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Cellach Allen, Oral History Interview, 2022

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Oral History Interview with Cellach Allen (CA) conducted on November 20, 2022 via Zoom by EMU undergraduate Linus Babcock (LB) for You Li's Journalism 313 course.

Transcribed by Linus Babcock

LB: Alright, so first off, how did the pandemic affect your passion for theater?

CA: Well, at the moment when everything got shut down and we were just like, locked away for a long time, I feel like in general, it kind of went down because just I wasn't doing it every day like I was and it was just lacking. But then as time continued to progress, I started to miss it more. At first, I missed my show and I was like, man, I can't do this show. But I didn't necessarily like it, the break was kind of welcome, so I didn't necessarily miss the theater. I was fine with taking a little break, but as time went on, I started to miss theater itself and I would say then my passion went up because it was just something I didn't realize that I kind of needed to do. I knew I liked it, but then as time progressed, I kind of realized I needed to do it or something, some sort of performance type of thing. So I would say by the end of it, my passion for it went up.

LB: So I guess the absence of it made you grow fond of it. So along those lines, what did you miss most about theater production during the pandemic, specifically?

CA: Honestly, the people. All my closest friends were in shows with me and in that show with me, so seeing them every day not being able to see them every day was very hard. But other than the people actually about the show, I reased the chance to perform because we were so close and performing like, that's why you do it. So you're able to perform what you've learned and what you've worked on for the past month or so, a couple of months.

So I think what I missed is the people. But then in regards to the actual production, just performing, just being up on that stage and showing what we had to people.

LB: Nice. Do you think any form of theater could have worked during the pandemic?

Whether it was extremely separated or even, like some sort of, like, zoom or online type of thing?

\CA: Well, I know that Emu, for example, they did a Zoom production, and they literally had each actor go into this studio separately, and everyone had masks on, and then they recorded their lines, and then they left, and another person came to record their lines, and then someone edited it all together. Technically. Does that work? Yes, but I don't think it works. I don't think, like, that's not theater. I mean, they're doing the best they can. Like, no blame to anyone, but it's like, I don't think I honestly don't really think it could work. There are things that people can do, but I don't consider it to be necessarily like theater. Yeah, it's not really the same kind of performance at all.

LB: Right, so you wouldn't have been interested in performing in any sort of content like that during the pandemic?

CA: No, not really. Because 2020, was my freshman year here, and that's what they were doing, and otherwise I think I would have jumped straight in. But I didn't because I was like, I'm not about to do this online show, and I don't even know anyone yet...So, no, I wasn't really down with the online stuff. And I actually talked to I interviewed I'm taking a theater class, and one of my professors, I interviewed her for another assignment, and she was also like, yeah when we did the online stuff, I said, I want nothing to do with it. So even the professors were, like, affected them too. So I thought that was interesting that

she was not open to it. Yeah, I mean, it just doesn't really kind of work with that aspect of performance at all. It just kind of takes away from the whole live theater part of it.

LB: So initially when you were doing the show in high school and it got canceled, what was the main reaction from your other cast members and other seniors in your show when it got canceled?

CA: It was rough. It was just like pure despair. Like, everyone was just like, oh, man, there's nothing you can do about it. There's no coping or anything because, on top of that, you can't even hang out and mourn the show together. So it's kind of over like that. It was rough. Well, at first, no one knew how long it was going to go. So at first, there was kind of hope that maybe because at first it was like two or three weeks we had off, and then we'll see from there. And so everyone's like, alright, maybe we'll still get to do it. And everyone was kind of hopeful, but also sketched out at the same time. And then, yeah, everyone was pretty distraught about it. Until this day, whenever I see an underclassman who let's say this year is their last year in high school, they'll like, mention it to me. I'm like, yeah. And now it's like in a joking context. I'm like, yeah, thanks. But before it was not fun. Yeah, it's kind of sour that experience a little for you. Yeah.

LB: How did the landscape of, like, theater productions you were, like, aware of or I guess we're in kind of shift during the pandemic and when stuff starts to open up a little bit afterward?

CA: Well, so basically, what I said earlier about the online production, I know stuff like that was happening around, but for a while there was nothing. Like, for a long time, like months. I don't want to say a year, but it was a long time before anything happened at all. And when it started to happen, it was online. And then from there, people had to be at

least Eastern, and people had to be masked while performing, so you can't even see their faces. So that's a big part of it. Huge thing. And also they're quieter because of the mask. And they had to be, what was it? 6ft Apart and stuff like that. So that takes away something too. And the audience had to be a social distance, a few seats. Because here's how it was during the pandemic. Everyone thought, well, at least I thought, oh, when this is over and I feel like everyone can relate to this, not just theater people, I was like, oh, man, when this is over, we're going to have a big party and it's going to be awesome. And the reunion and everyone imagined this big, like kind of reunion, like a joyous celebration, but slow and like, not bad at all. And even now it feels a little weird even though we're pretty much back to normal now. So I was like, yeah, it was all just gradual. And even when it was back to the in-person theater, it was still very weird.

LB: So what specifically made you want to come back to the theater after your senior show was canceled? And did you have a part of you that was worried that that would happen again?

CA: Similar to something I said earlier over the pandemic. Like, the lack of it really made me realize that I wanted to keep doing it. So I just did a couple, like, local productions, nothing like at school or anything, just like in the community area to get back into it. And it was really fun. But the show that I had joined, actually had gotten shut down due to the pandemic and they resumed rehearsals. But at school, because mine was through school, we obviously couldn't do that because everyone graduated and stuff. But this is a community production, so most of the people were able to come back. There were a few people that were added. Me, I was added. I wasn't originally and yeah, so they were working on a show for like, if you count the break time, for like over a year, like a year

and a half, which is crazy. But they basically still had to restart when they got back because everyone forgot everything. But I remember I wasn't necessarily worried for whatever reason. I don't know why I wasn't worried, but everyone else seemed you know, every rehearsal was mentioned that, oh, what if we shut down? And there was just general anxiety about it and we didn't and it was fine, but there was definitely anxiety about getting shut down. Everyone's traumatized and getting shut down that will probably never fully go away in a certain sense.

LB: So what do you like most about performing in front of a live audience?

CA: I like making the crowd laugh because then that lets me know that they're enjoying it. I did a show, I was in *Le Miz*, which is the most depressing thing I could think of ever. And there are no laughs in that show. So it's kind of hard to know if the audience was loving it until the end. I'm like, oh, okay, we did well. But I don't know. I really like making the audience laugh and I like talking to them after and hearing specific things that they liked. Yeah, I don't know. I get really anxious sometimes, especially post-pandemic. I don't know why. It might be because there's like a long break or what, but I get really anxious about lines and forgetting lines. But if I can get myself in a certain mindset, it's like I'm invincible, like I'm untouchable. I'm not going to forget anything. I'm just in it. I'm just in the performance. So that's where I strive to be for everyone. But sometimes I'll be very anxious and it's a weird dichotomy because this is my favorite thing. I love to do it, but then sometimes I'll just have I don't want to say, like a full, like anxiety tech or anything like that, but I'll just get super anxious and it'll make it, like, less fun, you know, because I'm so anxious about it going on and forgetting my lines even though I haven't done that.

LB: Did the pandemic affect your ability to perform in front of a live crowd, if so do you think that had any impact on you at first?

CA: Well, so definitely what I said about I was a little more anxious with the lines and stuff, but at the same time, like, completely contradicted what I just said. Oh, this doesn't even make sense because I was about to say I was also less anxious. But it was weird like it was a weird thing because like, the time off actually really helped because before the pandemic, it was just shown after show after show. Like the closing weekend of a show. Next week I'm auditioning for another show. So it was like boom, boom, boom. And I loved it, but it was super busy. And that time off kind of let me reset, think about what I wanted and stuff like that. And so when I came back to the theater, I felt like a reset. And I definitely felt honest, I felt better. I felt more, I felt like I was performing better, even though that extra anxiety was kind of added. So it was kind of good, honestly.