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Madness: A Tale of the American Prison System (Film)

Spring 2021 at Chabot College (Hayward, CA)

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This film won an award for **Best Short Documentary at the 2022 San Francisco International New Concept Film Festival**. The students at Chabot College used performance art for social change. This amazing group of artists collaborated to create 'Madness', which is essentially, a virtual protest against the prison industrial complex in this country. This was for our Thtr 61A class which is Social Issues Theater.

This piece was originally intended to be performed on a stage, but because of COVID 19 restrictions, we ended up with a film project that borders on documentary and experimental filmmaking.

We started with a simple question, 'What is protest worthy at this moment?' and then I walked them through a 4 stage devising process:

1. PREPARATION - There weren't many rules in this stage. The focus was on connecting with one another. We did exercises and played games to build the trust and energy of our ensemble.
2. GENERATION - We used the ideas from stage 1 to generate source material. We did outreach to collect interviews and source material. In this stage: more material = better!
3. WRITING, REWRITING, PERFORMING and RECORDING - We used the source material from stage 2 to inspire improv prompts and other explorative exercises to build a framework for the overall piece. We oscillated between stages 2 and 3 to create each chapter.
4. PRESENTATION - The final stage where we edited down the content to create the final project.

You can actually see the progression of the changing COVID guidelines throughout the piece! For instance, chapter 3 was built and recorded toward the beginning of the semester, before vaccines were widespread, so we staged this entire chapter over zoom. On the other hand, we built and recorded chapter 1 toward the end of the semester so we were able to coordinate an in-person, mostly outdoor shoot for this chapter. We were not able to do any reshoots once the semester ended, so what you see is the 1st and only draft of our writing process. I personally love how the differences in production value is basically time stamped by the differences in the COVID restrictions during the Spring of 2021.

Trying to build a piece like this from home on a zoom screen is VERY different than working together on a physical stage. I would like to acknowledge my class for their flexibility and rolling with the punches. Please enjoy our Frankenstein creation.

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