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Hidden: A Solo Performance

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HIDDEN: A Solo Performance
Engaged Learning Final Project
By
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PROLOGUE: THE COMMENTATOR

(Stage is lit normally. Lights sounds of wind and people talking are heard. Actor comes onstage in heavy winter coat, carrying a notebook, scurrying back and forth on the stage to imaginary passerbys.)

How many of you have seen a street performance?
How many have stuck around til the end?
How much did you leave behind?
Can you describe what you saw?
Did you enjoy yourself?
What's been your favorite performance?
Did you leave money? Did you?
Did you talk to the performer? Did you want to?
Why do you say that?
What did you think?
You stick around 'til the end?
You didn't? Why?
Why? Why? Why? Why?
Why?

PART I: ACTOR

(The stage is dark. Sounds of a crowd. Blue lights slowly fills the stage as the actor comes on with aguitar case. There is no guitar inside. The actor speaks to the invisible people around her, playing her invisible instrument, making her invisible money.)

ACTOR

Thirty five degrees. Thirty five degrees. Christ. Thirty degrees. What? Yes, I'm getting set up now. Yes, I'll start in the next few minutes. Can you leave that there? Thanks. Thirty degrees. Twenty five freaking degrees. It's 9:58 AM in February and I've already been here for two hours. Made the pitch. Got a slot. Good start. I really hope these people are in the mood to listen to acoustic covers of 90's songs today. Ten degrees. Are you kidding me?! Shoot. I pick up my instrument. People pass. They pass. Those people shuffle quickly through the crowd, taking cover in the myriad of overpriced shops or Ben's cookies – God I Could use a cookie right now. I start. I sing. I play. I watch. I close

my eyes momentarily shielding my dry eyeballs from the frigid air. I sing. I sing. I sing. I shiver. Clink. It cannot be 10 degrees right now. Clink. Clink. Thank you. Thank you so much. I sing again. I look at my piggy bank in the shape of a large empty guitar case and make a mental note of notes and pounds and I sing louder.

(Lights change to a sharp spot on the actor. A bright pinlight.)

But what I really want is something I can sink my teeth into – be it chemistry between two people or some tension in the air I can grab hold of, reign in and sink in and absorb and devour and it will fill me up to the brim of my inspiration that really isn't all the way full all of the time out here.

(Lights back to full, blue, cold winter light.)

I sing. I really do have a great voice. Clink. I sing. I'm really am charismatic. Nothing.

(During the following, the crowd sounds go out and the lights change from a blue to a yellow, encircling the empty guitar case. The actor climbs in the empty guitar case during this speech.)

The nameless artist – though not always necessarily the self proclaimed artist – but an artist nonetheless (or maybe someone just simply cunning with magic fingers and a desperate disposition) pounds the pavement. Creates a space. Attracts a crowd of adoring tourists to be momentarily entertained. An artist. Art. Art?

Performing is not a privilege. It's a right.

They pound the pavement they pound the tile and all the while there is this peacock sitting in the corner. He's beautiful. He's colored in blue and green and purple and all of the in between iridescent colors. He screams. He shrieks. He spreads and flutters and all heads whip toward his splendor. He himself is a work of art. The nameless artist keeps pounding their pavement. And when the pounding continues or even when it stops in the middle of the night he spreads himself further.

(Lights snap back to cold blue winter light and the crowd sounds snap up as the actor clammers out of

her mind and out of the guitar case back to the real world.)

I'm still singing and I look down and it looks the same as it did two songs ago. I swear it seems like two years ago. I need to get a job.

I take a break. I breathe. I warm my hands. I sing again. Yes. Desperation is an art.

PART II: PEACOCK

(Lights change to a warm interior orange as the Actor gathers her things and exits the stage. Crowd sounds out. We hear the sound of a tea kettle. The Actor comes out with a mug, dressed in a flannel shirt, hair tied back, if necessary. English accent.)

Bloody Nora, glad I walked in when I did. The whole place could have been on fire. You've really never used a kettle before? Shame. Do you like it? It's Rooibus. I know, it's spelled funny, but it's like *roy-bus*. Rooibus. It's an African tea. My granddad loved it and it always helps calm me down.

(Pause)

Yeah, just a little stressed, yeah. Well, things down at the club are always stressful and that girl - you know the girlfriend I was telling you about - threatened to break up with me again today if I don't get it together, so -

(Phone rings. pulls cell phone out of pocket.)

So sorry, one sec - Hello? Yeah, it's - yeah it's me - Hang on, Alice? Alice, I can't really hear you -

(Stands on chair, behind chair, on the side of the chair and all parts of the stage, trying to find service.)

- What about now? That better? THERE you are. Alright. Talk to me. Mmhmm. Mmhmm. Yeah alright so just call down there and tell them you're on your way alright? It should be a short set tonight so no worries. Thanks so much, you're the best Alice.

(Hangs up. Turns back to his interviewer)

Sorry - we had our scheduled host cancel on us today so I was scrambling. Alice is pretty great. She's also an aspiring comedian and she does well at these things, so. It's good to give her the chance - to get out there a little, you know?

(Sits)

Is here okay? Alright. Camera on? Not yet. Right.

(He sips his tea. He taps his feet. He's comfortable but uncomfortable.)

Yes, ready. Um – Mark Rothman, president of the SPA. Oh, Street Performance Association. And owner of Top Secret Comedy Club in Covent Gardens. – Are you going to ask me questions or would you like me to just...talk? Okay, yeah yeah no worries.

(Waits for the question)

SPA is a small non profit organizations formed by just that – street performers. A group of us got together after the Westminster Council tried to eradicate us from Covent Gardens and move us to less populated areas.

(Listens.)

Oh, you know the old bullshit. Afraid we'd be a detriment to local businesses, a nuisance to tourists, etc. But we'd been there the longest. Street performers *created* Covent Gardens. It was our right to be there. We had to protect our right to perform in our space that we had made so sacred. So, we got a petition together, got signatures, got some suits and stood in front of the Council and presented our case. Our opponents went nuts. They didn't think we'd pull anything together. But we did. And now we're a part of the Council and SPA works with them and Covent Gardens to keep discovering new ways and better ways to incorporate street performance into this community. It was long and difficult but – it was worth it. There are a ton of people who only have this as their livelihood. It's important stuff.

(Listens.)

Right. Well – this is kind of a long story, but I started performing in my twenties. Me and a couple of mates decided it we wanted to try it. We all were interesting people, we had interesting talents so we just decided to take it out there to see what would happen. The

money was incredible. And I wasn't so well off at the time, and London is expensive – so getting out didn't seem like a terrible option, yeah?

(Listens)

Oh right – yes I juggle chainsaws. I used to be the highest paid street performer in the world. Now I've got a mate, this Spanish guitar player, who's beating my record – but that's alright. He deserves it.

(Continues)

But yeah, so – we'd travel all over with these acts. Really – all over. Testing out certain countries, seeing where we got the most hits. We went to Spain, France, Germany, China, India, Switzerland – you name it, we were probably there. Probably China was the best – and the currency you know, so I'd go to China and perform for a month or so, make a ton of money and then fly to India where I'd just live like a king for 3 or 4 months. It really wasn't too bad.

(Listens. Looks confused.)

Oh, well – not at all. No. I mean, any monkey could do what I do. It doesn't really take a lot of guts to make a fool of yourself in front of a bunch of strangers. Not for me, at least. It's the others – the stand up comedians, for instance who have the real guts. That, for me, is terrifying. But I respect it immensely. This guy I knew was a comedian and I'd watch him at his shows and think – Wow. I want to do that. He was just so confident, yeah? So brave and confident and famous for a period of time and I wanted to do that, to be a part of that. Street performing is very public but you can still be strangely invisible. Nobody knows you, nobody really wants to – they just throw money at you. Which is fine, because you know – My rent. My life, my rent my clothes, my rent, my rent, my girlfriend, my rent, but – getting up on that stage and either failing or succeeding is so noble to me. Paid or not, it's just noble.

(Listens. Chuckles.)

Um – I think it's an ego thing, honestly. It's like, you know when a male peacock puffs up to attract the females? He's really confident, yeah? Confident and regal and yeah. I want that. I sort of want to be that peacock so confident and sure of my abilities. Which is why I went ahead and opened this comedy club. That's my real passion. It's my baby. We just found this shitty basement in Covent Gardens and turned it into a shitty little comedy club that most people come to and like. It's growing, it's really great.

(Listens. Laughs.)

Oh God, yeah no I got up there once. The first time was awful. I made a total fool of myself. But I learned. And I'm still learning. I like to host because I get to practice. It's really good practice, actually. Yeah, so I'd like to say I'm fading out of my street

performing and into a full time club owner/ comedian. I mean, that's what I *really* want to do.

(Looks down. Smiles a bit. Looks up.)

Oh, it died did it? Shame. Well, I can keep talking and you can write or – yeah that sounds good. It's getting dark.

(Stands up.)

So just let me know when you want to meet again. This was great you know, I never really get to talk about this. Or delve into this or whatever. Anyway. Thank you. Yeah. You know where the tube is? Great.

(Waves.)

Talk soon!

(Phone rings.)

Hey, Alice – what's going on?

PART III: INVISIBLE

(Lights down. Actor changes into her previous costume. Sits in the middle of the stage with a ukulele. Wind sounds. Crowd sounds. Spotlight on her. She plays. Crowd and wind sounds at a low level. As she plays and starts singing, the crowd sounds slowly slowly slowly fade up. She sits in her guitar case.)

ACTOR

(singing)

See this here
Take me away
Sitting right here
Take it away

Never had a thing that I could call my own
Save for a thought or something not shown
Picked it up and told it to hide
'Cause that's what you have to do when you're mine

See me here
Take it away
Sitting right there
Take me away

Invisible people all over the place
Taking away some sacred space
Gentle, gentle, take your time
There's not reason to get out of line

Never had a thing I could call my own –
Save for invisibility which isn't –

(Crowd sounds at full. They swell. Lights
swell. She is bathed in white light in her
guitar case. Abrupt blackout.)

END