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MOVING FORWARD

Interviewed by Logan Cole Martinez, Maverick Theatre Company Student Dramaturg

INTERVIEWER:
The Maverick Theatre Company is exploring devised theatre with MOVING FORWARD. How would you explain devised theatre to an audience member who is unfamiliar with this type of theatre?

PROFESSOR EYER:
Devised theatre is a broad term that I take to mean, a piece created in a collaboration between the cast and creative team. There is no single author or composer of MOVING FORWARD. Even if one student came up with an idea for a scene or song, multiple people then began to influence how the idea grew into the final scene that the audience will see. This type of collaborative skill for young artists to learn. We came into rehearsal three weeks ago without a single word written for the show. Which is always terrifying in a devised theater process, but it is something that you learn to trust. The creative team and I are used to devising with actors in a studio, in person, so this was a new challenge for everyone. With the use of breakout rooms, we were able to put students into writing groups where we could pop into to work with each group for a period of time. To give you an example of our three-week process, I’ll talk about the title song that runs throughout MOVING FORWARD. On the second night of our rehearsals, Maria Wirries, our music supervisor, gave the cast a four-line verse that she wrote. We then gave the cast time to come up with their own three-line verse, that had to end with the last line that Maria wrote, “But at least I’m moving forward.” Every cast member came back with an amazing verse! In week two we randomly assigned students into groups of three, had them combine their verses together, and then compose melodies for their verse in a particular style of music (which each group came up with on their own). In week three, we discussed the theme of each verse and how we might record it for our final rehearsal. Each section of our show was created out of a discussion, writing exercise, or assignment given to the cast.

INTERVIEWER:
Is there anything you could explain about the show itself, or how it came together and what the process was like overall?

PROFESSOR EYER:
Since we are presenting a virtual season this year, it was a perfect time to try something new. I reached out to three artists in the Broadway community to see if they would be interested in helping a group of students devise a music theatre piece, on Zoom, in just three weeks. Austin Regan, Maria Wirries, and Donald Shorter Jr. were excited for the opportunity to work with the students here at UTA and to be creative (since theatre on Broadway has been shut down since March). Each person brought different skills to our team. I chose a three-week rehearsal period because I wanted to focus on process more than product. A longer rehearsal period might tempt us to re-write, polish, or second-guess how to deliver the best theatrical experience to the audience at home. What you are seeing is current, raw, and all created from our apartments and homes. We do not shy away from or make excuses for our virtual-theatre creation.

INTERVIEWER:
Is there anything that you think an audience member should think about or keep in mind while watching MOVING FORWARD?

PROFESSOR EYER:
I think it’s important to have context for the creation and purpose of the show. Though my research focuses a lot on social justice and visibility, one of my goals with MOVING FORWARD was amplifying the words of the students here at the University of Texas at Arlington. I wanted to make sure that neither the guest artists, nor myself, censored or shaped the beliefs held by the cast. Every word, scene, lyric, or song was written by students in their own words. The creative team were there to lead workshops, discussion, ask questions, and help focus what each student wanted to express. We are opening the season with showing what theatre can look like in the future at UTA. I am very proud of the cast and the show we created as a team. Their collaborative spirit and willingness to dive into complex conversations is inspiring. We hope you will enjoy seeing a brand-new piece of theatre. The cast and I are very excited to share our work.

MOVING FORWARD
will be presented for our audiences to access as a filmed and streamed production of the Maverick Theatre Company.
For full information, please visit the streaming site at https://theatre.uta.edu/boxoffice/

ENJOY THE SHOW!