Top Class Theatre Studies

Discussion Forum Transcript

Thursday 16 April 2020
With Chief Assessor Richard Sallis
And performers Daniel Clancy, Juliette Milne, Max Harris and Olive Weeks

**RICHARD SALLIS [RS]**

Hi everyone, and welcome to Top Class Theatre Studies 2020, and the discussion we’re about to have with a few of our performers. I’m Richard Sallis, and I’m the Chief Assessor for the Theatre Studies monologue exam. I’ll be moderating today’s discussion.

As we begin our discussion we acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land across which we’re currently meeting, the peoples of the Kulin nations. We respect their Elders past, present and emerging.

Each year, Top Class concerts present some of the best work from VCE performing arts students, for the benefit of current students, teachers and the general public. In 2020, due to the disruptions of COVID-19, Top Class Drama and Theatre Studies were unfortunately unable to proceed as live concerts at Arts Centre Melbourne. And so, we’ve endeavoured to pull together an online version of these concerts. We’ve brought together today four performers who’ve contributed self-taped videos of their monologues, and in addition we’re hosting a series of conversations with performers about the process they went through to develop their work. We recommend that you watch the performances first, and then join performers for the following discussion.

And so now, I’d like the four performers today who are joining me to introduce themselves.

**JULIETTE MILNE [JM]**

Hi, my name is Juliette, I did Theatre Studies at Strathcona Baptist Girls Grammar in 2019, and I did the Mrs Lovett monologue from *Sweeney Todd.*

**MAX HARRIS [MH]**

Hi, my name is Max Harris, I was in year 12 at Bendigo Senior Secondary College last year, and I did the monologue of Sweeney Todd, from *Sweeney Todd*.

**DANIEL CLANCY [DC]**

Hello, my name is Daniel Clancy. I studied Theatre at Billanook College, and I did *The Encounter* monologue.

**OLIVE WEEKS [OW]**

Hello, my name is Olive Weeks. I graduated from Wesley College last year, and I did the monologue of Alice from *Carrying Shoes into the Unknown* by Rosemary Jones.

**[RS]**

Great, thanks everyone. The first question, a pretty important one that everyone has at some point in this process, is which character to choose. Juliette and Max, why a musical? And what advice would you give anyone thinking of choosing the musical option for their character this year? Juliette, could I start with you?

**[JM]**

Yes. I actually didn’t choose to do a musical as my first option. My Theatre teacher made us read all the plays and then pick the monologues we liked the most. She got us to perform them in front of the rest of class, and they’d say, ‘yeah I like you in that role,’ or ‘no that doesn’t really suit you.’ So I did pretty much every monologue except Mrs Lovett because I wanted to step away from musical theatre which I’d been doing for a few years now. I wanted to do something different. But people in my class knew I did musical theatre, so they said, ‘why don’t you just try the Mrs Lovett one? The other ones aren’t really clicking.’ So I tried it and they were like, yes, you have to do that one. So that decision was made for me, but I’m glad that it was picked.

And some advice to anyone thinking about choosing musical theatre. I’d say if you want to do something that has a lot of options, musical theatre is known for being very out there and non-naturalistic. So if that is the kind of thing that appeals to you, musical theatre is a great vessel for that. It also allowed me to put in a lot of my transformations, of character of time of place. I felt like I was able to weave that in pretty easily within the format of the song. I feel as though I would have had a little bit more trouble with that if I was just doing a straight play. So I’d say if you want to play around with transformation, I’d say definitely go for musical theatre, it really worked for me.

**[RS]**

Great. Thanks Juliette. And Max I could see you nodding your head quite a bit then, so how about you? How come you came to choose a musical?

**[MS]**

It’s a little bit similar to Juliette’s to be honest. It was very coincidental for me, I said to myself at the start of the year, ‘I’m not going to do the musical theatre one’. But then, it happened to be *Sweeney Todd*, and good for me because probably every day of Year 11 the year before I listened to *Sweeney Todd*. Like Juliet, I didn’t pick it straight away, I still did base research on every single play, and I still ummed and ahhed a lot about it, but I think it was the right decision. Like Juliet said it’s very good because it does lend itself to non-naturalism and you do get to explore an epic character, pretending to sing to miles away.

And advice I would give…I think a lot of people may go into a musical theatre selection assuming it’s just singing, which it’s completely not. It’s probably in my opinion twice as difficulty because you have to have the depth of acting as with all the other plays, but then you also have the element of singing, which has to complement the acting. You’ve got to do so so much research on the character and the playwright and every decision behind every little thing. It’s not an easy task. So if you are a brilliant singer don’t go into it just thinking ‘I can just sing a few notes,’ because it’s way more than that.

**[RS]**

Thank you so much Max. And Daniel, very different play for you, The Encounter. A play based on a real story, man lost in the jungle, and with this particular production sound plays such a major role. Even though you performed, was it some of the design aspects that interested, or was it the character himself, what was your starting point in terms of why you chose this particular character?

**[DC]**

Just like everyone, you always get the list of monologues and you kind of want to explore what you’re capable of, make sure that your choosing the right monologue. With *The Encounter*, I did all the other research for everything else, but there was just something completely different about it, that I’d never really encountered. Because of this sound element, it was so interesting, it’s a different way to approach theatre. We always feel like it has to be practical and imagined, but with *The Encounter* it’s all very sound based. I saw this as a massive challenge and I really wanted to push myself for my Year 12 exam. I went into it really scared and not knowing how to structure it, but I felt like that was an appropriate challenge and I just wanted to push myself.

**[RS]**

Thanks Daniel. And Olive, again a very different play, an Australian play set in the 1970s in a foreign country. At times very naturalistic dialogue, but also there are shifts in place within the monologue. So what was it about this particular monologue that really attracted you to it?

**[OW]**

Like everyone I did read through all of the monologues and I did base research for all of them, and there were some really great options. But when I read Alice’s monologue it instantly really resonated with me. I loved the language of the play script, as soon as you read it, I just got immediately drawn in. I could already hear her voice in my head. You know when you just read something and it clicks? I kind of just knew that was the one for me? It sounds like a cliché, but it was like that. I loved the rhythm of the language, I felt like it had such a flow to it, and I had this very clear image as soon as I started reading of what her character might look like. I felt like the image of the airport and these foreign, unknown places was so evident in the script, imagery was already coming to me and I got really excited, I knew I had to do that one.

Also, something that I was particularly looking for when I was looking through all of the monologues was room for deep emotional and psychological depth. That is what I am always looking for in a character and any work that I do, that’s what I love, I love that juicy stuff. For me I really wanted an opportunity to walk into that exam room and really move the panel and tell a story. I felt like Alice’s, it’s such an intense climate, the Iranian revolution, there’s so much to explore, so much emotional and psychological turmoil to explore, and that was evident when you read it. I really wanted to explore that. So that is mostly why I chose Alice.

I think it’s also playing to your strengths as well. I contemplated doing Mrs Lovett, because I do love my musical theatre, and I’ve always done that at school, and my teacher actually suggested Mrs Lovett – ‘come on, surely, I can imagine you in this role!’ But I just resonated more with Alice. And with musical theatre I just have this fear that I would get a sore throat the day before and not be able to sing, so I was just like, ‘I’m not doing that, I’m not giving myself that anxiety!’

**[RS]**

Next question! Obviously I’m talking to four performers today, so you didn’t choose the design option which is the other option for this task. That doesn’t mean that design wasn’t part of the performance. Could you just let us know a bit about what was a key design element that you incorporated into your performance. Juliette?

**[JM]**

I did set design in the first semester, and although I always knew I would do the acting for the monologue (that’s why I did the subject), I incorporated set design into it because I really wanted to, like they do in the stage musical and the movie of *Sweeney Todd*, I wanted to evoke the same place, but years before when all of the things Mrs Lovett is explaining happened. I wanted to keep it minimalist so that I could incorporate that transformation. I put the stairs there just so I could evoke this image of the room upstairs where all these events happened. I think that my experience in set design in semester 1 definitely heavily influenced my design in my monologue at the end of the year.

**[RS]**

Thanks Juliette. And how about you Max?

**[MH]**

For me set was a big one as well. I love so much in the book and the original production of *Sweeney Todd* how the industrial revolution and the evaporation of the middle classes, and the poor being abused by the rich and wealthy, I just love how that’s the backdrop for the play. They don’t directly talk about it all the time, it’s always there. I wanted to invoke that as much as I could in my 5mx5m space. I tried to have these dark themed colours, so everything’s really drab and dreary, which also worked as a reflection of Sweeney’s mind, about how he feels about London, coming back to this place where everything in his life went wrong. For me, set was the biggest design choice that I tried to incorporate.

**[RS]**

And Daniel, I’m going to guess that sound played a big part in your design. Would you like to tell us a bit more about that, and/or was there something else that you incorporated as well?

**[DC]**

With the sound, I wanted to be able to create that on stage in front of people. I incorporated the two along with my props. Having multiple props and multiple pieces around me allowed me to move around and adapt and create different and interesting sounds on stage. Also, with my monologue, there was so many things to consider, I would call some of the items down the front of my monologue my props, but I would call the main barrel the set as well. So you’re playing around with multiple production roles. That’s kind of the reason I chose acting, because you have that freedom to explore production roles alongside acting, which is just fantastic.

**[RS]**

Thanks Daniel. And what about you Olive?

**[OW]**

I did costume design for our play that we did earlier in the year, which was Marat/Sade by Peter Weiss, and I loved it, I had so much fun. Like Juliette I always knew I wanted to do acting/directing for the monologue because that’s more where my strengths are and what I was really excited about. In terms of design I did think a lot about it. From the start, even before I chose my monologue, I always knew I wanted a very minimalistic set. It may seem traditional, a bit conservative, but when I hear ‘monologue’ I just think of a chair, in a room, and an actor, and the focus is on the actor, and I really wanted to live that out for the exam. So when I decided I was going to do Alice, I thought, this is perfect, because the language is very realistic. I thought I’m going to keep it very minimalistic. I only had one chair, and in terms of props I just had a little bag, and my costume as you can see in the video is very simplistic as well. It’s just a simple dress, which was realistic in that it was an original 70s dress, it had the notable and typical collar of the 70s, I was either going to wear a shirt or a dress that had that clearly 70s collar. That was important to me, in terms of adhering to the realistic conventions. I made a clear directorial decision to have a very simple costume, prop and set, because I wanted the focus to be on the emotional and psychological journey; and I wanted the focus to be on my acting and how I use my body and the space and my movement to create the set, rather than having the physical set there. And I wanted that as a challenge to showcase my acting and how I can build that image for the audience.

**[RS]**

Thanks Olive. As you’ll remember, when you work on this task in class, one of the things you’re asked to do is do exercises and activities that give you a better understanding of the play as a whole, the scene that the monologue is in and then the wider world of the play. Starting with Juliette, was there anything that you did, an activity in class that the teacher took you through, or that you took yourself through, that you found was useful when developing your monologue?

**[JM]**

I’m quite a visual person, so I really wanted to have a clear image of what I would do. An exercise that really helped for me, it was really simple, it was just a visualisation exercise. My Theatre teacher made us all lie down on the floor and close our eyes, and she went into really really specific detail about what we saw around us, what the room looked like, she went into an incredible amount of detail. And that helped me form the initial image of what I wanted my monologue to evoke. If I found that I was straying from that and I didn’t know where to go next I did that activity again and that brought me back to what I wanted to express, what I wanted the audience to see when I was performing.

**[RS]**

Thank you. And what about you Max?

**[MH]**

Sweeney is very very different to me, so I felt like I needed to do a lot of exercises. I was in this weekly acting class outside of school, and in that I did a Stanislavsky character breakdown where I wrote down his social attributes, his physical attributes, his psychological attributes. Then I also did one for myself and compared the two, saw how I could connect the bridges. And then like Juliette I did a really in-depth imaginative exercise where you start closing your eyes and you try to feel every part of your body and try to imagine yourself in the bones of this character, and then you get up and you walk around and you try to imagine the world and how that made you feel. That was really really enriching for me, especially because Sweeney just hates London so much. It was a really beneficial exercise just walking around and pretending I was in that world, and getting so angry. Those two things really helped and I would encourage lots of people to do a breakdown of their character, and then also do physical imaginative exercises, I think those two pair really well together.

**[RS]**

Thanks Max. Daniel, you were nodding your head a bit there, what exercise or exercises work for you?

**[DC]**

It’s just like what Max was saying – that build up and that physical aspect. With my monologue he’s so drained and he’s so exhausted, you kind of want to understand how a character is normally as well. There’s that understanding and that contrast of their physical appearance. I remember we did this exercise where it was like, walk around the room, and then slowly adapt your physical body to the character. You would start with maybe your neck, and then your back, and then your arms, and you’re just building this character. I felt it was really important and really substantial to feel the character.

**[RS]**

Thanks Daniel. And Olive, what about you?

**[OW]**

Just thinking about the different exercises I was doing during the rehearsal process, and I think that, although this is not as physical as the other ones you guys have mentioned, something that’s really really important for me is really focusing on the script and the language. Because the language is so beautiful in Alice’s monologue, I think that a very very important and prominent exercise that I did throughout my whole process but particularly at the start, was reading through and just…I’m a massive highlighter of key words that jump out at me, and then writing all sorts of stuff on my page about what that means for her. Alice’s monologue is quite long, and I think for future students or students this year, if you get a monologue that’s quite long and it’s quite wordy, it’s a really important exercise to do – just to break it down and to hone in on what’s important in that section of the script. For me it made it a lot clearer in my mind about what Alice was doing in that moment and what she was thinking ,and her characterisation at the start, middle and end. There were quite distinct shifts throughout the monologue, and think that’ common in most of them. Focusing on the language and annotating the script in that way, and noticing how it changes and the language changes, and the character changes, that really provided a lot of clarity for me.

But also in terms of physical exercises, I think one of the first things that I really focused on was her voice. I spent a couple of lessons in the drama studio saying her lines in all these different ways. I was trying to do the typical Aussie accent, but I was like, ‘is that too far?’ I think for me, really trialling and experimenting with all different types of tones and vocal qualities in the first couple of days really helped me. Once I had a voice in my head of what she sounded like, it really really helped me. So, I would suggest that.

**[RS]**

Thanks Olive. With the next question, Olive I’ll pass back to you. Part of the task is to do dramaturgical research. Was there one piece of research that you did that really helped with your character, and where was that research conducted? Was it online, reading a book, seeing a movie, what type of research was it?

**[OW]**

The most important part of dramaturgical research that contributed to my interpretation, and probably the one I started with as well, was the historical and social context of the Iranian revolution. It was something that I was not familiar with at all. I love history, I studied history in Year 12, but that Iranian revolution was something that I really didn’t know much about. I used online resources, websites and YouTube – I love a good 5 minute summary on YouTube, watched many of them – on the Iranian revolution but particularly what it meant for a young Western woman to be in that situation. What I learned in my research for example was that during the anti-Shah movement and in the last days of the Shah (which is when this monologue was set) there was a lot of anti-Western values and cultural beliefs. Among the leftist movement that were going against the Shah, they denounced Western values and Western indulgences (is what the common word was). That was really really important in informing, well, if that’s how the rebellious population and the revolutionary population at the time, if that was the general view, what does that mean for Alice, being a young Western woman in that environment? It largely shaped my characterisation as out of place, alienated, anxious, feeling out of place, a very intense environment for her. That was a really important piece of dramaturgical research that contributed to my characterisation.

**[RS]**

Thanks Olive. And Daniel, what about you with your particular play *The Encounter*?

**[DC]**

Well, with *The Encounter* it always kind of comes back to sound. A really important thing that was complicated to wrap my head around. I still wanted to create the sound but I didn’t want to have technology to do that. I do use an audio file at the start of my monologue but I wanted it to be natural and onstage. Understanding the practices of a Foley artist was very important to me and made me wrap the idea around my head clearly. With a Foley artist they create sound for movies, so they’re always using obscure things, absolutely bizarre stuff to make sound, so that was a really important thing. And also understanding how people can make sound through objects, also exploring what objects can be used and also be politically and socially charged themselves was also really important dramaturgy information that I had to research.

**[RS]**

Thanks Daniel. Yeah, it’s interesting, because Olive’s talking about the context of the play and you’re talking about research into the stagecraft and the style of the play. And of course, we’ve got our two musical theatre performers, so Max, what was one piece of research that really helped you in developing Sweeney Todd?

**[MH]**

Like Olive, the historical and social context was really important, and I would advise every student to really study in that, because you need to understand and know so thoroughly the world that your character’s exploring. Also in the case of *Sweeney Todd* it was really interesting to explore the political context as well. Apart from that I really enjoyed watching the different adaptations over the years, because it’s been 41 years since it premiered on Broadway. One of the most special videos I found was an audio recording from 1978, of Stephen Sondheim and Harold Prince playing the score for the very first time to potential backers, and just explaining little things. It was the most magical little piece of research I could find, and they just explain little things and…I love Stephen Sondheim so much, I have a t-shirt of him!

Also the playwright’s context. Stephen Sondheim said when he saw the play and adapted it into a musical, was that he wanted it to be a musical and he needed it to be a musical, because he knew it could scare people, and that’s the thing – it’s a dark comedy. Once you understand that I think that sort of stuff clicks. I think, all the contexts, all the adaptations, you mix them together and that’s a good place to start.

**[RS]**

Great. And that playing to potential backers, that’s an awesome piece of research, I’d love to find that myself. And Juliette, what about you? Same play, but different character.

**[JM]**

I feel like I’m going to say the same thing as everyone else. But I have by notebook here, which I wrote everything down in, just looking through. Similarly to Max, the two most important things were other actors interpretation of the role – I looked at a lot of different productions and analyses of those productions and all the possibilities that you can approach the role in, Patti LuPone and everyone. And I think with the socioeconomic context I did a lot of research into the role of women in the Victorian era, which I found to be really interesting. Although Mrs Lovett is a psychopath and a villain, I think that it’s cool that in a time period when the stereotype of women was meek and mild and beautiful, she’s a gutsy, smart, kickarse female character who’s just so strong and bold and she gets what she wants. I thought it’s really cool to play a character, especially in that time period. Researching women in the Victorian era was a big part of my research.

**[RS]**

Thanks Juliette. To finish off I’m going to ask all of you a double-barrelled question. The first part of it is: did you encounter a roadblock along the way, and if you did how did you get through or around that roadblock. And secondly, if there’s just one piece of advice that you haven’t already given, that you would like to give to students who are working on this task this year.

**[JM]**

A roadblock that I encountered was when I first received the script and read through it and listened to the song, seven minutes seemed like a long time to fill. I was overwhelmed by what I would do with myself for the whole time. I had a vague idea of what I wanted the premise to be, but I was like, ‘how do I have enough actions and things to do for the whole song?’ So I started, in my first ever session with my Theatre teacher, I just imagined the setting would be Mrs Lovett behind her pie-bench, and I just had no idea what I would do, I was like ‘I’m stuck behind this bench, I dunno’. I freaked out. So I actually completely started from scratch again, removed the bench, and completely changed my set and just started with a tiny stool. That completely opened up so many more opportunities for me, and it allowed me to really explore the space more than I would have if I’d stuck with that rigid idea of what I wanted it to be at the beginning. I’m really glad that I didn’t stick with this idea so much so that it didn’t allow me to explore everything to its full potential.

Leading on from that the advice that I’d give this year’s students would definitely be to play around, because everything that I thought would be included in my monologue when I first started, pretty much everything changed, and it evolved into something that I didn’t think I would ever be able to do. I got a lot of help from my Theatre Studies teacher. I was so overwhelmed by it at the start, but I literally just played around tried different things, thought how would this feel, how would this look, and just let it evolve. Don’t be scared of trying any new thing, because some things I thought ‘oh, I don’t know if that’ll word’ and then I tried it and it just clicked. Try everything, and don’t limit yourself. It sounds cheesy but it’s true.

**[RS]**

Thanks Juliette, that’s really good advice. Max, how about you, a roadblock if you have one, and some advice.

**[MH]**

Oh, no, I was perfect from script to performan-…no of course, I ran into so many roadblocks! The first one is when I finally picked it, I was like, ‘oh this is fantastic, I’m a 17-year-old lanky boy, how am I going to be a brooding angry 40-year-old man’. And then it got to a bit where I went, ‘oh, the songs go for longer than the maximum time, what am I going to do?’ And then you can’t have an imitation of a weapon, and I was like ‘oh it’s a play about a guy with a razor, what am I going to do?’ And so I learned really quick I had to be adaptive and, well, I have to act, that’s how I’ll be a 40 year old man, and oh, I’m just going to speed up the song, and, oh, I’ll just use a garlic press with a brown piece of paper around it. It all works. You really have to be adaptive with any of the roadblocks. And then fine tuning of the little things – in my voice lessons sometimes it would just be four bars or this one line of lyrics that you’d just go over and over and over again because you just want to fine tune and get everything as perfect as you can.

And my advice would be practice practice practice practice practice! I think I sung my piece about 250 times before I did it, and you’ll get sick of it and you’ll hate it but if you’re awake and you’re breathing and you’re not practicing right now, go and practice! You need to know it back to front, you need to be able to recite it on your deathbed 60 years from now. Don’t just lazy practice it – practice the small parts, practice it in front of people. I started by just singing in a closet and that was no good because no one could see me, so then by the end all of us in the classroom were just loudly facing the walls and screaming and things. Basically just practice, is what I’m trying to say! And also with what I said about the roadblocks, if you practice a lot they’re not going to be there. Oh, and practice, did I mention that?

**[RS]**

Thanks Max, that’s great advice, and Daniel, what about yourself?

**[DC]**

I know I’ve mentioned this before, but I always come back to sound. The act of finding props to make sound and making them social and politically charged, making them themed to the intention that I wanted with my monologue, I found it so hard. I remember, with my monologue there’s a part where I’m snapping branches. I was like, ‘what the hell, apart from like lettuce, what makes a snap sound?’ I’m not just going to bring out lettuce and crush it, that doesn’t make any sense. I had to explore different ideas, I came up with the spoon idea thank god, that was a massive pain. That was really interesting, exploring and…always looking at the language as well, there’s always little bits where I thought, how do I want to create sound here or what do I want to use here, and then I just had to analyse the language a little bit more, and really focus on it.

Advice for Year 12s current who are about to do this, I don’t mean to seem really technical, taking the love out of theatre, but that framing statement. I remember as soon as we got into Year 12 and started that exam process our teacher was on our arse about each criteria and what you’re showing. It seems really like, ‘oh I want to act, and I want to do all these amazing things’, and we all really want to do that. But doing that technical part is super super important. And of course, always have fun with it, always. Because that’s the reason why we do this, we love it, and just because something’s a little bit hard, you just have to be really driven to do it. I had to really focus on what criteria I wanted to hit to get a score that I really wanted.

**[RS]**

Thanks Daniel, and to finish us off, Olive.

**[OW]**

My biggest challenge that I got to during the rehearsal process was, when we first started I was having so much fun, I was figuring out the character, yadayadaya, and then I got to this point where, because the language in the monologue is so inherently intense – I’m not sure if you guys have read Alice, or when you first did if you can remember, but it’s so instantly like ‘woah’. I got to this point where I immediately started the monologue at this place and at this energy level that was just a little bit too high. I still had somewhere to go, but it was too intense the whole time, that level of intensity was sustained the whole time, and I got to this point where I had to figure out how I can bury that, and how I can balance it out. I’m going to use some Theatre Studies lingo here guys – stillness and silence is important, and we need to use it. I think that that saved me a little bit in overcoming this roadblock. You need to have them, you need to have moment of bringing it back in, and to have those waves and the journey through the monologue, because it is long, it’s seven, eight minutes. You’ve got to have moments of quiet and moments of intense and moments of more internal, and more overtly intense. So that was a big challenge for me, figuring out where to place those key moments and which moments were the ones that I wanted to be really really impactful and really intense – because for me at the start I was like, ‘the whole thing’s intense! Where do I put it.’ So that was a big challenge for me.

In terms of advice, I already touched on my dramaturgical research being the historical and social, but I just think the research is so so important. And it seems like the boring stuff, and I know that when you get the monologue you’re like, ‘oh my god, I’ve done all this analysing of performances, and we’ve done the whole play, and I’ve just written that whole folio, and oh my gosh I’m so sick of research and I just want to act.’ But it’s so important. And your teachers are going to be like, ‘come on, dramaturgical research, let’s do it let’s do it let’s do it.’ I can’t stress enough how much it will help. Not only research into your social, cultural, political, historical context, but the playwright, research into the playwright is so important. I think it’s really essential to honour them, and you honour what they’re trying to say, because it’s their work and although you’re interpreting it, you need to read the whole play or listen to the whole musical and analyse it, and get the clues of why your character is like this during the monologue, inform that with your knowledge from the rest of the play. For example, in my monologue, at the end it jumps to a scene a lot later in the play – the monologue starts at the beginning and then it jumps to a part later – so that is an example of why you need to read the whole play and you need to know what character growth occurred and apply that. My character has a relationship with someone else during the play, and if I didn’t really hone into that relationship and what that meant for Alice, it would have completely changed the last section of the monologue. And even…there was one quote at the end of the playscript that Rosemary Johns has added, it’s something about absolute power, autocratic power – that one little quote just enforces more that it’s meant to be didactic and it’s political, and your research into the playwright and her other works and how they’re also political also informs that. I think that although the research can seem daunting and it’s not practical or ‘fun’ stuff typically, it will help you so much and you will find so many clues that will just make your monologues that much more meaningful and nuanced.

And yeah, just have fun, do what excites you, pick the one that makes you really really excited, even if you’re a little bit scared. I think that every single person here, our monologues were a little bit daunting, but just challenge yourself and excite yourself, have fun with it, because you picked this subject to have fun and do what you want – so do that!

**[RS]**

Great, Olive, and what a terrific way to end our conversation. Thank you very much Olive, Daniel, Max and Juliette for your nuggets of gold and your performances as well.

For those of you who are studying this year, as you’ve heard today, as well as being a highly enjoyable and creative process, it is a process, and there are many stages to it. And we do acknowledge the context in which you will probably be developing your monologue this year, which is a challenging context in itself. But, I think if you stick true to the monologues that you’re working on, take the advice that you heard today, I think that you’ll find that that’s a really sound basis for developing your own monologue this year.

Thanks very much everyone.