

UC San Diego Theatre & Dance Honors Thesis

Wellness in Stage Management: A Hospitality Table From Remote to Embodied Theatre

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In studying Stage Management at UC San Diego as an undergraduate, I have found that both remote and embodied theatre productions offer a productive learning experience for stage managers. My experience at UCSD has gone from working in fully embodied theatre, to exclusively working over Zoom, to hybrid productions, to productions back in person with strict policies surrounding COVID safety. All of these productions have taught me how to be a responsible and compassionate Stage Manager. Remote productions did not necessarily teach me how to call a show, how to set up a paper tech, how to schedule costume fittings, or how to run a technical rehearsal. These skills, I learned through embodied theatre exclusively. However, the remote productions on which I worked as part of the stage management team and as the Production Stage Manager taught me skills that are just as important as some practical skills such as running a technical rehearsal. These shows taught me how to apply soft skills such as empathy, understanding, adaptability, and judgment to practices such as supporting a director, supporting actors, prioritizing the mental health of the people in a production, and advocating for an equitable work environment. In this paper, I will draw on my experiences in both remote and embodied theatre, as well as research I have done on Stage Management as a practice, to argue that these skills developed through working in remote theatre are just as valuable to my work as a Stage Manager as practical skills learned through embodied theatre.

This paper will focus mainly on two productions for which I served as the Production Stage Manager. These productions were *Big Fish*, a remote production, and *American Idiot*, an embodied production. Both shows were produced by a student organization, Muir Musical, at UCSD. *Big Fish* was produced in Spring of 2021 - I was brought on as the PSM in August of 2020, and the show closed in May of 2021. For *American Idiot*, I was brought on in July of 2021, and the show closed in April of 2022. Both shows had eleven weeks of rehearsals and six

showings. Both shows had the same producer, Patricia Mahaffey. While this paper will also draw on my experiences from other productions on which I have worked, these productions with Muir Musical will be the main focus.

To begin, I will give some background to my work on *Big Fish* by explaining the skills I had already developed as an Assistant Stage Manager before I began working on the show. I had previously worked with Muir Musical for two years on two productions: *Hairspray* as a production assistant, and *Pippin* as an Assistant Stage Manager. *Pippin* was canceled after ten weeks of rehearsal - the next rehearsal would have been our spacing rehearsal in the theatre. The most important part of my stage management experience while working on *Pippin* was not any of the practical skills I learned. As an ASM, I was never formally taught how to take blocking notes, how to create an actor/scene breakdown, and I never was asked to assist with creating the Daily Call or scheduling fittings. Because the show was canceled, I never used the performance run sheet that I had worked on for weeks, and I never learned how to assist a PSM during a technical rehearsal. However, during every rehearsal for *Pippin*, the Production Stage Manager would ask myself and the other ASM, as well as the PAs, to set up the hospitality table in the rehearsal space. When our rehearsal spaces changed, it didn't matter where we were - we always set up the hospitality table. This consisted of hand sanitizer, a Brita filter, an electric kettle, cups, tea, vitamin tablets, and sometimes a snack such as pretzels. I disliked setting up the hospitality table - I did not think that it should be stage management's job to handle hospitality. I did not think that stage management should be responsible for providing this table to the cast, when no one on the stage management team used the table. It felt closer to acting as a servant than to being of service. Personally, I felt that my job during the rehearsal process was not entirely

important - I believed that my role was most important once the show moved to the tech process. I wanted to learn how to work backstage more than run a rehearsal.

However, when *Pippin* was canceled in March of 2020 due to COVID, I reflected on what my experience with this show had been. No one ever saw the show. Our last run-through had been in the basement of a building on campus with hardly any rehearsal props, no costumes, and certainly no lighting or sound equipment. I had spent that night working on the run sheet that never was used. So what did this experience mean? Had I wasted ten weeks of my life on a show that never saw the stage?

I thought about the hospitality table. That table was used every day by the cast. I always saw cast members drinking tea they had made with the kettle, snacking on pretzels, and using the hand sanitizer daily. As I thought about it, I began to realize that my experience working on this show was not null just because it had been canceled. If anything, the community that this show had created was important to me - I learned how to lead a room with grace and compassion, as exemplified by the Production Stage Manager whom I adored. By setting up a hospitality table every day, the stage management team had created a home base for the cast at every rehearsal. Whether we were in our preferred rehearsal space (a recital hall), a tiny classroom, a basement, a small dance studio, or in an even smaller dance studio with no extra tables for us to use as desks (where I worked on the run sheet on the floor), we had a hospitality station. No matter where we were, we had something for the cast so they could feel supported. It is that gesture of support, however small, that is so important to my job as a stage manager. Even when we go through our last week of rehearsals knowing that the show will almost certainly not happen, we can provide a small sense of comfort for the performers.

The idea of hospitality being the job of the stage manager is something that, in my research, I've found differs widely depending on who one asks. In researching the role of a stage manager in different aspects of a production, I asked those that I interviewed, "How do you go about supporting actors during a show?" One AEA Stage Manager I interviewed, Anjee Nero, explained her view on what it means to support an actor and, by extension, what stage management's role is in providing hospitality. She stated:

"I believe that the stage manager's job is to support actors in doing their work. I do not believe that a stage manager should serve the actor. If an actor needs help running lines or needs time to review blocking outside of rehearsal hours, I will do whatever I can to make that happen. But I stand firmly against washing actor mugs, getting them food, walking their dog, or any other personal responsibility of the actor" (Nero).

Nero's answer gives a clear picture of the difference between supporting an actor and serving an actor. She later stated in the same interview, when asked about hospitality, "I have never believed that hospitality is the responsibility of stage management...I'm okay to maintain the bare minimum of hospitality needs (i.e. tea, coffee, water) but that's it" (Nero). In understanding what it means to provide hospitality, I found that Nero's answer did establish that there is a difference between hospitality needs and hospitality wants. A need would include things that she mentioned: tea, coffee, water, and by extension maybe a mug to have these things in. These may serve as basic needs to provide hydration or caffeine that's important during long rehearsal hours.

However, other stage managers I interviewed had different views on stage managers' roles in providing hospitality. In my interview with stage manager Amanda Salmons, I asked the question, "If you were to set up a hospitality table for the rehearsal room with an unlimited budget, what would you include in it?" She responded by saying she too would include basics

such as coffee and tea for people to have. However, she also said she would want to provide, “...something to eat of nutritional value, for people who skipped a meal. Because there is always someone who needs something for their health” (Salmons). In Salmons’ answer, she focused on mainly what she also considered to be the basics, also believing that hospitality should not necessarily fall on stage management. However, her answer did provide an example of providing wellness, which she also emphasized as a need. Providing a hospitality table for actors isn’t necessarily about serving them, as I had previously thought while working on *Pippin*. It is about creating an environment where people feel they can have their basic needs met, to therefore feel that they are supported and can do their job most effectively. In general, this may just be coffee, water, and tea that serves to fulfill these basic needs. However, for someone who has skipped a meal, as Salmons mentioned, having snacks at a hospitality table, though difficult to maintain as a stage manager, might also be necessary to fully provide a space of wellness. This is especially true for an educational environment such as Muir Musical. Students who are not being paid nor receiving class credit to be in a show, may end up skipping meals and being low on energy when they come into rehearsal after a day of work or classes. In this case, while it is never technically stage management’s job to maintain a hospitality table, it is a gesture of support to actors that some like to provide.

Months after *Pippin* was canceled, I was offered the role of the Production Stage Manager for *Big Fish*. The director of the show, Kevin Kubo, had been the assistant director for *Pippin*, and had seen and experienced the devastation of the company when the show was canceled. I had worked previously on one remote production in the spring of 2020, *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play* with the UCSD Theatre Department. However, Kubo did not seem to care that I had never been the PSM for a show before. He liked how I had interacted with the PSM of

*Pippin*. He liked that I was always ready to do what was asked of me, and he wanted that for his show. His show, which he didn't know whether would be live and in-person, live streamed, filmed, or happen at all. He just needed a stage manager who was flexible and ready to work on the project, no matter how little we actually knew about it. He desired soft skills that, when I later interviewed him for this paper, he mentioned as being important to him. He defined soft skills as, “[Skills that] relate to actually connecting with people and working with people, not in a logistical capacity, and relating to the humanity of people” (Kubo). I then asked him what skills he felt were most essential for the production team to have during *Big Fish*. He responded by saying, “Empathy and understanding. Working in such a remote way meant you had to connect with people completely digitally, and had to be attentive to everyone’s needs” (Kubo). These skills are ones that, looking back on the production, he had needed from a production team, to support both the actors and other members of the production team.

When I went into *Big Fish*, I knew that these soft skills, such as empathy and understanding, were going to be of heightened importance in an online format. For college students in an educational environment, working on this show as an extracurricular activity, all during a pandemic, everyone involved needed empathy and understanding from others in the company of the show, regardless of whether they were actors, stage managers, the director, choreographer, or designers. As I have looked back on this production, I found that emotional intelligence and emotional competency, as explained by Daniel Goleman, are two skillsets that tend to include empathy and understanding. In his book, *Working With Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman explains how soft skills such as empathy can translate into a working environment only if one learns how to use them. He states:

“Simply being high in emotional intelligence does not guarantee a person will have

learned the emotional competencies that matter for work...a person might be highly empathetic, for example, and yet not have learned the skills based on empathy that translate into superior customer service, top-flight coaching or mentoring, or the ability to bring together a diverse work team” (Goleman 25).

Looking back on *Big Fish*, I have found that I learned how to use skills such as empathy and understanding to boost morale, set clear and reasonable goals, give grace and yet remain firm in my expectations, and offer tangible support to people struggling to get through the rehearsal period. This began with my stage management team, and extended to actors, the director, and other members of the company. When I had my first team meeting with the stage management team for *Big Fish*, I told them I had two goals for this production. One, to tell a story. After *Pippin* had been canceled, I had been reminded that theatre was not about creating the biggest spectacle, or knowing every last thing about moving scenery and props and costume changes - while our job as stage managers is to know this information, that is not why our work, overall, is important. The reason I did theatre was to tell stories. Keeping this goal in mind for the stage management team, I believed, was important to keeping up morale, which was so important in a student organization that had been dealing with low levels of morale since *Pippin* was canceled. My second goal, I said to the team, was to make this production a safe space for everyone involved. I couldn't give these actors a hospitality table, as we knew we would be on Zoom for rehearsals no matter how the show actually went up. But if I couldn't create a welcoming environment with a hospitality table, I could do so in other ways. I encouraged my team to do the same. This was my way of focusing on wellness. Focusing on wellness in a rehearsal space can only be done if one has empathy. Creating this safe space was done in a

multitude of ways that helped me later apply the skills of empathy and understanding to my work in *American Idiot*.

First and foremost, reading a rehearsal room, and adjusting my daily practices in running the room as the stage manager based on how people in the room were doing and how they were able to do their work, is a skill I learned during *Big Fish* that I applied to *American Idiot*. The pandemic did not just affect people physically by getting people sick and keeping us apart. It was a difficult time for people. I couldn't watch people mill about in the rehearsal room in the few minutes before rehearsal began over Zoom, but I could see who turned their cameras off while learning music or dance. I could see who wasn't engaging in tablework discussions. I could see who paced around their room while filming, and I could see who looked upset during rehearsal. In a way, Zoom was advantageous to getting a feel for people's energies. I had a full view of everyone in the rehearsal, as long as they had their cameras on. And, if a few people turned their cameras off during a discussion or while learning music, that also indicated to me that the rehearsal room may be low energy, low morale, or something else that I needed to understand.

In understanding that this was a difficult time for people as a whole, I found that it was an important practice to check on people during rehearsal. This, of course, is not necessarily something in the job description for a stage manager. However, this is a way of supporting actors, directors, and other production team members that was necessary in this specific workplace and time. In Goleman's book, he explains:

“...certain positions require specific competencies. For the best nurses, it's a sense of humor; for bankers, respecting customers' confidentiality; for outstanding school principals, seeking out ways to get feedback from teachers and parents” (Goleman 28).

In my experience with *Big Fish* and *American Idiot*, I found that in order to be a good stage manager for these specific shows, I needed to check in on people. It was a general need in the rehearsal space for both shows, for different reasons. For *Big Fish*, it was the remote format of the show and the general anxiety and stress caused by the pandemic, on top of the stress of being a student that each member of the company experienced. For *American Idiot*, it was the heightened stress of being a student, the strict COVID policy guidelines we adhered to, and the general fear that the show, like *Pippin*, would be canceled.

So, during *Big Fish*, I used the Zoom chat feature to check on people. I would direct-message them if I saw they were having a difficult time, seemed disengaged, or seemed restless. However, I also messaged them to show my appreciation for them. During this show, we had one actor who had been taken out of multiple musical numbers after they had not been keeping up with the material they were supposed to know for the show. I sensed they were upset about the development. While I knew the director and choreographer had made the best decision for the show, I wanted to ensure that this actor still had a positive experience in the production which was already not easy to be a part of. I messaged them one day during filming, telling them that I appreciated the hard work they were putting into the scenes they were in, despite their personal life and intense work schedule. These, I suspected, were part of the reason why they had a hard time learning their material for the show in the time we had. This went along with the fact that they were in the ensemble and did not have a lead role - because of the tight schedule we were on, and the director being forced to prioritize working with principal actors and not having the chance to work more directly with the ensemble, may have left ensemble members feeling neglected. Kubo acknowledged this during the production, and told me he wished he had more time to work with everyone in the cast to create a better experience for them. So, with this

particular cast member, I sent them that message. They responded by saying this meant a lot to them, and that they felt appreciated. For me, this was one of the most important aspects of my job - giving an actor a positive environment to work in, where they felt appreciated despite the challenges they had with the show. As a stage manager, I felt that for this show particularly, keeping up morale and caring for the actors was an essential aspect of my job.

One year later, translating this practice into embodied work was something I continued to find essential to my practice as a stage manager. In assessing the general workplace needs of actors in *American Idiot*, the continued stress of the pandemic, strict COVID policies, and a company comprised entirely of students who were not being paid or receiving class credit for their work on this show all showed me that in order to be the best stage manager I could, I needed to use empathy and understanding to check in on people regularly. When I checked in on people that I sensed were stressed, upset, or needed some form of emotional support in order to get through the rehearsal for *Big Fish*, this was always met with a positive response.

Translating this practice, however, was not always simple and straightforward. During rehearsals for *American Idiot*, the embodied nature of the production made it easier to read the room and adjust my approach to my work each day based on how people in the production were feeling. I could see how people interacted with others before rehearsal began, how engaged they were while learning music and choreography, and how much energy they seemed to have. However, when someone did seem to be stressed, upset, or disengaged, I realized I had lost the ability to silently and discreetly check in on them, as I used to do by private messaging them on Zoom. Through private messaging, I had learned how important it is for checking in on people to be private and not done in excess. It's important not to bombard people who seem to be upset if it is clear they don't want to engage. In Anjee Nero's interview, when asked how she supports a

director, she said, “I will do whatever I can to help make their job easier. It is not my responsibility to make their life easier” (Nero). This too can be applied to how a stage manager can approach supporting actors. While my work with Muir Musical, being in an educational environment among my friends and peers, is different in the sense that I am often a part of some members of the company’s lives in more ways than as just their stage manager, my job in the rehearsal space is to help actors do their job best. The cast of *American Idiot*, in my experience and observations, thrived when they were given some sense of emotional support by the production team, even if it was just a simple check-in that I performed. Oftentimes, a simple check-in that didn’t relate to any personal issues, and was simple a gesture of showing that I wanted them to be feeling the best that they could in the rehearsal space, and that was enough to boost morale.

It is also important to ensure that checking in is done in a way so that if someone does want to talk about the baggage they are carrying in rehearsal, they can do so in a safe and private environment. Because we were no longer on Zoom, I had a few options for how I could continue to check in on actors to see if they needed support. I could text them and hope they look at their phone, I could pull them aside during rehearsal, or I could check on them during a break. I found that checking in on actors during break was effective and generally appreciated by cast members. During most ten-minute breaks, I would look to see if any members of the company were sitting by themselves, if they looked lonely, or if they seemed especially worn down. I usually then went up and talked to them - if they seemed interested in having a conversation, then I would spend my break with them. In the times that I did this, multiple actors expressed their appreciation for this. Similarly, when I saw one actor who seemed to be falling asleep during a break, I asked them if they were okay or if they needed to go home if they wouldn’t be able to

continue with rehearsal that night. I did so quietly so that even among lots of people, our conversation wouldn't be overheard. They expressed to me that they were just tired, but they wanted to be at rehearsal and continue. After the run of the show, this same actor came up to me and thanked me for always checking in on them every time they seemed tired or stressed, as it made them feel cared for and helped them during rehearsal. Ultimately, I found that checking in on people in-person, during breaks, by simply talking to them and asking them how they were doing and having a conversation with them, was an effective way to keep people's spirits up as much as was reasonable in times of stress. The privacy of Zoom messaging taught me how important the element of privacy is to checking in on people during a rehearsal, and using my breaks to do so was an easy, gentle approach to helping others through the rehearsal process. Making sure these actors in *American Idiot* felt seen and supported was something I wanted to do not just as their friend and peer, but also as their stage manager - I wanted to help them do their job as best they could, and oftentimes a simple check-in was enough to help them do that.

In addition to supporting actors, another similar practice I learned in working on *Big Fish* that I could later apply to *American Idiot* and other embodied shows was how to support a director in tangible ways. One example of this was when Kevin Kubo, the director of *Big Fish*, had a family matter that he needed to take care of one day while we were supposed to film a scene for the show. I reached out to Kubo on the day this was occurring and asked him what I could do to support him. Since we were set to film that night, and our filming schedule was already very tight and we only had one day for makeup filming scheduled, we knew it was important to keep filming the show if possible. Throwing off the filming schedule by one day would not have forced us to readjust everything, but it would have taken away any wiggle room that our filming schedule had. We decided that it would still be best to film that night. That day,

Kubo had a multitude of props that needed to be delivered to actors living in La Jolla by that night so we could film for the next two days. He asked if I could come pick them up and deliver them so he could focus on his family matters that day, and so the show could keep running. I agreed, and drove to see him for the first time in-person during that rehearsal process to get the props. I then drove around La Jolla for five hours to get to different cast members on campus at UCSD and around La Jolla so they could have all of their props for the night. I got home right as I needed to log onto the rehearsal Zoom link to prep for the night, and prepared as I normally would for rehearsal. I had told Kubo earlier that if he needed to take the night off, we could film without him present as long as he was okay with us doing so. He decided to go with this plan. So, during rehearsal, I worked with the Assistant Director to keep filming going, and we filmed the scene that we were set to film that night with no setbacks.

Of course, it is in no job description anywhere that a stage manager is responsible for delivering props to actors, even for a remote production. However, in a student organization such as Muir Musical, jobs sometimes blend together, and what is more important to my job as a stage manager is to support the director in doing whatever miscellaneous job has fallen onto their shoulders, even if in the professional world, this work would be directed elsewhere. This adaptability to the work environment in which I am in is an important skill that I have learned in my time with Muir Musical that I first learned during *Big Fish*, and later continued to apply during *American Idiot*. While neither Kubo nor I had a job description that said we needed to deliver props to actors around La Jolla, this was a job that had landed upon Kubo as the director, and when he needed extra support in doing this job, it was important for me as his stage manager and partner in this process to step up and take over this duty for him at the last minute when he needed it.

In addition to supporting a director, another practice I learned during my work in remote theatre was how to advocate for an equitable work environment by prioritizing the company's mental and physical health over productivity. During *Big Fish*, Kubo and I made sure to openly acknowledge that we understood this was a difficult time for everyone working on the show. The pandemic and the lockdown caused family tragedies, financial troubles, and general stress and anxiety for many people. One thing I suggested to him early on, based on my experience working with the UCSD Theatre and Dance department, was to make rehearsals three hours instead of four, and to have a day off in the middle of a four-day rehearsal week. The theatre department had shortened rehearsals to three hours in Spring of 2020 when I worked on *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*, and this practice had continued as I worked on *The Nether* in Fall of 2020. However, while working on *The Nether*, during our second week of rehearsals, the director, Jim Short, found that many people in the company were already experiencing burnout. He, along with company members from other department productions that quarter, suggested that we take a day off in the middle of our five day rehearsal week. This, I found, greatly helped reduce Zoom fatigue and gave people time during the week to catch up on other things. Having this time off meant less time in rehearsal, but better rested and healthier individuals. Therefore, I proposed a similar plan to Kubo for *Big Fish*. We reduced rehearsals to three hours each day, and while Muir Musical generally only had a four day rehearsal week instead of five, we changed the days for which rehearsals were scheduled. Normally, Muir Musical holds rehearsals Monday through Thursday, with a few Saturday rehearsals sporadically throughout the quarter. For *Big Fish*, we had rehearsals Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, having Wednesdays off so people could rest and catch up on homework that day. This was especially important for production team members and some actors who were called to all or almost all rehearsals. While this did not

completely eliminate Zoom fatigue, it did keep members of the company from experiencing burnout so quickly in the production process. Taking away four hours of rehearsals every week definitely meant that we were on a tight schedule for the show - however, we were able to stick to this schedule, and individuals in the company felt better during the process and enjoyed it more without being so burnt out. In a collaborative essay written during the social justice movements that evolved during the pandemic, theatre practitioners offered these thoughts in regards to how those in the theatre industry can advocate for more equitable work environments:

“We should make a point of using breaks to de-stress, and taking days off, and encouraging those around us (particularly assistants, interns, and those without union protections) to do the same. By finding new ways to structure our production processes and taking care of the individual, we gain a multifaceted, well-rested, better-functioning, and healthier team” (Flores et al., 2020).

With continual focus on social justice arising during the pandemic, I have found in my research that advocating for the prioritization of people’s mental and physical health is not just my duty as a stage manager, it is my duty as a person who wants to dismantle systems of oppression within the theatre industry. Thus, the practice of advising the director on how I thought we could best prioritize and protect people’s health during this rehearsal process is one that I knew I would take with me into embodied work.

In returning to embodied theatre, supporting a director in tangible ways and prioritizing the company’s mental and physical health has been an essential part of my practice. In applying what I learned to *American Idiot*, I worked to make sure that my support of the Co-Directors, Erica Kahn and Meghan Ripchik, was adjusted to what they needed from a stage manager, which was different from what Kevin Kubo needed from a stage manager. Part of this was due to the

embodied nature of *American Idiot*, and part of this was, of course, due to the directors simply being different people with different needs. It was important that my skill of adaptability could be applied here.

One example of this support for directors during *American Idiot* was by being present to provide advice when it was needed. I did this not only to support the directors, but also to advocate for an equitable work environment that prioritized the company's health and safety. For example, part of my job during *American Idiot* was to help Kahn and Ripchik make the technical rehearsal schedule, as it was not a previously set schedule that we were given. It was their desire to have a talkback after one of the shows, which I did agree was a good idea and would be beneficial for Muir Musical as an organization. However, the desire was to have this on our two-show day, after the matinee performance. This made me reflect upon what practices currently, in the theatre industry, are allowed, even if many people find them inequitable. In the same article mentioned above, theatre practitioners offered this commentary on the idea of a ten-out-of-twelve:

“It’s an exercise in diminishing returns and unnecessary burnout. At least from anecdotal experience, the last few hours of the ten-out-of-twelve often lead to the most frustration, most slip-ups, and work that will need to be redone the following morning. By focusing on getting the most hours rather than the best work and fair treatment of workers, we’re putting people in a position to fail—on top of putting their health and safety at risk”

(Flores et al., 2020).

In addition to this, the article by Flores et al. (2020) provided examples and commentary on the lasting effects of long hours in the theatre industry. The article states that “long work hours and work-related stress to have adverse effects on a wide range of health impacts, including anxiety,

sleep quality, substance use, mental health, physical health, and injuries” (Flores et al., 2020). In order to create change in regards to these practices, this article explains that advocating for a five-day work week and eliminating ten-out-of-twelves is important to prioritizing people’s health, both physical and mental, while working on a production.

While in my position, I could not ask to no longer do a two-show day, I could ensure that we provided as much break time as possible in order to prioritize people’s health since we would be working for twelve hours that day. I advocated against having the talkback on our two-show day and thus shortening the break time. With the talkback, the crew would only receive an hour break during the day. While I personally think the practice of ten-out-of-twelves should be discontinued, in this case, I believed in this instance that if a twelve hour day was necessary, the least I could do was ensure that the company received an adequate break. I advocated for this on multiple occasions when discussing the schedule, and said that the crew needed to get as close to a two-hour break as possible. In order to support the directors while still advocating for this, I suggested other possible days for us to do the talkback after the show - these were all on days where we had one show only. These were also on days after we had had some time off. Our two-show day was at the end of nine straight days of rehearsals and performances. While this I did not have the power to change, it is something I am advocating for Muir Musical to change in the future. Regardless, at the moment, I supported the directors by offering alternatives, and supported the company by advocating for a more equitable work environment.

In addition, during *American Idiot*, I found that my skills of adaptability, empathy, understanding, and quick decision-making all were applied to the practice of prioritizing the mental health of the company during the show. One example of this was a rehearsal for *American Idiot* where we brought in intimacy and fight coordinators to choreograph the intimate

and violent moments in the show. This, I believe, is an important type of work, as it is always essential to create a safe environment for actors to work in when choreographing intimate and/or violent moments. I believe it is important for stage management to be present for this choreography, as stage managers should learn the skills to run an intimacy and fight call for any show for which it is needed, in a way that prioritizes the actors' needs. However, on the day in which we were choreographing the intimate moments in the show, I got a message from one of the Assistant Stage Managers, who was in another rehearsal room while the ensemble learned choreography for one of the dances, that an actor needed to talk to a stage manager because they were having a very poor mental health day and needed support. It was apparent that the actor would not be able to get through the rehearsal without having any support. In that moment, I had to decide what was more important for me to do: be present for the intimacy rehearsal, or help an actor through rehearsal. I quickly decided that I needed to support the actor so that they could get through the rehearsal day and wouldn't be alone when they needed to talk to someone. I also wanted to assess the situation myself to make sure that the actor was not in need of additional help in the moment that I myself or another student could not provide. I put my trust in the other Assistant Stage Manager to take detailed notes in the intimacy rehearsal so that I could step away. I ended up spending an hour and a half with the actor, the entire time that the intimacy coordinators were present. Looking back on this experience, I believe I made the right decision as prioritizing mental health is something that is not always convenient - mental health problems don't come up only when someone has time to deal with them. While my job as a Production Stage Manager is not to be a therapist, it is my job to help others through rehearsal each day. Whether that be talking them through their feelings when they need to be with someone and offering support, offering to have a member of the stage management team bring someone food

if they start to feel too light-headed to get it themselves, or giving someone the option to go home early if they feel physically or emotionally unwell, it is my job to ensure that people are supported throughout the process. This is not an easy thing to put in a job description, but it is essential.

In reflecting on this experience, I have found that a lot of what I did during *Big Fish* that I found to be most important was providing support for different members of the company for the show. In a practical sense, much of what I did was different than what I might do for an in-person show. For example, coordinating sending multiple copies of the same prop to different people who all handled it throughout the show is something that tends to not happen in embodied theatre, as a single prop can be shared. However, working on remote productions such as *Big Fish* taught me how to support actors and a director in tangible ways. Asking people how they are doing, if they need support, and if they need anything at all is something that creates a more welcoming environment in a rehearsal space. On Zoom, this is not something that can be done by setting up the room in a physical sense - there is not hospitality table to welcome actors into the space. However, being approachable, personable, and genuinely caring about the people with whom you are working also creates a space focused on wellness, not just production. This has the same function as a hospitality table, and can make a remote environment still feel welcoming and safe. Sometimes hospitality may not be the only thing that can support a production - a deep connection to the process and compassion can take its place. A hospitality table is about providing wellness, and *Big Fish* taught me how to create a space that focuses on wellness in a completely different, but also equally important way. In translating this to *American Idiot*, I found that it is not always so necessary to focus on a physical hospitality table, but to continuously focus on wellness and providing a safe space for people in other ways. Especially

in a time while COVID policies are still in place, a physical hospitality table is not always the most important thing to put my energy into maintaining as a stage manager. However, creating a culture of wellness in the rehearsal space is part of my duty as a stage manager and as someone who cares about creating a safe work environment that values people over product.

Overall, in studying stage management at UC San Diego, I've found that the skills which remote theatre offers to develop are just as valuable to a stage manager as skills that an embodied production would develop. The shows I have worked on in my time as an undergraduate in the remote realm have shown me how to use empathy, understanding, adaptability, and effective decision-making to perform practices such as supporting actors, supporting directors, prioritizing mental health over productivity, and advocating for an equitable work environment. After *Pippin* was canceled, I not only navigated a student organization that had been devastated by this event, but had also been pushed to online performances where no one could be in the same room together. This meant that my job as a stage manager was not only to make the show happen practically - it was to also help people through the process of rehearsals, filming, and editing. This includes emotionally supporting people during rehearsal. Through the shows for which I have worked on the stage management team, I have learned that prioritizing wellness is a way of providing hospitality for people in a production. While it is not necessarily something that can be written into a job description, cultivating wellness for people is something that is essential to being a stage manager. Focusing on people over product is always what is most important. A show is better if it is imperfect with a company who feels safe, supported, and cared for, than a technically perfect and ambitious show with a company who feels unsafe, alone, and used.

As I and other students move into establishing careers in the theatre industry, the skills I have learned through remote theatre are ones that I know I will apply to every embodied show I

do. Whether these skills are more emotionally driven, such as empathy, to help me better support people, or practical skills such as making paperwork, my undergraduate education is one that has made me into a more willing and capable stage manager because I was a part of four remote productions. I am now more understanding of what is essential to providing support for others in a production, as I have had to transfer the skills I learned in the remote realm into an embodied realm - thus, I learned to take the essential components of support with me, and this has made me into a better stage manager. Therefore, in the future as I continue to work as a stage manager on different productions, I will always go into them with three goals: One, to tell a story. Two, to create a safe space for everyone involved in the production. Three, to cultivate an environment of wellness. An environment of wellness is its own form of a hospitality table, one that can be provided in any medium for any production.

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