



# Marking Activity

## Student 1: Section A

- 1 Analyse and evaluate the live performance you have seen in light of the following statement:

'Live performance has nothing to say to a young audience.'

Your answer should:

- include analysis and evaluation of key moments from the performance you have seen and the contribution made by different theatre makers
- offer **balanced consideration** between your analysis and evaluation of the performance and your response to the statement.

(20)

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> January I went to see 'A Christmas Carol' at The Noel Coward Theatre. This production was directed by Phelim McDermott and adapted from the original Dickens novel, by Patrick Barlow. This production was a modern melodrama that used physical comedy and a heightened performance style to build the world of Victorian London. Because McDermott made the production highly visual it appealed to me as a young audience member. We live in a visual age and many of the key ideas in the production were communicated through the exciting design. The director worked closely with the designers, Tom Pye (set), Peter Mumford (lighting) and Gareth Fry (sound) to help speak to a young audience.

One-way this production appealed to a young audience was through the use of the set. Tom Pye used a 'Pollock Theatre' design to capture the atmosphere of Victorian London. Through various 'pop up' set pieces, a story book narrative literally unfolded in front of my eyes and this visual spectacular was impressive to me as a young audience member. This design helped to immerse the audience in the Victorian time period and this was important as the younger members of the audience might not have known about the original novel and its history.

Live Performance has a lot to say to young audiences and one of the ways this creative team kept me engaged was through the use of the 'play within a play' device. A revolve stage was used in this production and as the set turned the 'mechanics' of theatre and backstage were presented to the audience. This helped to keep the young audience engaged as we were able to see how some of the stage effects were created. The illusion of theatre was removed and as a theatre student I was particularly engaged when I saw both the illusion and reality of the shadow puppet sequence. On the front of the window I saw the effect of the musical notes floating through the air but as the stage turned I saw the puppeteers working hard to create the illusion. By showing me this it helped me appreciate the inventiveness of the staging and how hard the puppeteers had to work in this production.

Tom Pye's design was really effective because lots of the devices were simple. This helped to speak to young audiences and reminded them that often less is more! For example, a double sided door flat on wheels was used as an entrance to Scrooge's office and then spun round to be the grand entrance of the nephews house. Fake snow was thrown on the people waiting outside the door and the sound effect of a blizzard quickly showed it was cold. As the door opened the sound cut off and the actors walked through covered in snow. This device was repeated several times and as the amount of snow thrown increased, comedy was created.

The costumes in the production also created great impact in performance as they were helped to establish the world of the play. The costumes were period costumes and helped to visually indicate the class and status of each character. The wealthier male characters wore fitted suits with top hats and frock coats, accessorised by pocked watches and canes. The women dressed in hooped skirts, corsets and heeled boots and this helped remind the younger audience members which character was rich and poor.

There were lots of young people in the audience when I saw this production and one of the main reasons for this might have been because the main actor, Jim Broadbent is well known due to his work in films such as Harry Potter. Broadbent mainly used a melodramatic style of acting to present the greedy and corrupt Ebenezer Scrooge and used comedy throughout to establish a likeable villain. He used a heightened, declamatory voice and his use of over large gestures helped show off his eccentricity. However, as the story unfolded, Broadbent's actions and vocal choices became smaller, softer and more naturalistic. This was an effective choice as it constantly engaged the audience and helped to show the 'change' that is central to Scrooge's character. By the end of the play he appeared more truthful, showing that he had changed for the better and was now more approachable to others.

The moral of this story is that life is short and Phelim McDermott uses many theatrical devices and elements to help the audience understand the importance of charity and goodwill. Patrick Barlow's adaptation helps to speak to a young audience as it stays true to the classic story but at the same time uses comedy and visual effects to engage a young audience.

## Section C

- 5 As a director, discuss how you would apply the methodologies of your chosen theatre practitioner to the acting styles used in your production concept.

Your answer must focus on the named section listed above for your chosen performance text.

Your answer must make reference to:

- the overall aims of your production concept in response to the play as a whole
- how your practical ideas will work in performance
- the original performance conditions of your chosen performance text.

(24)

My production of Woyzeck is a site specific promenade piece that has been influenced by the work of Brecht and Berkoff. Woyzeck is the main actor in my performance. His character would be played in a heightened and grotesque way to help show he is gradually turning mad. When he says things like "In the dark, black cats with fire in their eyes" I would want him to stutter and have a break down.

Woyzeck is a low status character and this could be shown through his costume and body language. Woyzeck in my production would be played to be in his late twenties, although he would have a poor physical and body language showing he is a working man, a hunch or a strange posture could show that he is a working man and might have been over worked. His movement would be very fast paced and twitchy. This would help compare him to an insect. His frame would be skinny as he is undernourished and in poverty, this could be shown through dark eye make-up showing his tiredness and stress.

A gestic prop (Brecht) could also help Woyzeck in my production such as a cloth which he could use to clean shoes, wipe the captain during the shaving scene and wipe his head when he is tired and sweaty from all the running about. It could also be used to show he is ill and coughing. Woyzeck would lead with his head in my production this is because as a character he is thinker and his mind is in turmoil.

This key role would have been played differently in the 1913 production but also different from what Buchner would of imagined this character to be like in 1836. In 1913 Woyzeck would have been played by Albert Steinruck a famous movie actor of the time this would make it relatively difficult to show the themes and status of Woyzeck's character, he would have played this role at a heightened state also as it was popular way of acting in 1913, of melodrama. The portrayal of Woyzeck in the 1913 production would be not as gritty and focussed on the working class status of Woyzeck, it would instead be more focused on the aural elements of the production. During the morgue scene I would make Woyzeck scream each time the doctor poked him or cut him. This would shock the audience as he is meant to be dead.

## Student 2:

### Section A

- 1 Analyse and evaluate the live performance you have seen in light of the following statement:

'Live performance has nothing to say to a young audience.'

Your answer should:

- include analysis and evaluation of key moments from the performance you have seen and the contribution made by different theatre makers
- offer **balanced consideration** between your analysis and evaluation of the performance and your response to the statement.

(20)

On May 16<sup>th</sup> my group took a trip to see 'The 39 Steps', directed by Maria Aitken at The Oxford Playhouse. This production is based on the original novel by John Buchan and is a spoof of the 1935 film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Unlike the film, this is a 'spoof' and throughout the production, slapstick, melodrama and farce is used to create comedy. There are only 4 cast in this production and this is impressive as they collectively play over '130 different characters in 100 minutes'. 'The 39 Steps' presents the adventures of the everyday British hero, Richard Hannay (played by Ben Righton), who is accidentally involved in a murder case and top secret conspiracy.

The design of the production is simple but effective and several key props and set pieces are used to establish the many locations in the story. The actors successfully present each scene using simple props and pieces of furniture. For example, a car is quickly made using 2 luggage chests and a steering wheel. This is effective staging as each location only exists for a few short minutes. It would take too long to set up each scene and therefore the simple, minimalistic approach helps keep the pace and audience interested.

This production does not rely on technology and is very simple. For example, when Hannay was chase by the police, he jumped off a bridge made by 3 ladders, this is comical because the contrast between climbing a real bridge and a ladder bridge is very big. Also when he jumps down, the ground is only one meter under him but he still acts terrified which is funny.

Some technology was used effectively in this production. The lighting and use of music in this production was also effective and helped to create the tense atmosphere that is central to the mystery spy genre. The music was classical and melodramatic which helped create Hannay's world of danger, adventure and romance. The use of shadow puppetry was also an effective moment as this helped to parody the Hitchcock film, 'North by Northwest' as well as show Hannay's long journey from London to Scotland. I particularly liked the special effect at the very beginning of the show when a strobe light was used to show the actors running across the stage in a panic.

The cast were very strong and created each role with ease. The most memorable performance was from Greg Haiste. He played several comedy characters and stereotypes and managed to successful portray each role with a different voice and physicality. Mutli-role was an important feature of the production. One of his major characters was Mr. Memory. Haiste created Mr. Memory through a strong physicality – shuffling, stiff neck and head movements and a clipped, staccato London accent. It was particularly good when he shrunk his body when he was thinking and confused. His death scene was particularly dramatic and it was funny when we thought he was dead by he quickly restored to life to finish the speech. This created a big impact on the audience.

Another performance that was effective was the role Annabella Schmidt (Ellie Beaven) a German spy chased by assassins. Her physicality and her accent made us believe who she was. Although she only appears in a short period of time, but the way she died is unforgettable.

## Section C

- 5 As a director, discuss how you would apply the methodologies of your chosen theatre practitioner to the acting styles used in your production concept.

Your answer must focus on the named section listed above for your chosen performance text.

Your answer must make reference to:

- the overall aims of your production concept in response to the play as a whole
- how your practical ideas will work in performance
- the original performance conditions of your chosen performance text.

(24)

My production of *Woyzeck* will be set in an abstract toy world where key ideas of oppression and control are presented to the audience. My toy concept helps to explore the hierarchy of character and supports Buchner's idea that "we are only puppets, our strings are being pulled by unknown forces." As a director I want to explore the idea of determinism and use toys to help suggest that some characters are not in control of their own destiny. I intend to stage my production on a semi-circular amphitheatre stage similar to the Olivier stage at The National Theatre. This contrasts to the original performance in 1913 that was staged at The Residenz Theatre in Munich. As the stage is very big the acting style will also need to match the epic scale of my production. I have been influenced by the work of Brecht in my approach and will present each character through a gestic acting style. By exploring each character as a recognisable 'toy' I am using Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* to make the audience look critically at the ideas Buchner presents in the play.

The overall acting style is influenced by Brecht and will therefore be exaggerated and over the top to help convey the attitude and archetype of each character in the play. For example, *Woyzeck* will be presented as a damaged, wind-up Pierrot Clown to highlight the tragedy of this powerless and fragile character. I got this idea from the reference Marie makes "thinking's wound his mind up like a watch spring." I intend for my actor playing this role to develop a repeated physical action to encapsulate the oppression felt by *Woyzeck* and will constantly get the actor playing this role to circle the black tear on his face. This will highlight the sadness of the role and the tragedy that is central to *Woyzeck's* existence. *Woyzeck* as a clown will also wear bright white make-up and a Pierrot costume and hat. During the morgue scene (24) I will ask the Doctor to roughly wipe off make up during the scene and gradually restore him to the everyman he represents. This will help communicate the idea that he is putting his experiment to rest "the trouble I took with you – what a waste!" I want the Doctor to do this in an aggressive way to show his lack of compassion. This is a different interpretation to the original performance that was directed by Eugene Kiliyas as the actor playing *Woyzeck* (Albert Steinruch) would have played him in a melodramatic style as this was a popular acting style of the time. Steinruch was a silent movie actor. He would also have been presented as a military soldier. This would have been recognisable to the audience as Germany was on the verge of war.

The Doctor and Captain in my production will be presented as a Robotic, futuristic toy and a 'Jack in the Box'. This will help communicate their function to the audience. The Doctor wants to "blow the whole thing sky high" and therefore the Robot toy helps represents the future. The Captain is lazy and the 'wobble' of the jack in the box will help communicate the idea that "people they make me dizzy". It is important that the acting style of these characters contrasts and the traditional Victorian toy and the Robotic toy help to establish their different attitudes on life. During the Morgue scene the Captain and Doctor appear to argue over the dead bodies I will help show this by breaking the fourth wall while they talk to one another. This is another Brechtian idea that helps to make the audience critical. During this scene I would get the actors to keep using 'direct address'. "Marvellous! To work that out from them being found in the lake." By using direct address I will encourage the audience to laugh during a sad scene and this will make them critical. The vocal delivery of each character should also be exaggerated and help communicate their attitude and status. I would ask the Doctor to speak in a robotic tone to

show his lack of compassion and ask the Captain to speak in a slow and melodramatic tone to show his sense of self-importance.

I would present Andres through the use of a small wooden puppet as this would help reinforce his low status and fragility. In scene 25 it would be effective if the Grandmother presence was overbearing on Andres as this would help show his fear when the grandmother laughs and he runs off in fear. The use of a puppet is another influence from Brechtian theatre. Puppets would not have been used in the original performance although it was staged on a revolve stage and this would have been visually impressive to an audience of 1913.