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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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Reflection on Senior Play

It is my third time joining the stage crew and also my third time working on sound effects and music this year. Though I wanted to try something else, working in the sound effect team would be useful for my résumé and my future career since I am planning to study film scoring after graduating from the English Department. Also, I have certain skills in music that are helpful for the play; for example, I can compose music, know how to edit sounds and music, and know at least some basic operation of the audio console. Compared with many other peers in the English department, I know more about plays and have more experience in working as a crew. This was probably the reason why they chose me as the leader of the sound effect team. However, I had no faith in myself when I got the position. Firstly, though I was in the sound effect team twice, both times were guided by more experienced leaders and instructed by them. Also, while the first time I could only retain limited information out of everything to learn, the second time we didn't even make it to the final presentation due to the pandemic outbreak. Therefore, I reckoned that there must be many things I still need to learn, and this time I won't have anyone to depend on. Secondly, there are many things about music that cannot be fully and comprehensively expressed by words, meaning that it is hard to reach a consensus simply by "teaching" or "discussing". It's about musical taste and aesthetic sense, and it cannot be cultivated in a short amount of time. Thirdly, a large part of the duties of the sound effect team is to find music or songs that go well with the scenes, and searching for music can be quite difficult for a person who doesn't usually listen to

music in diverse genres. This worries me because I have no idea what my team members are like and how much they love music.

Before the first time we met, I pictured it and rehearsed my speeches many times, but when it actually took place, I forgot it all. Originally, I wanted to become a strong leader who can establish rules, plan schedules, and express oneself and one's ideas clearly and precisely. More importantly, I want to make sure my team members learn as much as they can during the process so that they won't feel their time wasted and will be able to work on sound effects independently after I graduate. However, when I started to stutter while I was just trying to introduce myself, I realized that I will never make a strong and powerful impression, and they probably think I am weird or something. Luckily, the following few weeks went quite well because they all understood what they were supposed to do and they all did great in finding sound effects. When questions arose they did not hesitate to ask me, so I had a chance to share with them a possible answer or solution. I soon realized that while I was answering questions I no longer felt unconfident or stuttered, but I began to feel like a true leader.

After a few times of meetings and discussions, I gradually learnt how to get along with them, and I became much more like a friend than a commander to them. However, something tricky happened. At first, in the course of searching for music and songs, I tried to be open in terms of genres because we haven't really decided how the overall music style should be like yet. I wished to see how they interpret the play based on the music pieces they provided, but then I found that most of the music were too different from each other that it was difficult to fit them into the same play. Also, I discovered that some of the music was found from some royalty-free music libraries, and I remembered telling them to avoid finding music from those libraries because of the unstable quality. Moreover, the music they handed over hardly reached

my standard. As a result, I contemplated how to express my thoughts to help them understand the concept without hurting anyone's feelings. This was truly a major task for me. Finally, I plucked up enough courage and requested an online meeting with them. I wrote down all the points I wanted to say and proposed them carefully. Though I was scared that I might put it too directly, they acted calmer than I expected and told me that they think they understand my concerns. So, slowly we reached a consensus, and we were all satisfied with the final choices of music.

We used to search for online free sound effects, but this time we realized that those we found sounded fake and that it was too hard to find the sound we were looking for, so it occurred to us that we could search for sound effects from movie clips or youtube videos. This turned out to be a really fun process because our target was the sound of Roger and Philip falling down the stairs, meaning that we had to watch a lot of videos that involve someone falling down the stairs. After we found some potentially usable sound effects, we tried to play it along with their performance, but those sounds needed further editing because they were either too short for the scenes or were mixed with other unwanted sounds. As the only person in our team who knows how to edit, I was automatically responsible for this job. It was actually quite fun and rewarding to apply my knowledge and skills in music to my project in the English Department, so besides this one, I thought about what else I could do with the music and sound effects, and I came up with a cool idea. I figured that since during Act II the audience are watching everything that happens backstage, and this means that they can't hear sounds from the front stage as clearly as in Act I and Act III. Therefore, what I could do is to edit every sound effect and music that will be played in Act II to make them sound like they come through a wall.

Soon the performance days were around the corner, we had to check that all the microphones worked and the volume of all the audios we were going to play were the

same. This might seem simple and easy, but in fact it is not. First, the actors and actresses didn't use headset microphones, but we still need microphones to receive their voices because the lighting and sound effect controlling booth need to hear their voices to be able to cue our cues, so we had to set up two shotguns (the name of a special kind of microphone) above the stage. Second, whenever there is a microphone, we have to pay attention to the volume and positions so that feedback won't happen. Third, we reckoned that since we already used microphones, why not send the sounds to the main speakers? In this way we won't need to worry if the actors speak loud enough. So now, we not only had to make sure that everyone in the controlling booth can hear clearly what the actors are talking about and make sure the audience can hear both the lines and the music clearly, but we also had to make sure that neither the voices nor the music were loud enough to cause feedback. In addition, we later on found that both of our shotguns were set above the downstage, but all the lines spoken during Act II are from the upstage center, where the microphone couldn't reach. Due to this issue, we had to move one of the shotguns to the downstage center and move another one to the upstage center so that both positions had microphones.

The final performances were quite stressful yet joyful. Although I could tell that many crew members lack enough experience in working in the theater, which was the truth, and the director and the stage manager were less harsh than the previous ones I encountered, the crew members did not become undisciplined or lazy. I would even say that the overall experience as a member of this time's senior play can be counted as the happiest of all three experiences. On the one hand, among the three plays I took part in, this was the only comedy. Though we all watched them rehearse for many times already, we never thought that seeing them performing on stage could be so funny and enjoyable. Not only did the actors improve significantly and even improvise a lot while unexpected incidents happened on stage, but I guess it was also

because we could well hear the laughter of the audience from the controlling booth. On the other hand, I was extremely thankful for having Terry, April, and Annie as my team members. They were so kind, caring, trustworthy, and willing to learn and try new things. Even though I always feared that they might not regard me as a particularly good leader because I sometimes made mistakes when I was nervous, they told me in the end that I gave them a sense of security and they were glad that I was the leader of the sound effect team.

