havin' this ball all in masks.
There's no one she knows there, poor dear, poor thing.
She wanders tormented, and drinks, poor thing.
The Judge has repented, she thinks, poor thing.
"Oh, where is Judge Turpin?" she asks.
He was there, all right — only not so contrite!
She wasn't no match for such craft, you see,
And everyone thought it so droll.
They figured she had to be daft, you see,
So all of 'em stood there and laughed, you see.
Poor soul! Poor thing!

So it is you — Benjamin Barker. So changed! Good God, what did they do to you down in bloody Australia or wherever?

Your wife? She poisoned herself. Arsenic from the apothecary on the corner. I tried to stop her but she wouldn't listen to me.

You daughter Johanna? Judge Turpin’s got her. Even he had a conscience tucked away, I suppose. Adopted her like his own. You could say it was good luck for her…almost.

You're going to — “get 'em”? You? Some bleeding little nobody of a runaway convict? [laughs] Don't make me laugh. You'll never get His 'igh and Mightiness! Nor the Beadle neither. Not in a million years.

You got any money? Listen! You got any money? Then how you going to live even? Oh, you poor thing! You poor poor thing!

Wait! See? It don't have to be the sewers or the plague hospital. When they come for the little girl, I hid 'em. I thought, who knows? Maybe the poor silly blighter'll be back again someday and need 'em. Cracked in the head, wasn't I? Times as bad as they are, I could have got five, maybe ten quid for 'em, any day.

See? You can be a barber again. My, them handles is chased silver, ain't they?

[Interpretation Statement]

As a director, I have chosen to incorporate the colour red into various aspects of my performance. The red petticoat, symbolises both my characters hidden obsession with Todd, as well as foreshadowing the dark themes of death in the musical. My hair is the traditional red colour used in the original production, showing the characters overt, fiery personality. My skirts are hiked above the ankle to show Lovett’s unconventional but practical way of life. The ash smeared on my costume and used as meat when making the pies, combined with the burns (both old and new) on my arms show her inability to make pies, as well as foreshadowing her death in a furnace later on in the musical. At the end of the music I have incorporated crashing waves and thunder at the climax. This represents the inner turmoil of Todd as well as a reference to his recent arrival off a boat from Australia. The collar-like choker symbolises the master/pet relationship between Todd and Lovett. The black colour of the figures on the music box represent the wealthy at the party to show their impurities contrasting with the white, smaller figure representing Barker’s wife to show her innocence. The music box compliments my singing and heightened use of movement to convey the Musical Theatre style of the production.

As an actor, I have manipulated my voice by raising the pitch and giving it a harsher, piercing quality. Whilst singing, I have made the decision to add vibrato and use an operatic quality to emphasise the classical musical theatre style. Using my facial expressions, I conveyed Lovett’s infatuation with Todd my widening my eyes, raising one eyebrow, and making an ‘o’ shape with my mouth, especially towards the end of the monologue, this shows her curiosity towards the other character. I have added disgusting actions to my performance (like wiping snot into the dough) to heighten the comedic aspects, integral not only to this monologue, but to the entire show.