Top Class Theatre Studies

Sarah Bowers 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, one of them 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.   
Ah, but 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 thing, poor dear,   
They're havin' this ball all in masks.   
There's no one she knows there, poor thing, 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!

[Cackling laughter]

So it is you — Benjamin Barker. So changed! Good God, what did they do to you down there 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. You could say it was good luck for her…almost.

You mean, you're going to — get 'im? You? A bleeding little nobody of a runaway convict? Don't make me laugh. You'll never get His 'igh and Mightiness! Nor the Beadle neither. Not in a million years.

Have you got any money? Listen to me! Have you got any money? How you going to live even? 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 it. I thought, who knows? Maybe the poor silly blighter'll be back again someday and need it. 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, but…

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

[Interpretation Statement]

In my interpretation of Mrs Lovett from Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, I have remained true to the contexts of the original playscript setting the scene in London 1850, in the kitchen of Mrs Lovett’s Pie Shop.

The elements of theatre composition evident in my performance are variation and rhythm.

To convey Lovett’s complex motivations and the dark games she was playing with Todd, directorially I focussed on finding ways to find nuance and variation in the delivery of every line - through blocking and use of space, manipulation of visual and body focus and vocal variation in both the singing and the dialogue. My concious inclusion of the implied person is a vital aspect of my interpretation, as the stakes are extremely high and driven by each character’s agenda.

A music theatre audience expects to see conventions such as; song, dance, presentational acting, heightened gesture and energy, which I applied to ensure maximum impact. The decision to work with Sondheim’s music, although challenging, was a very clear choice. The score is busy and relentless in its timing, but its density in the imageric rhythms, melodic contour, shifts in tempo and musical climaxes could not be ignored as they supported my artistic choices and performance strongly. The manipulation of rhythm in both the music and the dialogue aided my interpretation; for example in choreography and the manipulation of prop.

The theatrical style of Gothic Horror is also inherent in the playscript with dark themes throughout – abuse, kidnapping, rape , revenge, murder, lies and deceit. Conventions include decaying settings, secrets, psychological and physical terror. I used these to feed my design choices, incorporating a dark colour palette in the minimalist set pieces and era-specific costume, which were also important in conveying Mrs Lovett’s low socio-economic status and her harsh life within the world of the playscript.

The major dramatic climax is the reveal of the razors. It is an integral moment in the musicals plot and hugely impactful for Todd and audience, so it was important to convey the climax as effectively as possibly. The razors symbolise power and revenge – important themes in the playscript. The choice to apply the theatre technology of a red LED within the razor case was to further emphasise the themes of revenge and the blood thirsty nature of the two central characters.