

Kathleen Nixon Prize Recipient Report 2019-20

Musical Theatre is famously one of the most difficult industries to have a successful career in. One of the primary ways to ensure as best a chance as possible in this, is to attend a world-renowned drama school. In December 2018, I auditioned for the MA Performance (Musical Theatre) course at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts in London, which is self-proclaimed as 'one of the best places in the world to train for a career in musical theatre'. The course only accepts a maximum of 32 applicants a year out of several hundred applications. 'The MA develops technical skills through practical classes, workshops and performances and is split equally between the three essential musical theatre skills: singing, dancing and acting'; it is extremely intensive and designed to get you ready for the industry within one year.

Achieving a place on the course was honestly a dream come true, but with it came severe financial cost; the course fees alone were £17,700. This is where the Kathleen Nixon Prize has been so valuable in contributing towards. It is clear to see what these fees go towards; each week we had over 36 hours of contact teaching time with a maximum of 16 students per class. Classes were varied and stimulating, and included things like acting, improvisation, approaches to text, voice, acting for camera, recorded voice, dance & movement and one-to-one singing lessons. As well as this we completed seven projects, including two book musicals, a play, a devised jukebox musical and showcase self-tapes which was sent out to industry contacts such as casting directors and agents. Due to COVID-19 two of these projects had to take place online, but Mountview was incredibly supportive and resourceful in ensuring we still received first class training. The year has been rigorous and challenging, but I believe has brought me up to a new level of professionalism both in my physical skill sets and in my attitude towards the industry.

As well as contributing towards course fees, the Kathleen Nixon Prize went towards the purchasing of additional materials, suggested by Mountview to have cost around £600. Some of the necessary materials the grant help me to purchase were a hand-made rehearsal skirt, dance shoes, dance wear and key texts such as *Actions: The Actor's Thesaurus* by Marina Caldarone and Maggie Lloyd-Williams, *Different Every Night* by Mike Alfreds and *Finding Your Voice* by Barbara Houseman. As well as this, the grant contributed towards the cost of professional industry headshots, which often cost several hundred pounds, as well as membership to Spotlight, the largest casting resource and invaluable for accessing professional castings and resources.

The performing industry is very much a community, as therefore it's important to support work within the industry, both to network and gain contacts through and to have an up-to-date knowledge of what's new and exciting. With help from the bursary, and encouraged by Mountview, I've been able to see some brilliant theatre in London whilst being on the course; some of the most inspiring have been *A Number* by Caryl Churchill at the Bridge Theatre, *Preludes* by Dave Malloy at the Southwark Playhouse, *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett at the Old Vic and *Cyrano De Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand and Martin Crimp at the Playhouse Theatre, just to name a few.

Despite the current unprecedented times I feel that, due to my time at Mountview, I am ready to take my place in the industry as it begins again. I have succeeded in securing myself a fantastic agent and feel excited for my future post-education, which wouldn't have been possible if not for the help I received from Royal Holloway and the Kathleen Nixon Prize.