

A New World of Acting

Four theatre students tackle finding purpose through song.

From the moment they received their music, four theatre majors faced an unparalleled challenge: performing the musical “Songs for a New World” by Jason Robert Brown. In only three weeks, they managed to present one of the most satisfying productions of their theatre careers.

Starting in early June, theatre majors senior **Isabela Aronson** and **Nicolette Clivio**, and junior **Jaelyn Korkin** and **Alivia Adams** were given three weeks to block, memorize, practice, and perform the musical. The Academy, the acting program hosted by nonprofit theatre company Palm Beach Dramaworks, brought in professionals to guide the kids prepare the musical. “Songs for a New World” is a song cycle, a collection of different songs meant to be understood as a unit. The actors took on different characters at different stages in their life, which required the actors to find a personal connection and understanding of these characters and their mannerisms.

“Getting to find these characters and relate them to my own personal experiences in life was extremely difficult,” Clivio said. “When you’re able to pull back the layers and get down to the nitty-gritty of the piece is when the most truth and vulnerability shows.”

CHALLENGE ONE: HARMONIES

The harmonies were unusually complex, and the actors, Aronson, Korkin, Clivio had less time to rehearse together. They would record their own harmonies while at home and practice with the pianist to solidify them with the cast. Stage manager Alivia Adams played a major role behind the scenes. While the cast practiced their harmonies, she worked on calling the show, or cuing the sound, lights, moving parts, and other intricacies of the play.

“(Calling half of the cues) isn’t so normal since you’re usually calling a whole show,” Adams said. “However, since I was shadowing the production stage manager, Tyler Osgood, he had set up a way so we could get more practice calling the show.”

Adams also said she kept up with the blocking, which was challenging for this play due to its unconventional structure. According to the Palm Beach Dramaworks website, the songs deliberately cover a wide range of genres, from gospel to salsa, and even country.

“We collaborated through song to tell the story from birth to death,” Korkin said.

CHALLENGE TWO: UNCONVENTIONAL STRUCTURE

The play had no clear story and instead was a collection of songs linked together by a common theme: the celebration of life and embracing change.

“Every song has a deeper meaning than what is presented in the lyrics, and as an actor, it’s my job to tell that deeper story to the audience,” Clivio said. “When you’re working on pieces, you make choices, create circumstances, and sometimes they work, and sometimes they don’t.”

Even though it was the quickest production Adams has been a part of, she said that the final product was one of the smoothest and stress-free.

“I was extremely proud of the cast and crew and was so excited to show my friends and family the final product,” Korkin said.

THE PERFORMANCE

Three weeks later, the performance took place at Palm Beach Dramaworks from June 30 - July 2. Aronson said she walked away with many valuable lessons, such as the importance of digging into lyrics and finding meaning you didn't previously see. She was also satisfied with the final product and would “do it all again if (she) was given the chance.”

“The ‘new world’ is a new opportunity coming up for me in life,” Aronson said. “After all the struggles and hardships we all went through, there was going to be something truly beautiful at the end.”

By Ben Seelig