

Edexcel GCE Drama and Theatre Studies

Unit 2: Theatre Text in Performance

Example work 2014 - 15

Overview

This commentary should be read in conjunction with the recordings of the performance, which can be accessed here:

Section A: monologue

<http://youtu.be/RLEYeRGUBHc>

Section B: duologue

<http://youtu.be/t7QVDzgHIhw>

Please note: these recordings is accessed via Youtube.

We would like to thank the teachers and students of Hurtwood House who have granted permission for this work to be used as example material.

If you would like to share examples of your students' work for any of the GCE units, please contact Paul Webster by emailing

TeachingPerformingArts@Pearson.com.

In order to use any work, we will need permission from all students involved and a good quality recording.

Unit 2: Section A

Monologue: Grusha

Brecht: Caucasian Chalk Circle

Duologue: Gwendolyn and Cecily

Wilde: The Importance of Being Earnest

Introduction

Section A requires students to present for an examination performance that:

- meets in balance all assessment criteria
- meets the time requirements as detailed in the Assessment Support Guide.

The performances have been re-recorded to give clarity of both sound and vision for the purpose of this teacher support work. The comments relate to the live actual examination performance.

Monologue

Grusha from Brecht: The Caucasian Chalk Circle

Written Performance Concept

My intention is to perform Grusha as a desperate and passionate mother, trying to convince the peasant judge, Azdak, that she deserves to keep the child. I want the audience to respect her and empathise with her situation. I intend to show the various stages of her courtroom plea through different physical and vocal choices.

Grusha's voice will generally be fragmented and broken to show her vulnerability and nervousness. She is a low status character, not used to arguing in such a formal situation and by stuttering and hesitating through my words I will show her anxiousness and upset. Grusha becomes disgusted with Azdak: "*you drunken onion!*" and therefore my body language will become more aggressive and the pace and rage in my voice will become more threatening. I intend to use my teeth and throat resonators to portray her anger and resentment. This will be a much stronger voice than the start and will hopefully demonstrate how passionate she is as she attempts to stand up to The Governor's wife.

I used 'Circles of Attention' as an exercise to vary intensity and focus. In rehearsal, I began exploring the speech as if I were alone, speaking to myself (1st Circle), then to another person, direct conversation (2nd) and lastly as if I was speaking to a whole crowd (3rd). This exploration helped show a range of Grusha's emotions and helped me understand that she speaks in all 3 circles during her speech. She has moments, where she is completely intimate/private with herself and Azdak and at other times she wants to express her feelings to everyone in the courtroom. This then led me on to do the 'urgency exercise' in which I performed my speech to several people, who started to move away as soon as they lost interest in the child.

Their lack of compassion helped me realise how much integrity Grusha has and how important her words are. Time is not on her side! Another exercise I used explored was a physicalisation of the positive and negative words. This made me realise that the speech was mainly driven by negativity. Therefore it was really important for me to find the lightness and happiness in the words, especially when she talks about the baby: "*I won't give him up. I've raised him, he knows me*".

Brecht wanted theatre to challenge the theatrical conventions of naturalism and 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' is an example of how his epic theatre could make an audience think and consider about social issues. He writes with a revolutionary heart and stands up for lower class characters, like Grusha. To help me appreciate Grusha's dilemma, I read some articles about parents fighting for custody:

'You can lock a man up, but you can never take away his love for his children. When Tim pulled a picture of his daughter's from his pocket and told the judge, (It's not about me ... it's about them ...' that picture spoke a thousand words and broke the hearts of every person in the court room.'

WeAreFathers4Justice.com

I thought this was an interesting article as it reinforced Grusha's love for the child and related to Brecht's aim that theatre should challenge an audience and not leave them passive.

500 words

Comments on the WPC

The student earned 9 marks.

There is the balance between the elements that have to be covered.

The WPC is a very strong response; it indicates a clear appreciation of what Brecht is trying to achieve, but also how the play connects to modern situations involving cases of child custody.

This is a clearly personal response, giving several examples of the student's individual preparation process. There is a clear sense what the candidate hopes to achieve in performance.

Comments on the examination performance

The recording of the performance can be viewed here:

<http://youtu.be/RLEYeRGUBHc>

Marks awarded:

Vocal Skills 8

Movement Skills 8

Characterisation 8

There is a high level of vocal clarity throughout, and the skills are used to create a strong and urgent vocal quality that very successfully captures the desperation of Grusha in this situation. The use of repetition and stutter is particularly effective.

She is engaged with the emotions and status of the character. She is certainly at ease with the role, and shows a sensitivity to the high level of emotion. The status of her character is also clearly demonstrated in her physicality.

Her facial expressions are very strong and effective. There is a very high level of understanding of the role and its context at this moment in the text.

It is certainly a consistent performance, showing a depth of understanding of the role. It is clear she knows exactly where Azdak is in the performance space, and addresses her plea to him. In addition, she successfully uses varying circles of attention to move between private and public levels of intensity (as clearly detailed in her WPC for intended interpretation).

Overall, she was awarded marks at the top of the excellent band.

Duologue

Cecily from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Written Performance Concept

'The Importance of Being Earnest' is a social satire of Victorian society. The characters are parodied as both shallow and hypocritical. I hope to capture this intention through Cecily's superficial romanticism. Wilde chooses to highlight the trivial problems of the upper-classes and the duologue I am performing is a perfect example of his social wit and attack. Cecily's innocence and kind nature is compromised during this scene as she '*speaks with perfect candour*' towards the infuriating Gwendolyn: "*when I see a spade, I call it a spade.*" I will emphasize this contrast through my use of a soft, polite child-like tone, which I found makes Cecily instantly youthful and a harder, more aggressive voice for moments of verbal battle. I will use both my head voice and chest voice, and speak through gritted teeth to achieve her varying levels of suppressed aggression.

Cecily's language requires the use of a heightened RP accent and by exploring this voice I was able to enter the C19th, upper-class world. In order to exaggerate the voice I used 'Berkoff's 10 Levels of Grotesque.' This allowed me to explore a number of different accents in a heightened manner. I began at 1 (Cockney) progressing through 5 (standard RP) up to 10 (heightened RP) and found that by rolling 'R' sounds I was able to find moments of melodramatic comedy. For example "*Cake? Or bread and butter?*" My partner and I agreed that remaining at number 8 for the scene work was the perfect balance between melodrama and realism; we were able to communicate using a high status, mannered voice: a parody of the aristocratic lifestyle, without it becoming too unrealistic. In many ways this social parody is similar to the life and times of characters featured in today's '*Made in Chelsea*', a modern day comedy of manners.

We also explored tension using Complicite's '*Cane exercise*'. We performed the scene with one finger on each end of a cane. During moments of tension the cane would physically bend. This helped us emphasize moments of verbal battling and made us consider where and why moments of tension were caused. Despite the period of the play, Wilde presents two dominant and independent women. They each have their own opinions about the world and their society, and this exercise allowed us to see and physically feel their vocal and mental strength. Moments of tension were particularly apparent when we discussed, sensitive subjects such as marriage, living in the town and country and family reputation.

I also took part in a nonverbal exercise and it was interesting conveying the details of the scene without words and this helped me realise how important the use of props could be. As a way of exploring subtext, I rehearsed using a fan. Victorianism is often described as the era of 'refinement and grace' and during rehearsals we explored walking and sitting with books balanced our head to consider the traditional forms of elocution that both Cecily and Gwendolyn would have taken part in.

500 words

Comments on the WPC

The student earned 7 marks.

This is a somewhat uneven WPC; it is an example of best fit marking, where some areas are considerably stronger than others. The preparation process details a range of rehearsal activities and references theatre practitioners. The detail on vocal work is strong. However, the final paragraph is an example of work that is underdeveloped, as more detail and insight could have been offered regarding working with the fan, and the elocution exercises. It is also lacking in detail of the context of the complete play.

Duologue

Gwendolyn from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Written Performance Concept

I intend to present Gwendolyn as an educated, arrogant and fashionable young woman from London. This will act as a suitable contrast to Cecily's naivety and country innocence. At this specific moment in the play, Gwendolyn is authoritative and demonstrative. I intend to show this by using a clipped tone and heightened Received Pronunciation to show my disinterest in Cecily and self-importance. I will hold myself with a strong and elegant posture, balletic like in order to show status through action and non-verbal communication. However, I wish to present her romantic and lyrical side at times and by changing her posture and voice I will capture her melodramatic passion "*one should always have something sensational to read on the train*". By raising the natural pitch and making the voice more breathy, I am able to present a contrasting quality to her natural stern and demonstrative tone.

To find the physicality of our characters my partner and I researched Victorian elocution exercises. We worked with books balanced on our heads in order to maintain the required posture and this was initially difficult as I felt I had to retrain the way I held my body. I used a Grotowskian animal exercise to explore the physicality of a Swan and this helped me explore her elegant posture and high neck. Secondly, in order to remain 'unbearably' polite but show our infuriation with one another, we took away the language and acted the scene through physical action. This allowed us to explore subtext. For example when Cecily served tea and cake I was able to communicate Gwendolyn's frustration and horror by retreating and using a tight lipped facial expression in order to demonstrate my shock and distaste towards Cecily.

A challenge we faced was being able to present our characters truthfully and not ridiculously but still in a way that complied with the theatrical style of Wilde's 'comedy of manners.' To explore Gwendolyn in rehearsal, I exaggerated her voice using heightened language choices in order to find a believable yet lightly comical and melodramatic character. To experiment with voice I applied Berkoff's levels of grotesque exercise to accent and tone. I starting at 1, this being cockney, and 10 being the extremist version of mannered RP. By doing so I was able to find a suitable voice for Gwendolyn and as so much of Wilde's theatre is presented using language this was an important stage in my process.

Throughout the play, Wilde places upper class caricatures under scrutiny and we were drawn to this scene in particular because it draws attention to the petty problems faced by the upper classes. The Importance of Being Earnest is a social satire, a 'comedy of manners' which was a popular genre in the 1700's and later revived through Oscar Wilde.

Modern day equivalents which parody the upper classes are popular today through programmes such as 'Made in Chelsea' and 'Swingers'; in one off text workshop we explored playing the scene as two modern London 'Chelsea' types in a cocktail bar.

504 words

Comments on the WPC

The student earned 8 marks.

This is a strong WPC. The preparation has a focus on physicality and is detailed and clear. The social and historical context of the play is understood, and the reference to 21st century culture shows knowledge and understanding. This is a balanced WPC, which is why it's placed in the excellent band.

Comments on the examination performance

The recording of the performance can be viewed here:

<http://youtu.be/t7QVDzgHlhw>

Cecily (hat) marks awarded:

Vocal	8
Movement	9
Characterisation	8

Her use of RP is very strong. The diction and pace matches the heightened language of the text. Moments of tension are vocally clear. She implements effective comedy timing.

In her movement and posture, she convinces as the innocent Cecily. Gestures are well thought through. And she uses, with skill, the performance space, the set and the props. This is a very well realised physicalisation of the role.

This is a well-rounded and effective characterisation, showing a depth of understanding of both the innocence and strength of Cecily Cardew.

Gwendolyn (pink dress) marks awarded:

Voice	8
Movement	8
Characterisation	5

A wide range of vocal skills are used, that show a secure and sophisticated understanding of the historical period and social class.

Her physicality is effective, and there are moments of contrasts that show moments of both romance and melodrama.

The characterisation is less strong. As there is a clumsy handling of prop, which causes the student to lose focus. This has to be reflected in the marks, as precision and detail is essential to this well-known duologue.

In this duologue, the centre has chosen to provide costumes, set and props to support the students (the sound FX of birdsong is also noted).

It is entirely centre choice to provide all, some or none of the above. It is well worth considering, particularly in period texts, how these can be used to support the candidates.