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**Reflection on Participating in the 2022 Senior Play-
*Noises off***

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LOD - Senior Play

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3, 2, 1 cue!

“I am Amy Teng, the stage manager of 2022 FJU English Department’s senior play.” Finally, I can proudly say that out loud. My first theatrical experience is the 2019 senior play, *Golden Child*. It was so excellent that starting from then, I decided to join the senior play’s crew. I have joined the crew 3 times, and being in different teams really helped me as a stage manager a lot. As one of the leaders of three major teams of cast and crew (acting and directing, administrative, technical), I was responsible for managing the technical teams, including lighting, sound effects, translation, property, costumes, and makeup and hairstyle team. Three of us have been making preparations since July, such as auditioning, recruiting crew, choosing the script, arranging budget, and so forth. We chose *Noises Off* as our final decision. It is a well-known play written by an English playwright, Michael Frayn. The play is set to be in a two-story mansion, and it needs to show both frontstage and backstage to the audience. That is the most challenging part of this play. Since there are a lot of things happening during senior play, I will select the more interesting and crucial parts of those 6 technical teams to share. Starting from preparation period to the 3-day official performance, it will be written according to chronological order.

First, I would like to first talk about the hardest part of the senior play, stage design. I personally recognize this stage design as epic in the history of senior plays. To be honest, the scenery is not suitable for us. On the one hand, it requires a large amount of money to actually have stairs and enough space to walk on the second floor. On the other hand, in act 2, the stage

would be turned 180 degrees to show backstage. In other words, we need to transit the whole scenery while the audience is still in the theater watching the play. I came up with several ideas right after finishing reading the script, which all proved either too expensive or too dangerous to carry out. It was a nightmare that made me feel extremely regretful and unconfident at the beginning. People around me were confused about the decision that we chose this script. “Can we actually make it? What if we fail?” There were many uncertainty elements at that time. Fortunately, there were a lot of references for us to produce our unique one. Compared with other places where they performed *Noises Off*, Arens center is too small to fit a “two-story mansion.” Thus, we modified the scenery into a more delicate version. By narrowing the second floor and moving its stairs, leaving only enough space for the actors to walk one person at a time and putting the stair and the second floor in the middle. Smaller and not exactly “second floor,” but more practical and executable in our case. After having a sketch of stage design, the next step is to figure out how to actually build it. Initially, we were thinking about lowering the cost and making the scenery with cardboard and wooden sticks. For the second floor, we could utilize cubes in CFL to make it just look higher than the first floor. However, after taking safety into consideration, both making the scenery by ourselves and using cubes to build the second floor were rather unworkable because of the height and the stability. The cubes in CFL were too fragile, too short and too small. Everything seemed to go south, and a lot of work was stuck due to stage design.

Luckily, one of the most attractive parts of preparing senior play must be collaborating with friends. I must shout out to the property team, and especially the leader, Anita. She is the one who discusses the whole thing a lot with me. I mean, really A LOT. From big and small property lists to keep modifying stage design back and forth, I am glad it is her that was leading the team. Whenever I had a mental breakdown, discussing with her always made me feel better, for I know

we were progressing step by step, and haste makes waste. Rushing could not make things done. Thus, little by little, we dealt with headaches. There was a property company lending wooden platforms. By piecing together platforms and stairs from CFL, we decided to leave the scenery to the professional. The owner of the wood store was a kind man. Since we were on a very tight budget, he said that he would deduct expenses that went beyond our budget. That was the historical moment that the whole scenery finally had a prototype in my mind; it is also the main thing we did during the preparation time.

Secondly, I would like to talk about costumes and makeup teams during the preparation period. Two main problems of those two teams, the number of characters and their gender and age. The English department usually has a lack of male students. Therefore, when it was supposed to be 5 males and 4 females, we had only 2 males and 7 females. For the costumes team, they first needed to design each character's outfit in accordance with their imagination of how they would dress. Next step, buying and borrowing those outfits within the budget. We spent a lot of time borrowing costumes from friends and family to reduce the expense as much as we could. Moreover, there were also extra expenses like corsets or briefs. It was hard to keep everything within the budget, especially under the condition that there were accidents from time to time. I am glad that our friends really helped a lot, and the actors and actresses were also very helpful, for some of them were willing to buy those clothes by themselves (people who would wear their costumes in the future). Another challenge for them was to practice changing costumes in a short time, which required the actor and the costumes team member to cooperate with each other to ensure he could go on stage on time as another person. As for the makeup and hairstyle team, their biggest challenges were to have aging makeup and hairstyle and turning a girl into a man. Normally, we would have 2-3 times to try the official look to improve the overall look. However, to coordinate

with the clothing, my opinions, director's opinion, and the actors' opinions, makeup team members try makeup for 4-5 times. What's worse, people contracted the coronavirus one by one, which made it even harder to follow the schedule. In general, both teams were the teams that would need to prepare more before the performance, but they will be more and more relaxed with time passing by.

Third, I would talk about the teams in the control room. Starting from the middle, for the translation team, they were responsible for providing Chinese subtitles and changing the slides in accordance with the cast's lines. This time, the script was a little longer than we expected. Therefore, they spent a lot of time translating and discussing how to translate the authentic meaning. However, I think one of the problems was scheduling. The order was for the translation team to translate. Then, me, the cast and the director would review it, checking whether there was anything that can be improved. The problem was that the time for the cast reviewing was too early. They weren't very familiar with the script, or they hadn't figured out their ways to interpret their parts. Thus, this was the part where I suggested Naomie (stage manager assistant) think twice and make changes next year. The other challenge they had was clicking to change the subtitles, but this was more difficult to solve, since it was also related to the speed of the cast talk and whether they skip the line or not.

Another thing that was impressive was about the punctuations. Initially, we discussed whether we need to remove every punctuation, except for the comma. This idea was derived from Netflix subtitles. They usually don't have many punctuations to prevent navigating (or restricting) the audience to a certain way. Still, I forgot about taking repeated lines into consideration. There were a large number of repeated lines, which indicated that if we don't have punctuations, it would be harder for the audience to understand the script for those slight differences that were hard to

notice if they were unable to understand the lines. It was not until the week before the official performance that I noticed this problem, so the translation team, Naomie and I were rushing to change the whole file into subtitles with punctuation. The version with punctuation was much better! They also worked very hard on translating paronomasia. Some lines contain sexual implications, so it was hard to explain the underlying meaning and abide by the regulations of subtitles (under 13 words, two entries at most) at the same time. We finally decided to merely translate the literal meaning, leaving the audience to watch and comprehend by themselves.

Fourth, the left and right side of the control room, lighting and sound effects team. In my opinion, *Noises Off* doesn't provide enough space for these two teams. Videos of it on YouTube basically don't have any lighting and sound effects design. Nevertheless, I still hoped they could use their imaginations to design as much as they could. The final effects were awesome! It was much better with effects than those performances on the Internet, which were more plain. Me and the lighting team were mostly discussing when to add some effects; Miss Agatha would be in charge of actual implementation, for lighting equipment was so expensive that it needs years of training to be skilled in operating them. As for the sound effects team, their first main task was to choose the introductory music of *Nothing On*, which was used to set the tone.

Sound effects team needed time to adjust. Since it was very different between imaging and actual playing along with the performance. Searching for the right music was hard. We kept changing the cue sheet until the very last three days. We tried several pieces of music during practicing, and one of the most crucial points was to ensure the beat of the music wouldn't affect the cast's speaking speed. Comedy values tempo a lot, when the audience feels like laughing, when to say the next line. Music would play an important role in this. If the beat of the music is faster than the pace of the cast, it would not be helpful. Therefore, before the theatrical week (the week

before the official performance), me and the sound effects team spent a lot of time trying to play different music at different timings.

The essence of senior play was not only for the students to perform a play, but also for us to work and make good memories together in the last year in the university. If I say the process is smooth and joyful, that must be a lie. Some people were very good at complaining, but unable to do their job well. That was the time I felt helpless, for not knowing how to encourage them and explain everything that we were working to achieve to them. As a leader, I think I needed to be both soft and hard. It means to treat people with kindness and appreciate everyone's efforts, but also propose anything that is unreasonable or something that can be improved, pointing out which parts need to be modified or practiced more. In the theatrical week, I would need to show more "hard," calling people to pay attention and to be careful to not make the same mistake again after practicing. To condense everything happened before the official performance, I would say: chaotic. The scenery produced most of the problems, for it was too heavy to move and too fragile to use. It kept brokening, and we had been fixing it all the time. In addition to managing technical teams' progress, I was more concerned about how to cue accurately. This was very new to me, and the timing was tricky since if the action was our cue, when the actor acted differently, we may lose the cue point. That's why we needed to have a review after each practice and performance. It was the time for everyone to talk about difficulties they had and how to improve.

It is hard to make everyone feel joyful and satisfied with the whole arrangement, so some people would complain, but this is inevitable. I want to be a leader, so I need to take the corresponding responsibility, and this was undoubtedly included in it. People always say that teamwork during university is a miniature workplace, in which we can experience life after

graduation in advance. That is so true. There were people who worked hard and took senior play seriously; accordingly, there were people who weren't thinking that way. I learned lessons from different people with different attitudes. For those who, from my perspective, didn't take it seriously, I could also learn how to communicate with them. I haven't skilled in the art of communication, but I think being a stage manager makes me one step closer to mastering it.

Besides some brief interludes, the journey to make *Noises Off* was exciting and memorable. I am really grateful to people around me, especially those who have already graduated, Dubu, Sharlene, Deedee, to name just a few. They gave us a lot of constructive advice and also provided us with much mental support. Also, I really appreciated every team leader, Nicole Lee, Sophia Chang, Ora Cheng, Iris Kao, Crystal Ku, and Anita Ko. Each of them devoted themselves to the play, and they have been so responsible that we can never succeed without their efforts. There are a lot of people whom I am also really grateful to, including those who are in the actors and actresses team or the administrative team. I also wanted to say thank you to Professor Cecilia. Even though it was inconvenient for her to accept to be the instructor of senior play, she was still willing to help us. Furthermore, while we were stressed and hopeless, she encouraged us and it really made me feel more relieved at that time. Senior play taught me to value each chance to make new friends. It was a serendipity to be more familiar with those wonderful people. This is the experience I will never forget.

