

GROWING IN STAGE MANAGEMENT

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While it is common for most kids growing up to look at a stage and have the dream of being a star, I grew up looking at a stage and wanting to be behind it. There was always a drive and desire to put on a show for an audience, but it was never from the perspective of performing myself. It was a drive to help another showcase themselves. As I grew older, the desire persisted, but the belief that it was possible was shallow. In college I found the career that allowed me to finally put this desire and dream into action. Stage Management immediately pulled me in and in doing so gave me the ability to be a theatre artist in every capacity that my younger self never could have imagined. This artform is one that is highly detailed and involves a tremendous amount of interpersonal communication combined with schedule keeping and being quick thinking. It is the art of keeping a well-organized excel document detailing every small component of a show with the knowledge that at any moment all that is written may change in a single moment. And then having those changes listed and sometimes predicted too.

Every stage manager is different in their approaches. My approach is to put the people I am working with first. When working on a theatre production, everyone is working on their own tasks to create a whole. They each have their own stressors, deadlines, and desires for the show, but also in their personal lives. Putting people first in this field for me means to constantly be treating those I work alongside with compassion and reliability even if things may not be going according to plan. I work to strengthen the bonds between people to build trust so that they can feel safe to come to me both when there is a problem, but also when there isn't. I believe that by

having compassion for others while simultaneously keeping everyone on track and held accountable is the perfect mix that holds a team together. By ensuring that the individuals feel seen and heard creates an atmosphere where creativity can bloom and the end results are beautiful. Just as they were in the productions I did for my Signature Honors Project.

The first production I stage managed for my Signature Honors Project was the world premiere showing of the new musical “Wild Heart” written by Chelsea Marcantel. Featuring music from artists such as “P!nk,” “Kelly Clarkson,” and “Weezer,” this show followed the story of Joan of Arc from her perspective as she fought to save the world as a teenage girl. As this was a world premiere show, I not only worked with the faculty and students of ECU as is the standard here, but also the producing company “Theatrical Rights Worldwide” and the playwright herself. This gave me an inside look into how a play, or in this case a musical, comes together and how that differs from a previously produced work. I had to learn new communication skills and verbiage to communicate with those not in the state to ensure that they also knew exactly what was occurring in the rehearsal space. As we rehearsed there were instances that the action on stage and what was written in the script appeared to have a disconnect and on occasion we would have to reach out to the playwright and ask exactly what she meant in her writing for us to implement, or even if we could alter the lines to fit better with how the characters were being portrayed on stage. It gave me a glimpse into what I am to expect when I begin working in the professional field when I will be working with more people that may or may not be present as a show is forming.

Over the course of the Wild Heart production process there were many ups and downs that occurred. Some occurred as I was learning more about how to better myself as an artist and some that were completely out of the control of anyone. One such instance was during opening

week when there was a snowstorm that not only made it unsafe to come in for rehearsal but also cancelled opening night of the show. While the run was meant run from February 19th until the 23rd, we were unable to open until February 21st and ended up running until the 24th with multiple performances each day to make up for the lost showings. While the situation was extremely unfortunate, now that it is passed, I am extremely grateful for it to have occurred. As this art is one that I am planning to continue in my career, I would undoubtedly be faced with an obstacle such as this again. By working with my mentor and others around me I have now learned at minimum the basics of what to do next instead of panicking due to the unknown. Overall, this production, while rocky in some places, taught me a tremendous amount and the result was well received by the audience members. It may not have been the most perfect thing ever or what I had imagined it to be when I started, but I am still incredibly proud of myself for the work I accomplished. This show in all my trial and errors has set me on the path of success by showcasing the areas I struggle in and can improve in along with the things I can continue doing as they work well. Which directly affected my work on my second production.

The second production I stage managed was “Dancing In The Streets: A Celebration Of Motown.” This was a dance concert that, as the name implies, took the audience through a journey from the beginning of Motown in a factory through the decades to celebrate the music, artists, and the impact that the genre had on the world today. Taking place from October 1st through the 5th, Dancing In The Streets was yet another first for both ECU and myself. Dance concerts occur frequently with a main showing every spring and fall for the public to view. However, in the past all the concerts have been a collection of works by different choreographers all focusing on different themes/subject matters. They would be presented in a manner that the stage curtain raises and lowers at the beginning and end of each 10–20-minute dance and the

show would continue until the final piece was shown with the dancers bowing at the end of their individual section. This show however is the first produced at ECU where the choreographers worked together to create a seamless flowing production that followed the same timeline and theme unbroken by anything apart from intermission. The result was a show that brought standing ovations and tears by many of the audience members as the entire building was filled with the feeling of connection and community.

After learning as much as I did in my first production earlier in the year, this final show process went by much smoother. I was much more confident in myself than I was prior which was shown in both my work and actions. With my first production I went to my mentor almost every day asking her what I should do in each scenario that I encountered. My inexperience made me anxious and I leaned on her like a crutch so that I wouldn't make mistakes. This of course led me to making mistakes anyways because by constantly looking for approval I wasn't utilizing my own skills out of fear that my instincts were incorrect. Only after the show had finished and closed did I realize that I was self-sabotaging myself and that I could trust myself to make the decisions. With this realization, I still went to my mentor when I needed additional support but the times became less frequent. My questions became inquiries on if she knew of anything I missed when following through on a decision rather than asking her to solve my problem entirely and give me the steps to do it. By changing to this approach, those that I was working with trusted me more which led to less stress on everyone involved. It also allowed for me to plan and find solutions for potential problems that had not yet occurred.

While mistakes were still made in my second production, and I still have much to learn and improve on, the growth in my communication skills and work is leaps and bounds ahead of where I began even at the beginning of the year. Seeing the audience filling in each night from

my booth above the auditorium brought a feeling of excitement and then pride as they interacted with the world I spent countless hours aiding in its creation. My younger self would be so excited to find out that sitting amid my excel files and script notations while calling on headset for the lights and sounds to change is the place I'm meant to be.