

Performance Studies

Advanced GCE A2 H548

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H148

Report on the Units

January 2009

H148/H548/MS/R/09J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner's comments

In this first session of the new Specification, it was recognised by examiners and moderators that the changes to the requirements, although small in number, would be challenging for Centres entering candidates for them for the first time. That being the case, examining panels took a very positive approach to the work, looking for examples of good practice, and recognising the considerable work that had been undertaken.

In the case of G402, the assessment task had changed little from the legacy specification, but in the case of G401, the challenge of bringing together the assessment of practical work with a written commentary in the coursework proved challenging to complete between September and January. Moderators' advice for future series was to consider the January series as a resit opportunity for this unit, since it is hard for candidates to complete the work for a first sit in such a constrained time period.

There was particular concern about standards of practical work in unit G401, and a general feeling that candidates needed longer than twelve weeks to work on their practical skills before entering the whole of their AS practical work. In the event, much of the practical work seen for this unit was of a lower standard than that formerly submitted for unit 2558 in the legacy Specification.

Nevertheless, much of the practical work showed vision and energy, and moderators reported that the intention of the work, if not its execution, demonstrated a good sense of creativity and insight into the performance process. It is hoped that Centres will encourage candidates to rehearse these pieces at greater length prior to assessment in future series.

G401 Creating Performance

Administration

This was the first occasion when this unit was assessed and there were few entries. However there are important issues raised that can inform centres for the June series.

It is essential that centres present their work clearly and with care. The new aspect of presentation of evidence for moderation is the recording of the Community Piece. As required by the specification this should be on DVD with clear chapters for different performances. Candidates should announce themselves, with candidate number at the start of the performance that they are in. The centre also needs to provide a running order with identifying information on each candidate.

The primary evidence for checking the assessment of the Devising and Performing Skills by the centre is what is on the DVD. Centres need to be aware that if the evidence is not there it is difficult for the moderator to support the marks awarded by the centre. A poor example, for example, might be poor placing of the camera so that work of a particular candidate cannot be viewed. Centres need to give careful consideration to the venue and lighting design to ensure that candidates are seen clearly.

As with the previous specification it is a requirement for written evidence that centres must annotate the commentaries showing where marks have been awarded with supporting comments on each Coursework Cover Sheet (CCS).

Written Commentaries

The requirement for approximately 3,000 words, with four performances to discuss within the devising structure of *Improvise, Rehearse, Perform*, is challenging. It is important that candidates focus on matters of devising, and the way they have practically understood and realised the technical terms and not on anecdotal details that do not gain them marks. Moderators are expecting to read objective, well-structured commentaries that clearly discuss the process that the candidates have been through. There have been excellent examples of submissions where the commentary has effectively been in two sections with the three performances in the separate art forms forming the first half and the Community Piece the second. It is important that candidates are able to make links across the art forms so commentaries that are structured that deal with art forms separately are unlikely to allow candidates the greatest opportunities for making connections. There were examples of candidates repeating material by discussing Dance, Drama and Music separately in terms of *Improvise, Rehearse, Perform*. It is important that candidates write economically within the word limit that they have.

Knowledge and Understanding

For marks to be awarded in the higher mark bands candidates need to show a clear understanding of the techniques in all art forms and display, with authority, that they can use them. There needs to be clarity about the style and intent of the performance. Candidates need to show that they understand the reason for devising and performing a piece and the style that they are working in. This will then inform evaluative comments that receive marks under *Process*. In terms of the Community Piece the specification makes clear (Pg.10) that the focus should be the intention, the venue and the audience. Candidates need to address these issues in their written commentaries if high marks are to be awarded. There were some examples of good submissions that were let down simply by failing to address the issues of performance

intent and style. There were also good examples of candidates making links across the art forms throughout their commentary and it was clear to see that the Centre fostered an overview of the three performing arts from the start of the course. Centres justly awarded high marks to those that involved discussion of links throughout the commentary and did not just reserve this discussion for the Community Piece. Centres are advised that high marks are not likely to be awarded by the inclusion of a single paragraph in which to obtain marks under this criterion.

Centres are reminded that the style and intent of the Community Piece is important. One centre enabled its candidates to access good marks by making sure that the piece had a clearly understandable narrative line, wide accessibility in terms of age, and intellect. It clearly informed the audience about an aspect of their own community's history and used a range of performing techniques. It is not acceptable that candidates have an existing idea and then search for a local situation in which to devise a piece for their stimulus. The challenge is for the candidates to respond to an outside stimulus.

Process

Candidates who gained high marks were able to understand the nature of the three aspects of devising and show that they understood the important aspects of each piece and how the devised work could be 'honed' to produce a secure final performance. These candidates did not give a 'blow by blow' account for each art form but were able to concisely recognise the significant moments for each performance piece. Those candidates that stated clearly the performance style and intent for the pieces were able to inform their discussion with a clear review as to the extent of their success. In awarding marks centres need to be careful about the application of the word 'meticulous'. These two marks in the top marking band should only be awarded when there is a clear attention to detail and the significant points for each aspect of the process discussed. Where discussion becomes general and where superficial statements are made about any aspect of the process marks should not be awarded in this top band. Candidates need to write clearly and objectively and refrain from narrative and anecdotal comment.

Quality of Language

Marking for Quality of Language was good; centres appeared to have understood the new marking criteria and overall awarded marks appropriately. Candidates should be advised that writing that ends up reading like a list or with a succession of sentences or paragraphs starting 'we then did..' and variants are not likely to gain high marks.

Community Performance Piece – Practical

Centres should bear in mind that there is no visiting practical for the new AS specifications so therefore the standard of performance expected should be in line with what centres were used to presenting, very well, for the legacy specifications. This piece should be a substantial piece of devising and not simply a slightly longer Integrated Piece that was part of the legacy Language of Performing Arts. Moderators are expecting to see work that has a definite style and a clear intent to it and is well informed by the intended audience and the venue. The audience needs to clearly understand what is going on, as the affect on the audience is part of the marking criteria. It should be rehearsed over a period of time and be a piece of polished work presentable to the public.

Devising

Centres need to state clearly on the CCS the role that the candidate has had in the overall devising of the piece. There are obvious occasions where the majority of the candidates are going to receive a similar mark and this will obviously be justified by the quality of the piece and the nature of the group effort. The piece has to have a clear intent and candidates need to have considered pace, dynamic and the effect that they have on the audience. Misplaced performance energy that is not well judged to produce effective reaction from other performers and the audience is unlikely to receive marks higher than 5 because of the statement 'limited in its success'. Similarly candidates need to consider the balance of the art forms since this can equally put a ceiling on the marks that available to them.

Performance skills

The DVD should show clearly that each candidate has skills in each of the art forms and these should be referred to, with supporting comments on the CCS. If there is clear evidence that the work is under-rehearsed or that there are not evident skills in each art form then the marking criteria 5 – 11 are the appropriate areas for awarding marks. Good performance pieces are those that have been devised with consideration of all three art forms from the beginning and what good theatre can be made by all three. There needs to be a coherent reason for the inclusion of a piece of dance, drama or music and candidates need to know how it contributes and moves the devised piece forward. A good integrated piece would be significantly weakened if any art form was absent. Whilst moderators accept that a live event is different to one that is recorded nevertheless it is still possible to judge ensemble skills in dance, proxemics and correct intonation in singing, for example. Centres do need to be aware that the DVD is the evidence they are submitting to OCR to justify their marks. After the experience of the live event it is important that the DVD is watched to see if the marks initially awarded at the performance can be justified.

G402 Performance Contexts 1

General Comments

This was the first session of the new written examination and examiners noted that the standard of work was not as high as in legacy specification 2557 unit. Candidates entered for this unit in a January series will only have been on the AS course for a few months and it was noted this January that many candidates struggled to achieve an appropriate AS standard of examination response. Many candidates did not seem to have the acquired knowledge, experience and skill to equip them for tackling the written examination. There was little evidence of any understanding of the way a practitioner orders his or her material and exploits the elements of the performing arts, as identified in unit G401 in order to achieve a distinctive style. Attention is drawn to page 11 of the new specification which clearly states that the knowledge and understanding of one or more of five interrelated aspects will be tested for each work studied. Centres should further note that this now includes performance techniques in terms of the approaches that might be taken by a performer undertaking a performance of a work. Many candidates were unable to identify specific skills or to explore possible interpretations.

Very few candidates planned their answers but those that did seemed to be able to follow a more logical line of argument. Many candidates chose to ignore the question completely or to ignore the main thrust of the question, choosing to write generic responses that showed little in-depth understanding of the works studied. References were often very vague and superficial and sweeping generalisations and subjective opinions were offered as fact without offering supportive evidence from the studied work to prove that point of view.

Key terms were often misspelt or misunderstood and there was a noticeable lack of knowledge of techniques and devices, where they were used and to what effect. The exceptional strong candidates were able to place the studied works into the appropriate social, historical and cultural context, assess how the work had evolved and how it had been influenced by others during its evolution. They offered logical and succinct arguments that either supported the question or in some cases effectively counter-argued against the question and were able to use appropriate examples to exemplify their ideas. Examiners noted that there was often a naivety about the work of the weaker candidates and that it seemed to be rooted in ill-informed opinion rather than embedded in a firm foundation of knowledge and skills appreciation, as acquired in units G401 and G402.

Many candidates seem to have difficulty in constructing a response and there were some thin and unconvincing arguments.

Most centres chose to study the practitioners from the legacy specification although Matthew Bourne and Caryl Churchill were attempted by some centres. The presumption is that centres are remaining with practitioners that have possibly proved to be successful in the past and have been appropriate in terms of suitability for practical examination in the 2558 Performance Realisation. Obviously this is still a consideration even though there is no AS practical examination connected to this unit, the candidates will still be required to perform from memory one extract from the repertoire they have studied for either Performance Contexts 1 or 2. This will be performed either individually or in a group of up to six candidates. There is also much resource material available for Matthew Bourne and centres may still retain resource material from Churchill's previous appearance on the specification.

As in the past with unit 2557 many candidates failed to identify specific movement material for Section A or to identify dramatic techniques and devices in Section B or to show a real understanding of musical form and structure in Section C.

There are now two marks for the ability to use clear and accurate English, one for each response. This means that this mark is no longer holistic and is a fairer reflection of the work as it is possible to gain very different marks for each response if there is a disparity in terms of quality of approach.

SECTION A

Matthew Bourne

Question 1

Candidates were expected to recognise that Bourne's work is often character driven and that each character has a distinct purpose and function within the work and the audience need to react/care in order for the production to be successful. The strongest candidates were able to identify the characters and their function and were able to logically follow their journey through the studied work and show how that story using specific choreographic devices and techniques. Weaker candidates used the action of the studied work as the structure for their response and failed to show how the choreography supports the story. Such responses were very narrative in approach and struggled to move beyond the superficial. Surprisingly few candidates used "*Edward Scissorhands*" as a reference and some candidates did not refer to live performances at all, focusing on videoed performance.

Question 2

Candidates needed to recognise that Bourne is always aware of his relationship with the audience and seeks to attract a new audience back to ballet which is often seen as "High Art". He does this by reworking familiar classics and often places them in a more contemporary or relevant setting in order to make them more accessible eg "*The Car Man*". Again surprisingly few candidates mentioned "*Car Man*" or "*Dorian Gray*" focusing in most cases on "*Swan Lake*". Unfortunately many candidates presented rather naïve views such as "it's a gay dance" without looking beyond the obvious to achieve a greater in-depth evaluation. Strongest candidates showed how Bourne's choreography is a fusion of different styles and how he is not afraid to exploit popular culture to achieve recognition. They were able to cross-reference different works but in both questions there was a noticeable lack of identification of actual movement material. *Works studied include: "Swan Lake" "Nutcracker"*

Shobana Jeyasingh

There were no responses to the two questions in this section.

Question 3

Jeyasingh grew up in Madras and relocated frequently, reinventing herself in order to fit in. Her work is concerned with the themes of displacement and how a person can be rooted in many cultures yet finds no conflict in that. Candidates should recognise how her work is organic and although it has its roots in traditional styles it also has something to say about the contemporary world that it inhabits. The response would depend on the studied work and candidates should recognise Jeyasingh moving in new directions particularly with her later works.

Question 4

Candidates could agree or disagree with the statement that Jeyasingh's choreography is a 'set of formal pieces that shape the human form into mathematical patterns' and this is acceptable as long as they justify their position. Key moments should be pinpointed to either disprove or prove the statement. The mathematical patterning is expressed through the dance and conveyed to the audience to achieve a specific response.

Lloyd Newson

Question 5

Newson is said to have started the idea of "Physical Theatre" a term that he chooses not to be associated with nowadays. He wanted to challenge the audience's ideas of what dance was and the idea that it consisted of pretty bodies making pretty shapes. Newson's work is raw, shocking, challenging and disturbing. He uses an integration of all the arts forms to create a form that is greater than the individual forms alone. There were some very good responses to this question with candidates able to clearly notate the action of the studied work whilst also being able to identify the techniques used by Newson and the relationship between the drama and movement of the studied work. Weaker candidates tended to adopt a narrative approach and retold the story of the work, focusing on the dramatic action rather than addressing the question.

Question 6

Newson himself says: "Let me be clear, whatever ends up on stage, the subject matter, each individual step, I decide on. I see my role as stimulator, facilitator, editor and constructor, but equally I want to learn from my performers. I find it dull, boring and reductive bringing in steps for my dancers to learn — which is what I did in my early choreographic days. I have a responsibility to keep finding ways to open up and creatively stimulate performers in the company. Most people are capable of producing incredible performances; however some are reluctant to enter new territory. I can open gates, but at a certain point, unless they are prepared to let go of their psychological blocks, I can't do anything." Candidates may draw on their own experiences as long as these are placed in the context of the study of the focus work. Strongest candidates were able to show how performers are expected to expose their inner vulnerability both during the creative process and during performance and dancers are invited to bring their own addressed past paper questions and were often very superficial and naïve in terms of their evaluation of Newson's work. Such candidates often focused on the graphic material within the pieces without exploring the function of such sections.

Works studied included: "Enter Achilles" "Strangefish" references to "To Be Straight with You" "Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men"

SECTION B

Caryl Churchill

Question 7

Candidates should recognise that Churchill's unique style raises many performance challenges and candidates may choose to isolate one character in their studied work and logically go through the development of that character charting the many challenges faced at certain points in the play with very specific textual references used to illustrate ideas. This is a performance question and strongest candidates were able to identify the challenges faced by different characters and how Churchill uses specific techniques at particular time in the studied work to create a dramatic effect and a response in the audience. Such candidates identified devices such as use of dialogue forms and how Churchill's experimentation places a demand on the performer as well as analysing the emotional journey of characters and what specific skills are used to overcome the challenges. Weaker candidates listed Churchill's techniques without connecting to the question at all.

Question 8

Candidates should identify the “political context” of the studied work and seek to show whether Churchill does, or does not, challenge that context. Plays such as “Top Girls” are set in Britain and implicitly condemn the increasing incidence of Thatcherist values in society, and especially their effect on Feminism. In addition, there is also a commentary on Margaret Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, who also celebrated individualism and believed in Reaganomics. Churchill is an English dramatist known for her use of non-naturalistic techniques and feminist themes. Some candidates were able to show how Churchill’s work reflects the world around her. They placed the studied work in the correct time frame and then connected the content with the greater political picture. The structure of the chosen play and how dramatic devices were used to create effect were clearly understood. Weaker candidates followed the story of the studied work without reference to dramatic construction and without illustrating ideas with specific examples of key moments in the text that supported any ideas.

Works studied included: “Top Girls” “Fen” “Softcops”

Athol Fugard

There were no responses to the two questions in this section.

Question 9

Candidates should be able to place the chosen work/s in the context of Fugard’s plays, showing which stage this work falls into – the plays are divided into *Port Elizabeth plays*, featuring families torn apart by poverty and apartheid. *Township plays*, *Statement plays* where Fugard experimented with improvisation and directly attacked the South African apartheid laws, *Exile and other worlds* where Fugard addresses issues outside South Africa and South African politics, *My Africa* where Fugard examines post apartheid South Africa and *Sorrows and Rejoicings* where Fugard looks back at his own life.

Question 10

Candidates should recognise that Fugard seeks to expose injustice by showing how greater political injustice imprints upon, and affects the lives of ordinary people. By choosing two contrasting characters candidates could show differing approaches to different struggles and different strategies for coping.

John Godber

Question 11

Candidates were expected to be able to recognise Godber’s use of everyday situations to denote time and place the work in the correct social and historical context. Candidates may believe that the work is timeless and that the work can be updated to fit the time that it is presented rather than the time that it was created. They may refer to their own personal experience or productions that they have seen and their respective interpretations but they must connect with Godber’s original work. Godber’s work is amongst the most performed and candidates should show that they have an understanding of why this is the case. Strongest candidates identified what they understood by “of their time” and were able to show how Godber uses specific techniques that allow his work to continually evolve and that his appeal lies in showing the audience everyday situations and characters that they recognise. Weaker responses identified a list of features but failed to analyse the significance of that use. There were a few responses that presented strange opinions such as that “Godber’s work is only for the working class and only connects with that class”.

Question 12

Candidates should reflect on their own interpretation of the question. The demands of a particular play may differ in terms of specific requirements but there is a general acceptance that in order to achieve a truly effective performance of Godber's work the performers need to have a number of performance skills. The biggest weakness when addressing this question was that most candidates ended up identifying a list of characteristic features but failed to show what specific performance skills were needed to be put into action by a performer in order to successfully realise a particular feature. The confusion arose when candidates wrote about the use of multi-role or stereotypes or physical action without then being very detailed in terms of exploring the actual performance skills needed to perform the work effectively. Some candidates ignored the question entirely and wrote about Godber and how he wrote his work. Few candidates were able to show a real understanding of the practical performance demands of a particular role/roles.

Works studied included: "Teechers" "Shakers" "Bouncers"

SECTION C

John Adams

There were no responses to the two questions in this section.

Question 13

Originally trained at the prestigious Harvard University John Adams left after completing his Masters degree in 1971. Inspired by John Cage he was reacquainted with Minimalism through watching a live performance of Reich's "Drumming". Candidates should be able to identify the resonance in Adam's work and may question whether it is derivative or innovative and totally new.

Question 14

Candidates could decide whether they think it is possible to perform different interpretations of a piece of Minimalism or whether they feel that it is totally didactic and cannot be open to any interpretation other than that dictated by the composer. Any opinion must be strongly supported by specific reference to the studied work(s).

The Beatles

There were no responses to the two questions in this section.

Question 15

Candidate could agree or disagree with the statement. They may believe that the work is "of its time" and can be frozen in time or that it is ageless and is still relevant and significant today and in the future. Whichever stance they take they must fully support their opinions with evidence from the studied works.

Question 16

The Beatles' were constantly searching for new ways to create new sounds on every new recording, combined with George Martin's arranging abilities and the studio expertise of EMI staff engineers. They continued to absorb influences long throughout their career and drew inspiration from listening to their contemporaries. Candidates were expected to be able to identify the musical elements in the Beatles' songs and how they are brought together to make a successful cohesive whole.

Songs of George Gershwin

Question 17

Candidates should be able to show that the way Gershwin's songs are performed is arguably as important as the structure and content of the songs themselves. Many diverse singers have interpreted his work to varying degrees of success but often lack of technical skill can be masked by a strong dramatic and emotional performance. Some candidates were able to explore the potential of the songs to be reinvented by performers and were able to identify different performances by such diverse performers as Diane Krall and Bon Jovi but these responses were not just narrative reviews, they consisted of an analytical review of the musical elements of Gershwin's work, including rhythmic patterning to emphasise the meaning of the words and the harmonic structure of the accompaniment underpinning the melody of the vocal line. Weaker responses showed little or no musical understanding and ignored structure and form to focus on the personality and performance style of an individual performer without really connecting to the question.

Question 18

Gershwin was never afraid to experiment and though many critics thought his work was banal his work was extremely popular with the audiences of the day. Candidates were expected to be able to identify Gershwin's musical influences and to show how they are reflected in Gershwin's work. Some candidates focused exclusively on the influence of Tin Pan Alley without identifying the structures and approaches that developed in Tin Pan Alley. Strong candidates also identified the influence of French composers such as Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy and the works of Alban Berg, Dmitri Shostakovich, Igor Stravinsky, Darius Milhaud and Arnold Schoenberg. Having identified the influences, the strongest candidates were able to then analyze how these influences have helped to form the approach to Gershwin's writing and how the songs are crafted. Weak responses identified some influences but could then not expand their work by then analysing how those influences were reflected in Gershwin's work. Such responses remained superficial and did not maintain a connection with the question.

Works studied included: "Fascinating Rhythm" "Summertime" "I Got Rhythm" "Foggy Day"

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Performance Studies H148/H548
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
G401	Raw	70	56	49	42	35	28	0
	UMS	140	112	98	84	70	56	0
G402	Raw	60	48	42	36	30	24	0
	UMS	60	48	42	36	30	24	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H148	200	160	140	120	100	80	0
H548	400	320	280	240	200	160	0

AS GCE certification is available from June 2009.
Advanced GCE certification is available from June 2010.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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