Top Class Theatre Studies

Max Harris 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

I beg your indulgence boy, my mind is far from easy. For in these once familiar streets I feel the chill of ghostly shadows everywhere. Forgive me.

Farewell, Anthony. – What is it? No!

[Sings]  
There's a hole in the world like a great black pit  
And the vermin of the world inhabit it  
And its morals aren't worth what a pig can spit  
And it goes by the name of London...  
At the top of the hole sit a privileged few  
Making mock of the vermin in the lower zoo  
Turning beauty to filth and greed...  
I too have sailed the world and seen its wonders,  
For the cruelty of men is as wondrous as Peru  
But there's no place like London!

There was a barber and his wife,  
And she was beautiful.  
A foolish barber and his wife.  
She was his reason and his life,  
And she was beautiful,  
And she was virtuous,  
And he was... naive.

There was another man who saw  
That she was beautiful.  
A pious vulture of the law,  
Who, with a gesture of his claw,  
Removed the barber from his plate,  
Then there was nothing but to wait,  
And she would fall,  
So soft,  
So young,  
So lost  
And oh so beautiful!  
  
Oh, that was many years ago...  
I doubt if anyone would know...

Now leave me Anthony, I beg of you. There’s somewhere I must go, something I must find out. Now, and alone. If you want me you may well find me at Fleet Street, I wouldn’t wonder.

[Sings]  
There's a hole in the world like a great black pit  
And it's filled with people who are filled with shit  
And the vermin of the world inhabit it...

Would no one have mercy on her? Not Barker! Not Barker! Todd, now! Sweeny Todd! Where is she? Where is my wife? Where is Lucy?

And my daughter? He? Judge Turpin.

Fifteen years sweating in a living hell on a trumped-up charge! Fifteen years dreaming that perhaps I might come home to a loving wife and child. Let them quake in their boots – Judge Turpin and the Beadle! For their hour has come. No money. I’ll live if I have to sweat in the sewers or in the plague hospital I’ll live - and I’ll have them!

Silver… yes.

[Sings]  
These are my friends.   
See how they glisten.   
See this one shine.   
How he smiles, in the light.   
My Friends, my faithful friends.   
Speak to me friends.   
Whisper, I’ll listen.   
I know, I know, you’ve been locked out of sight all these years.   
Like me, my friends.   
Well I’ve come home to find you waiting.   
Home, and we’re together, and we’ll do wonders.   
Won’t we?

You there my friend, come let me hold you.   
Now with a sigh, you grow warm, in my hand.   
My friends, my faithful friends.   
Rest now my friends, soon I’ll unfold you.   
Soon you’ll know splendours you never have dreamed all your days.   
My lucky friends.   
‘Til now your shine was merely silver.   
Friends, you shall drip rubies.  
You’ll soon drip precious, rubies.  
  
My right arm is complete again.

[Interpretation Statement]

I portrayed Sweeney as very psychologically removed, attempting to hit the perfect balance of anger, grief, depression and overall psychological damage he has developed over the last 15 years in Australian prison. Later in the production, Sweeney begins to murder people for revenge and because of this, I needed Sweeney to come across as vulnerable in the emotional sense, as to allow the audience to sympathise with him and to establish the forming of his character’s arc. I originally debated between giving Sweeney an Australian or British accent but I discovered that the Australian accent as we know it today wasn’t formed until just after the period that Sweeney is set in, and the British accent took away from Sweeney’s seriousness. I therefore decided to go with the American accent as donned by most major iterations of the character such as Len Cariou, George Hearn and Michael Cerveris. Being a character from Musical Theatre, I use musical theatre conventions such as movement, gesture and focus to adhere to audience culture and expectation. The era and setting of the industrial revolution and its subsidiary themes such as the exploitation of the poor and the evaporation of the middle class are in the DNA of the production and I wanted to replicate that as much as possible through my stagecraft, whether it’s the industrial shipping crate and wood pallet, the low-quality costume Sweeney wears, or the gritty instrumentation of the backing track.

My set is dark and gritty in their colour palette, working as a pathetic fallacy for the grim and depressed view Sweeney has on the world. The first half of the piece, I blocked Sweeney to move through the streets of London and used the crate as a source of elevation to apply emphasis to the importance of his wife’s absence in his life. The song ‘My Friends’ is intimate and romantic, following Stephen Sondheim’s advice in an 80’s masterclass where he stated that this is the love song of the show - between Sweeney and the razor. When acting with the razor internally emphasised the importance of the razor as his connection to his old life which he wants so much.

And the difference between doing it now and doing it six months ago in November is in November I grew my hair out for six months and now I have short hair. I wish kept it out longer, becuase it looked really good in the solo. But we have the short hair today. Thank you.