

# **Performance Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 H548

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H148

## **Reports on the Units**

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**June 2010**

**H148/H548/R/10**

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**Advanced Subsidiary GCE Performance Studies (H148)**

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## Chief Examiner's Report

This was the first series in which all four units were available and there were some encouraging results. The report identifies in detail the main points reported by examiners during the session, and the following summary is intended to highlight significant areas of practice that examiners wished to draw to centre's attention.

### G401 Creating Performance

There were 2027 entries for the unit in this session, with less than 5% of these being from candidates who were retaking the unit. Attention is drawn in particular to the following points:

- The strongest candidates were those that linked the two parts of the commentary and were able to make links between the three short pieces and the community piece.
- The weakest work was that where only one art form predominated, both in the devising, and performing as well as the written commentary.
- There was frequently a lack of differentiation between constituent parts of the assessment, with candidates being given inappropriately similar marks for each of the criteria.

### G402 Performance Contexts 1

There were 2134 entries for the session, with around 18% of them being retakes from 2009.

- The ability to structure an answer was perhaps the greatest discriminator. The use of spider-diagrams rather than a plan was often a limiting factor and prevented candidates thinking through the structure of their answer. However, a number of mid-band candidates slavishly followed the structure of the piece and adopted it as the structure of their response: this tended to produce description without analysis.
- The limited ability of candidates to use technical language was also a concern for examiners. The fifteen terms learned in G401 were not often used naturally in answers to the questions in this unit; the best candidates were those who were able to use this vocabulary effortlessly in the context G402.
- Understanding the performance contexts of works should frame candidates' study in this unit. Many candidates focused entirely on the one work they had studied and almost completely ignored the context in which the practitioner worked. Whilst the focus of the unit is on a single work, the better candidates were the ones that were able to write authoritatively about the significance of what they had studied in that work.

### G403 Performance Contexts 2

There were 894 entries in this session, of which 42% were re-sitting the unit from January 2010.

- Many candidates focused exclusively on three practitioners with three works being drawn from each practitioner. Whilst this is within the allowable rules, the unit was revised with the intention of allowing an opportunity for the study of a more diverse range of practitioners. This allows a better focus on the topic rather than the practitioners, and it is

## *Reports on the Units taken in June 2010*

recommended that this is gradually broadened over time in centres where this is not currently the case.

- The amount of work written often does not reflect amount of time allowed for the examination. Many answers were very short, and a particular area of limit was the use of music quotations, where (for example) a single short example was used over and over again to make a range of points.
- The quality of language was often poor. Many used no paragraphs at all, and a worryingly high number of scripts contained widespread and intrusive spelling errors that even extended to incorrect spelling of words contained in the questions themselves.

### **G404 Performance Project**

This was the first time the unit was examined and there were 1469 entries in this series.

- The repertoire performance is now assessed at A2 level, rather than at AS in the legacy specification. This proved challenging to those centres that had not made the step up in their expectations, and a significant number of performance realisations reflected a standard of work more appropriate to AS than A2. This was exacerbated where candidates performed an extract studied for G402 which they appeared not have performed for some months.
- The use of backing recordings for singers proliferated greatly in this series. Whilst such recordings are not forbidden, they should be used with great care. They often undermined, rather than assisted, the performance because of being the wrong pitch for the candidate, or drowned them out, or duplicated the vocal line. All of these are significant considerations, which should be noted for future series.
- In the student-devised pieces there was an improvement in the approach to the commission, but this was not matched by any significant improvement in the ability of groups to construct pieces without resorting to hackneyed devices. In particular, the use of blackout was overdone, and generally unnecessary; the introduction of a game show as a device was something examiners identified particularly as being unhelpful.

## G401 Creating Performance

### General Comments

Centres are clearly becoming accustomed to the logistics of this unit and the related administrative demands. Moderators reported that the majority of centres sent the required samples on time, complete with the necessary paper work. Moderators were able to identify where marks had been awarded because of full, supporting comments on each coursework cover sheet (CCS) and annotations on the commentaries themselves. There was a clear increase in the quality of the DVDs and candidates were clearly identified. The moderating team was particularly grateful to centres who completed additional paperwork after they had received the sample request as this helped to locate the candidates in the sample for the moderator. However there are still a few centres who failed to include marginal annotations, leaving it unclear where marks have been awarded; centres are reminded that marginal annotations are part of the centre's evidence that candidates have fulfilled particular aspects of the mark scheme and as such it is important that annotation takes place in order to ensure that candidates receive the appropriate marks. Unfortunately there were also a few instances where comments on the CCS were very brief and appeared rushed. Considering that centres have this opportunity to support the work of their candidates it is regrettable when care is not taken to present the work of the candidates in the best possible light.

With regard to the marking criteria there tended to be bunching towards either side of a mark band and there was evidence that centres were not using the full range of marks open to them to differentiate between candidates.

When awarding marks for the written commentary, centres need to be clear in which marking criteria are being used to credit the examined skills. The ability to make links between the art forms is to be credited under knowledge and understanding and not under process. There were also several instances of centres awarding the same marks to a group of candidates: both for the devising of the performance, and performance skills. Although marks might be close it is rare that candidates cannot be differentiated and centres should think carefully before awarding the same mark.

Although the majority of centres were specific in identifying strengths within a piece of work, whether written or performed, there were still some instances of unhelpful, generic comments being written such as 'outstanding work', 'brilliant performer' and 'alovely read'. This tells the moderator very little. Unfortunately some of these comments appeared on work where there were obvious inadequacies and these call into question the quality of the marking in the mind of the moderator.

Moderators identified that a significant number of able candidates obtained a higher percentage of their marks on the performance aspect of the course whilst less able candidates were able to support their marks by writing a well structured commentary. It seems clear that where centres are able they are tailoring their teaching very much to the particular cohort of candidates and making sure that support is given to enable the candidates to achieve. This customised and differentiated planning is clearly good practice. Centres are reminded that the whole course is intended as a taught unit and at no point in their written submissions should candidates be discussing, purely hypothetically, a range of performance possibilities.

- Please ensure that each mark criterion on the CCS has a full supporting comment. Eg 'dance and drama clear – Pg.3, Clear links between music and dance Pg.4. Some confusion as to intended outcome of community piece'.
- Commentaries should be annotated showing clearly K/U, Links, Process and QL.

## **Written Submission**

The written submission should be in two balanced sections: the first dealing with the performances in the individual art forms and the second with the community piece.

Overall in this examining series there was much better cross-referencing of technique and style to outcomes in the individual pieces and candidates seem to be learning how to explain what they are exploring in the practical work within a concise and objective written style. Candidates should focus on their understanding of the improvise, rehearse, perform process through the practical work they undertake. Marks are not available for a theoretical discussion that is not grounded in their own experience.

Most centres had clearly defined stimuli, but there were instances where the stimulus appeared to be workshops they had undertaken, and in one centre the stimulus, for all three performances, was the work of the same practitioner. In this instance the dance piece appeared to have no improvisation at all because it was a re-creation of a piece by the practitioner (Swan Lake by Bourne) and several candidates described this work as being tightly choreographed and led by the teacher. Work must be devised, and this infringement of the rubric would not have occurred if there had been a proper stimulus.

The discussion on links was significantly improved and it raised the quality of many candidates' work as it made them think laterally. However centres are not always including links as part of the annotation on the commentaries or on the CCS, possibly because it does not appear as a separate set of mark criteria. However when justifying why marks have been awarded, it is important to draw the moderator's attention to each aspect of the criteria within a mark specific mark band. When marks are awarded at the top of a mark band the moderator is looking for evidence to support this and an adjustment may be made to the marks if this evidence cannot be found.

Many centres focused the written commentaries on the fifteen elements identified on page nine of the specification, and this often enabled candidates to gain higher marks. The successful candidates were those who were able to link these elements to specific performance intentions, and then chart the extent to which these were achieved through the performance process.

On some occasions, candidates discussed the elements in detail with regard to the three discrete pieces, but then neglected them in their discussion of the community piece, often with the result that the discussion of the latter tended towards the narrative rather than the evaluative.

Some centres also discussed particular practitioners, such as Stanislavski, Fosse and Brecht and this often added greater depth to the discussion of performance theory. However, there were occasions when centres discussed practitioners such as these but neglected the fifteen elements listed in the specification. Centres are reminded that these elements should form the basis of the discussion of the practical work undertaken for this unit, and that three of the four bullet points within the knowledge and understanding assessment area refer to 'the elements of all three art forms'. It is therefore expected that these will be discussed in some detail within the written commentaries.

The second section of the written commentary should focus on the community performance piece. The best results were evident from centres where there was a clear performance project as a focus for the candidates from the start. Where there is a clear focus on the project, performance style, venue and intended audience, candidates wrote in a concise and organised way and were able to identify the devising process, discuss the development of the piece of theatre and individual characters, show how the art forms were fully integrated in their work and then evaluate the success of the project in the final project. There was a clear ability to work consistently within a style and to cross-reference relevant practitioners. However there were exceptions to this that raise a concern. Most noticeably there were problems when candidates

worked in a post-modern or eclectic style. Here there was little understanding of the overall style and the candidates' work suggested confusion. Candidates need to be challenged on their use of the word 'eclectic' and think carefully about using it. Candidates wrote far more confidently when there was a clear style that could be researched and demanded specific performing skills that could be developed and evaluated.

Centres are reminded that the work should be for a specific audience and this should inform the devising of the work. Candidates need to devise a piece that arises out of the community and is for the community. The style chosen should be consistent with this and this gives a secure foundation that forms the basis of development and evaluation. Centres are also reminded that the community performance piece should be a piece that integrates all three art forms and so this section of the commentary should also contain explicit examples of links between the art forms. Again care should be taken in the style chosen for performance. Too often groups became immersed in a narrative so that the devised piece became a piece of narrative drama with little room for music or dance. Unfortunately too often candidates took the option of performing existing songs or devising backing tracks and therefore not using elements to provide them with original, live performed work. The full mark range is not available to candidates who do not show that they have been involved in a piece that is using original, devised material in all three art forms. In some cases, the music component of the community piece was repertoire rather than devised, with candidates simply performing existing musical theatre or pop songs such as 'All That Jazz' or 'When September Ends.' This severely disadvantaged the candidates as they were consequently unable to discuss the devising process for the music and therefore could not be marked in the higher bands for their discussion of performance process.

It is still a concern that candidates across the ability range are prepared to undermine their writing by the inclusion of anecdotal details about the use of time and organisational problems within the group. The focus should always be upon the techniques used to devise a piece of theatre and how these have been developed, refined, realised with an objective evaluation against the stated intent of the group and the style they are working in. Moderators are looking for a clear ability to discuss objectively the devising process, seeking clear evidence that candidates are clear in the distinctions between improvise, rehearse, perform and that examples are drawn from the three art forms to show their analysis of the process and how theatre has been created and refined. There were also several instances of candidates starting a sentence, "If we were to do this again..." with the all too usual comment about being better organised, using time more effectively or making a simplistic statement about including more examples of techniques from a particular art form. To access the higher mark bands candidates should analyse the effect of the techniques they have used and the extent that they enabled the original intent of the piece to be realised and its effect upon the audience.

Several candidates in several centres still persist in writing separate essays for music, drama and dance, and in one centre, although the candidates used the improvise – rehearse – perform structure, they did so within a series of three essays on the separate art forms, thus defeating the purpose! In another centre all four pieces were considered as part of the process so there was no section one and section two. This made it very difficult to follow the process of the community piece.

Quality of language was often marked too generously because there was an assumption that if the writing was clear and there were no or few spelling, grammar and punctuation errors, this meant the high marks could be accessed. In such cases the use of language was often simple and complex ideas were not explored and expressed. The comma was often used incorrectly, placed at a point where a new sentence should have started. Another problem was the over-use of the personal pronoun, 'we'. In some commentaries sentence after sentence started with 'we' and this made the writing appear like a list of actions rather than an analysis and evaluation. Paragraphing was also poor in many commentaries. They were either too short or too long, with a variety of indentation in the same commentary. Changes of font and unnumbered pages

stapled in the wrong order were other administration issues that caused problems for the moderator.

Some commentaries were too long. The specifications clearly state that 3,000 words is the approximate length for the commentary. Therefore submissions that are close to twice this length are unacceptable and this should be reflected in the mark awarded for quality of language.

- Candidates should submit two balanced sections.
- Section one should be structured using the devising process showing clear links between the art forms.
- Section two should state clearly the intended project, the style, exemplar practitioners and how each art contributes to the total theatre.
- The written style should be concise and objective showing understanding arising from the practical work undertaken.
- The length of the commentary should be approximately 3,000 words.

### **The Practical Submission – DVD**

Most centres submitted good quality recordings of their performances. A few centres had a slight problem with sound, often as a result of an outdoor venue or poor acoustics in the performance venue. This did not generally impede the moderation process. There were some examples of recordings where it was difficult to make out the candidates, usually as a result of the following problems:

- Low light levels
- Overly-bright stage lighting that tended to white-out the candidates' faces (particularly when red or orange lighting gels were used)
- Camera positioned too far from the stage
- Candidates moving out of shot.

As with the point regarding annotations above, centres are reminded that the DVD recording is the primary evidence for the marking of the practical performance work. If, for whatever reason, the recording does not clearly support the marks awarded then these marks may not be upheld. It is therefore in centres' interest that the recording is of good quality. It is suggested that centres review the recording before submitting the work for this unit in order to ensure that it supports that marks that have been given.

Centres do need to ensure that the DVD is clearly labelled and appropriately chaptered so that the work of individual candidates can be clearly accessed by the moderator.

### **The Community Performance Piece**

#### **Practical Work**

There were some very exciting examples of practical work, with candidates working as ensembles, and supporting one another's work. The use of narration and direct address often worked well, whereas the groups who worked primarily in a naturalistic style often struggled to integrate the art forms successfully. In order to work effectively, naturalism requires a depth and complexity of character that was rarely evidenced. Instead, there were several examples of rambling, unfocused scenes that were of little dramatic interest and which sometimes seemed more influenced by television soap operas than by relevant theatrical practitioners. This was

evident when candidates were unable to move beyond GCSE thinking and highly charged, emotional scenes appeared improvised rather than crafted.

There were a range of strong performances where candidates had obviously developed clear skills across the individual art forms and were then able to combine them in the community piece. There needs to be a balance between the art forms and the majority of mark adjustments were because candidates did not provide evidence of original performance work across all three art forms. The specification is clear that there should be a balance. Candidates cannot be awarded a mark of 9 or 10 marks for devising with 19 or 20 for performance skill for a drama driven piece with a little evidence of dance or music. Some candidates actually admitted that 'music was minimal', and several centres submitted work from candidates who described last minute attempts to 'add dance' or add some music' because 'there was a poor balance in our art forms'. There seems to be a misconception that music has been devised if candidates take an existing song and change the lyrics to fit their piece. Nursery rhymes, sometimes with minimal additions, were often used this way but could not be given credit. Where marks had been awarded for this, often in the higher bands, an adjustment was made. Other tokenistic examples included a short series of beats on a drum, and, in the words of one candidate in another centre, the inclusion of 'ringing a bell because it had an impact on the audience.' Candidates are expected to engage with the composition of music in order to gain high marks for devising and need to show sustained performance ability in all art forms to be placed in the top band for performance skills. If candidates do not show clear evidence of having devised work in all three art forms then the full range of marks is not available for devising. In awarding marks for performance skills in this session there was a significant tendency for centres to give inappropriate credit to candidates who were good performers within one area but who could not then display more than rudimentary skills in the second or third art form.

Some of the best examples of effective performance work were where a true synergy between the art forms was achieved, with two or three occurring simultaneously. There were a few examples of strong work where the art forms were presented sequentially rather than simultaneously but in general this approach did not lead to performance material that fulfilled the criteria for the top bands of the mark scheme. One strong example of work focused on a song that the candidates had devised: the song only appeared once, but motifs from the song appeared throughout the work, arising from dance and drama, before finally being presented as a complete song. This very strong, planned structure served the candidates well. When choosing a performance style, centres are advised that promenade performance represents a staging decision rather than a specific performance style. The candidates who were working with promenade often struggled to articulate the conventions and requirements and usually fell back on discussing practitioners such as Fosse and Godber, neither of whom are known as significant pioneers in this field.

The best work came from centres where clear planning had taken place and the candidates were guided in the devising process and not left to their own devices. This in turn meant that candidates were challenged to use all the art forms and not simply to rely on what they saw as their own strengths.

### **Community Performance Piece venues**

Great care needs to be taken with regard to the choice of the venue and whether the candidates can have the necessary access for sufficient rehearsal.

Locations varied from churches and chapels, to working men's clubs and woodland sites of historical interest. Most centres were able to maintain volume and visibility in these locations, but in one case the echo of the chapel was so bad it made hearing difficult.

Two extensive pieces set outside were on a very cold, wet and windy day, the wind interfering with the sound quite significantly. Commentaries suggested the candidates didn't think about this until their dress rehearsal.

### **Community Performance Piece subjects**

There were a wide range of subjects presented for examination from local figures, ghosts, historical events, buildings and visiting artists. Candidates are reminded that the piece should be specific to their community and not based simply upon a universal topic such as drugs, the problems of old age or the election unless there is a strong local focus.

- Centres must provide a DVD that is clearly chaptered, enabling easy navigation to the work of individual candidates.
- Each candidate must be clearly identified, in costume, at the start of the performance.
- Each candidate must show clear evidence of devising and performing in all three art forms in order to access the full range of marks.
- Narrative drama pieces should be avoided.
- Plan the project so that clear account is taken of the intended venue.

# G402 Performance Contexts 1

## General Comments

Many candidates planned their responses, some with significant detail and most answers were structured well around the question, beginning with an introduction to the practitioner's general aims and a brief contextual biography and ending with a conclusion that related the points that had been made throughout the answer. It was noted by examiners that more candidates planned with more sophistication this series. Generally a good plan led to a response that had more logical progression and coherence to the argument. The best plans were not just a list of words but formed the structure of an argument by identifying which points should come where in relation to answering the question. Many candidates again used the spider diagram idea for planning which can be useful for pinpointing key features but which did not always help the candidates to order their thoughts or ideas.

As in the past some candidates seemed to struggle with timing, either only writing one answer or writing one long and one short response and frequently candidates wrote a much better response for one art form and a weaker one for the second art form. As before there seem to be a lot of candidates who had at least a reasonable knowledge of the stylistic techniques of a practitioner but who still struggled to exemplify ideas using specific details of movement material, musical notation and performance, quotation, practical explanation and text references. Sometimes examples were used that were totally out of context and unrelated to any specific idea. Some candidates were still not experiencing any live performance and those that did often misunderstood and confused directorial interpretation with original textual demands. Weakest responses tended to make assumptions about the prior knowledge of the reader and often forced the reader to fill in the gaps to make sense of a response.

Examiners noted that some candidates had studied one work in the drama and dance sections and were often able to use a range of examples to illustrate ideas from within that one text, other candidates had studied a wider range of text. Although the specification does not demand this, many candidates who were in this situation showed a real in-depth understanding of a practitioner's work with examples to prove ideas garnered from across a range of works.

Mid-band candidates often adopted a very narrative approach, once again taken the structure of the work as the structure of their response. Weakest candidates offered no structure at all and jumped from point to point with no connecting argument or meaning and little or no evidence from the piece studied. The very best responses offered both argument and counter argument.

Good responses continually returned to the question, not just repeating ad nauseum but rephrasing it to keep the writing fresh. Such responses offered insightful opinions and interesting standpoints. Higher level candidates appreciated the socio-political and performance context in which the practitioner found themselves and made these links clear. Weaker candidates did not explore potential interpretations whilst better candidates were able to draw from a range of references and to offer interpretations that were appropriate to the question whilst still recognising that other interpretations were possible.

As in past series introductions and conclusions were often omitted with some conclusions consisting of a list form of the response. Good conclusions were summative and rounded and referred directly back to the question. Few candidates were able to conclude their work by doing anything other than recapping but the strongest answers raised further questions or challenged statements. For example in relation to themes raised in Godber's work some candidates argued that from a very political standpoint alluding to the recent change of government which supported the view that Godber's themes are still relevant today.

Some candidate confused practitioners completely or lost the connection with the question, particularly when they appeared not to fully understand the key terms that they were using. Either the terms were poorly interpreted as in *blues scale* or the definition was ignored as in *contact improvisation* and *physical theatre*. Some candidates struggled to address questions with more than one part and although most candidates seemed to understand the terminology used in the questions, some candidates struggled with the term *structure* and thought that this only related to the narrative structure of a piece. The term *radical* was also not always fully appreciated as some candidates referred to this as just being “different”.

Dance movement material is often described in very narrative terms and candidates are encouraged to utilise the fifteen terms acquired in G401 which are designed to offer a technical vocabulary for all of the ensuing units. Best candidates were able to pinpoint a moment in a piece, and then describe its presentation or possible presentation, followed by a discussion of interpretation or effect.

Dance responses still often include little actual movement material and such response remained narrative. When candidates did provide dance detail they often omitted to locate it within a piece making the point become rather vague. Musical responses generally included very few musical illustrations and notation was often simplistic or inaccurate. Candidates often struggled to clearly explain musical terms and to exemplify them. The Beatles responses were more lyrical or story based or emotional rather than musical or informative. Many candidates did not refer to more than two Gershwin pieces which narrowed the scope of their response.

The quality of language was variable. Most examiners felt that candidates were generally fluent with an increase in candidates who were able to interpret the question and offer a sophisticated response to that question. Once again some candidates were not able to spell the playwright's names or the titles of the works they studied correctly, for example *Achilles*, *audience*, *playwright* and *choreographer* were often misspelt. The overuse of *etc* or statements such as “*this feature along with many others*” represented a vagueness which meant that candidates could not access the higher band marks. Examiners noted that paragraphs were often not used at all or new paragraphs began at inappropriate times. Statements such as “*gave good effect*” or “*made it sound more stronger*” were clumsy and not very illuminating. A chatty tone was adopted by some candidates as in “*John's work really hits you*” “*The way I see it it's like this*” but this did not help the candidate to take an objective, analytical approach. Strongest candidates clearly have a real engagement with the work, are able to absorb the information regarding techniques and features and are then able to synthesise that knowledge and apply it to a specific set question with clarity and sophistication.

## Question Specific Comments

### Section A

#### 1 Matthew Bourne

This question focused on performance techniques. Bourne's work has been described as containing all of the elements of musical theatre so that it combines all the Arts with the emotional content as well as the story being communicated through the words, music, movement and technical aspects of the piece. Candidates were expected to show how performers need to be versatile to achieve effective performances. They must be able to use different dance and dramatic styles as well as technical skill to convey their character. Generally how Bourne creates a spectacular performance for the audience was not addressed as much as the demands on the performer. Candidates tended to either focus entirely on one or the other or tried to deal with the audience and performer equally but in so doing lost the focus on the versatility of the performer. The best responses did appreciate the question and discussed skills such as being able to seamlessly dance in a variety of styles from classical ballet to pedestrian

movement, from salsa to club dancing whilst also multiroling and using drama skills in terms of expressiveness and gesture. They also mentioned the research and development of characters and practical demands such as working with the music, using unusual sets and locations and having an input into the choreography. Some candidates mentioned that an aspect of the versatility was to be able to express shocking material as seen in works such as *The Car Man* and *Dorian Gray* and to present it to a possibly unsuspecting audience who might be expecting more traditional fairy tale ballets. As always the best responses were supported by specific movement material drawn from the studied work(s).

## 2 Matthew Bourne

The focus of this question was on structure and form. Candidates were expected to recognise that Bourne is always seeking to create a striking and memorable theatrical experience for his audience. Many candidates struggled with the idea of structure and form and would generalise by stating that a certain element of the work had “*theatrical impact*”. Good candidates often started by stating the fact that Bourne is reworking a previous story. Most responses focused on the narrative as the main structure and explored the idea of the journey of a central character. Some candidates felt it was impossible to isolate the components of a dance as they formed a cohesive whole and explored the idea of moments of juxtaposition. Most candidates seemed to be aware of Bourne’s particular working approach with the dance coming last and how he uses dramatic techniques and research projects to enable the cast to inhabit their characters. The best candidates were able to discuss different aspects of the works and how they contributed to the mood, atmosphere and impact of the action. They were able to identify what effective theatrical performance meant to them and were able to discuss the humour, the cheekiness and the accessibility of Bourne’s work using examples from the studied works to exemplify their ideas.

**Works studied included: *Dorian Gray, Nutcracker!* , *Swan Lake, Edward Scissorhands, The Car Man.***

## 3 Shobana Jeyasingh

The question focused on how Jeyasingh’s work has evolved and how she sometimes deals with different styles separately or sometimes melds all of these styles into a newer hybrid style. Candidates were expected to be able to place Jeyasingh’s work in its appropriate place on the timeline of dance and to show how she brought together all of her influences and her training and background and reflected them in her dance work. Having studied classical Bharata Natyam as a child, an MA in Shakespeare Studies and contemporary dance methods she has a rich foundation to draw upon. Weakest candidates produced prolonged biographical details without recognising the full significance of those experiences and how they had helped to form Jeyasingh’s work. Strongest candidates were able to identify Jeyasingh’s background and experience but were then able to highlight how each is reflected in her work and to what effect.

## 4 Shobana Jeyasingh

This question was focused on structure and Form. Candidates were expected to be able to identify the movement material used and to highlight key moments in the studied work where different emotional intensity is created and what choreographic devices are used to achieve those effects. Some candidates recognised that Jeyasingh’s work is non narrative and multilayered and that her choreography continuously evolves with each new piece that she creates. The few candidates who answered this question sometimes struggled to discuss structure and form other than in very general terms. These responses tended to lack analytical depth and discussions of choreographic devices used were minimal and mainly focused on the

number of performers on stage and the use of unison and canon. Better responses were able to clearly show how Jeyasingh's work is rooted in the principles of the temple dance form, Bharata Natyam that consists of detailed hand gestures and grounded footwork done with deep bent knees as well as a mixture of both straight and fluid torso. Such candidates proved their ideas using evidence from the studied work, highlighting specific moments when a particular movement was used and where that movement had derived from.

**Works studied included: *Exit no Exit, Faultline, Flicker.***

## **5 Lloyd Newson**

The focus of this question was on cultural, historical and social context. Newson wants to create an emotional and physical truth on stage that is demanding for both the performer and the spectator. Most candidates were able to identify that Newson challenges his audience by dealing with taboo subjects. What was not always clear was what attitude was being challenged. Candidates who fully understood the context of Newson's work and who were able to draw on a wide range of knowledge and experience of Newson's work(s) were able to address the question without repetition. Weaker responses were narrative and subjective whilst stronger candidates showed how Newson explored the taboo subjects such as homosexuality, faith, relationships, being different and masculinity using particular techniques such as the rare use of unison or use of pedestrian movement. Some sophisticated responses detailed how the issues explored in the pieces have changed and developed and how society's attitudes have also changed and in some cases softened. They were also able to place Newson in the appropriate position on the drama timeline and show how his concerns have evolved and yet whilst there is still injustice in today's world then his work still has a resonance today.

## **6 Lloyd Newson**

The focus of the question was on elements of the Performing Arts. Candidates were expected to recognise that Newson's work is constantly evolving and to be able to identify the specific devices used in the studied work to convey the stories and ideas clearly. There were some very good responses to this question. Candidates were able to focus on what stories and ideas are being presented and often identified the journey that a central character undertook as well as identifying themes and ideas such as homosexuality and disability. The link between techniques, narrative and themes and the subsequent audience experience was dealt with in high end responses. Some candidates struggled to name the techniques Newson used and sometimes resorted to describing the moments rather than deconstructing the elements that made that moment. Weaker candidates did not seem to be aware that Newson's works are performed live and were therefore unable to appreciate the level of audience reaction and interpretation. Some candidates presented narrow interpretations as fact so "*Strangefish is all about AIDS*", "*In Enter Achilles pouring beer on the floor and writhing in it shows he is an alcoholic*". Such absolutes left no room for any alternative interpretation and led to a very narrow discussion.

**Works studied included: *Strangefish, Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men, To Be Straight With You.***

## **Section B**

## **7 Caryl Churchill**

The focus of this question was on structure and form. Candidates should be able to identify the structure of the play that they have studied and to then show how different techniques that Churchill has used have manipulated the material in order to achieve a specific effect. Most

candidates focused on the episodic structure in Churchill's plays with weaker candidates just describing each scene. Most candidates took the term *radical* to mean *interesting* or *different* whilst also asserting that Churchill did have radical approach, often using juxtaposing of sections, acts or scenes in her plays alongside the use of song and direct address. More sophisticated responses discussed Brechtian influences, episodic structure, narrative sequences and flashbacks as well as other styles of performance such as realism and the Stanislavski approach. Some candidates wrote about Churchill's particular use of language forms, including coarse vernacular terms, use of dialect and overlapping speech patterns. A number of centres had studied *Seven Jewish Children*. This non linear, fragmented text, with no stage directions for characters provided candidates with plenty to say about structure and form in terms of Churchill being radical. The best responses were able to present the argument, supported by textual evidence, that Churchill was radical because she presented ideas but left the audience to make up their own minds regarding their feelings about them.

## 8 Caryl Churchill

This question focused on the cultural, historical and social context of Churchill's work. Churchill is concerned with creating strong characters as well as presenting issues. The audience is drawn into the characters' lives and the issues are often addressed through the prism of these characters lives. The women in Churchill's plays often struggle to find, and to justify, their place in society. Some candidates ignored the *raise questions* part of the question, choosing to focus instead on the story of the characters within a studied work. Better responses were able to establish the often allegorical stories that Churchill tells and establish the context of the characters. More sophisticated responses then identified the original context of Churchill's work and to show how society has changed in its thinking and how this affects the original context. Some candidates were confused when it came to identifying the world of the characters in their studied work and became confused about which world was being challenged, the historical world or the parallel contemporary world. Some candidates took the raising question aspect literally and took it to mean the questions asked in the actual play such as *which one of the characters is a witch?*

**Works studied included: *Seven Jewish Children, Top Girls, Vinegar Tom.***

## 9 Athol Fugard

The focus of the question is on the cultural, historical and social context of the studied work. Candidates were expected to show an understanding of Fugard's work and how he sought to expose the injustice of the apartheid system and its ability to strip a man of the last vestiges of his dignity. There were some excellent responses to this work from candidates who were clearly engaged with the work and who declared an intention to perform a Fugard piece for their performance realisation in unit G404. Such candidates were able to identify the social and political context of Fugard's work and in particular, their focus studied work. They identified the individuals in the studied plays and were able to show, using key moments, how that individual's struggle represents the greater struggle of man within a potentially destructive regime that seeks to destroy a nation. Best responses identified the techniques that Fugard used such as lengthy monologues directed at the audience to reveal their inner thoughts and lives and to also reveal the extent of their humiliation. Weakest responses retold the story of the studied play without showing what techniques were used to provoke the audience in to examining an individual's life and through that examination to also throw a spotlight on an oppressive regime.

## 10 Athol Fugard

The question focused on structure and form. Candidates were expected to be able to analyse the structure and form of the Fugard play studied and to show where a particular device or technique is used and to what effect. They should also identify what they believe the message of the play is and analyse how it is explored throughout the play. Strongest candidates were able to clearly identify what they believed the message to be in their studied work. They were then able to explore the different techniques that Fugard employs and to show how each is used in the plays to ensure that the stated message is delivered with clarity and conviction. These candidates used clear and detailed analysis of the studied text to strengthen their argument. Some candidates used productions seen or their own practical experience of the text to support their ideas. This engagement with the work often was reflected in a greater understanding of the emotional truth of the play and the power of Fugard's work in performance. Weaker candidates retold the narrative of the play and failed to recognise the significance and function of devices such as humour and comic action; minimal staging and Brechtian devices designed to challenge and confront the audience.

**Works studied included: *Boesman and Lena, Blood Knot, Sizwe Banzi is Dead, The Island.***

## 11 John Godber

This question focused on stylistic influences. Candidates should be able to show whether they believe that Godber's work is still relevant today and to use evidence from the text to prove their opinions. A large proportion of candidates ignored stylistic influences and stylistic traits and concentrated solely on the issues Godber explores which resulted in some heavily narrative and subjective responses. Better responses were able to clarify that part of the reason that the issues he explores remain relevant is because of the way he presents them, so devices such as direct address made the audience feel involved and therefore engaged with the issues. Some candidates were able to show how performers keep the work fresh by updating it using more relevant and modern interpretations. There seemed to be more confidence shown when addressing the relevance of the issues to the era within which the play was written. High end answers offered both sides of the argument suggesting that whilst most of the issues were still relevant some of them have had a change of focus. They were able to reflect on current topics such as the recent change of government and relate that to the situation during Thatcher's Conservative leadership in the 1980s. The quality of education both in the past and in the future was examined in relation to *Teechers*. Some candidates suggested that Godber was no longer relevant as the class system was dead and the education system was totally fair.

## 12 John Godber

The question focused on elements of the performing arts. Candidates were expected to identify Godber's techniques are how they are used at a specific moment within a text to create a specific effect and to evaluate the effect and the relationship between the different elements and how that juxtaposition creates a more powerful piece. The clearest responses were able to discuss the different elements to Godber's work and were able to identify how these made theatre more accessible, relevant and engaging. They then worked systematically through the studied work and highlighted moments that proved their argument. In identifying effective theatre candidates also automatically considered the audience and therefore the effect of the relationship between the elements and how Godber links them all together. Weaker responses only addressed the first part of the question, ignoring the second part and resulting in rather generic list like responses.

**Works studied included: *Teechers, Bouncers, Shakers.***

## Section C

### 13 John Adams

This question focused on stylistic influences. Adams was inspired by John Cage and he was reacquainted with minimalism through watching a performance of Reich's *Drumming*. Candidates were expected to be able to identify the influences reflected in Adams' work and to identify whether they believe his work is derivative or totally innovative. Few candidates attempted these questions but those that did demonstrated a clear and detailed understanding of Adams' work and were able to place his work in the appropriate position on a timeline and to highlight and explore the diverse musical influences that are reflected in his work. Strong candidates showed how Adams' work links with minimalism and used examples from *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, *Nixon in China* and *Shaker Loops* to exemplify ideas. They were able to identify what they understood Adams' personal language to be and showed a clear understanding of the wide range of musical styles that had helped to form his own. Some candidates worked successfully through a number of different styles, highlighting features and showing how Adams translated them into his own work. Clear and detailed examples from the studied work helped stronger candidates to define Adams' personal language.

### 14 John Adams

The question focused on performance techniques and candidates should have shown that they understood the performance demands placed upon a musician when performing a specific work by Adams. There is an expectation of versatility and skills that cover a wide range of styles although, as some candidates pointed out; musicians are often selected especially for a particular piece. Few candidates answered this question but those that did were able to show an in-depth understanding of the characteristic features of Adams' work and to identify how that arrangement of materials makes specific demands on a performer, so there is an expectation of vocalists who are expected to tackle a wide range of styles from operatic to gospel styles as in *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*. Better candidates appreciated the demand for tight discipline and showed a clear understanding of the relationship between instrument performers and song performers. Some candidates recognised that Adams writes some pieces for particular performers such as *Central Rolls* written for Emanuel Ax and that these pieces are created as a response to the individual's performance style so may be open to greater interpretation. Some candidates had never seen a live performance of Adams' work nor had they actually practically experienced the work themselves so their responses tended to be rather generalised.

**Works studied included: *Nixon in China*, *Shaker Loops*, *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, *I was looking at the Ceiling and Then I saw the Sky*.**

### 15 The Beatles

The focus of the question was on stylistic influences. It was expected that candidates would be able to define what they understand by the musical language of the 1960s and to show that they have an understanding of where The Beatles fit by contextualising their work, placing it in the appropriate social and historical context. The term musical language was understood by most candidates to mean the elements of The Beatles' style and many candidates struggled to chart the development of that musical language further than expressing that they were influential. Some candidates were able to reflect on the changing attitude of the 1960s but few were able to link this to the structural changes in music. The analysis of songs was often underdeveloped and mainly lyrical focusing on how their earlier songs "*were about love*" and their later songs "*were about drugs and relationships*". Most candidates could discuss influences and processes but few could discuss affects. Most candidates could acknowledge that The Beatles' approach to

composition and the writing of lyrics was not conventional. Few candidates were able to analyse the songs with any rigour and there was limited recognition of The Beatles use of varied instrumentation or the use of specific musical elements such as tempo and melody and how they were used and to what effect.

## **16 The Beatles**

The focus of this question was on structure and form. Candidates were expected to define what they understood by *“the structure of popular songs”* and to show where The Beatles sit in the timeline of music and how their work evolved and developed to become more expressive and complex. As with many of the music responses there was a surprising lack of musical knowledge and understanding. Few candidates were able to identify the musical structure of the songs and to break them down into their component parts such as rhythm, chord structures, verse and chorus and to analyse those parts and show how they were manipulated to create a specific effect. Some candidates were able to recognise many changes to the structure of the songs but were often then unable to reflect on what pop songs had been like before. Most focused on instrument choice, lyrics, themes, influences and timing. Candidates were also unsure of exactly how popular songs were made *“more expressive and complex”* but did understand that The Beatles travelling, willingness to experiment musically, change of topics and the influence of a wider range of musicians meant that there was a big difference between earlier and later songs. Strongest answers were able to reflect on the change to the composition of melodies and harmonies and the use of technological advances and how these affected the structure.

***Works studied included: When I’m Sixty-Four, Michelle, Please Please Me, She’s Leaving Home, A Day in the Life.***

## **17 George Gershwin**

The focus of this question was on Performance techniques. Candidates were expected to show an understanding of the crafting of the songs and how they were constructed to have the maximum impact on an audience. The music came before the lyrics but a performer of a Gershwin song has to understand that the rhythm of the words always matches the rhythm of the music even if it means skewing the poetry of the words so that they match without making sense. If candidates took *“approach”* to mean approach to composition they needed to show an understanding of the style and form of the studied songs and how that might affect performance. The best responses were able to establish what Gershwin had composed and then show what a performer had done with it through performance techniques such as the manipulation of pauses, the use of rubato and the retention or omission of verses. Some candidates referenced Michael Buble but only a few discussed any specific performances or performances and few reflected on their own experiences of performing the works, often discussing instead the different approaches to the drama in the songs in the third person. Strongest answers showed a good depth of understanding as to how the songs can provide drama, both musically and lyrically and the power of the songs to identify with universal themes and emotions. Most candidates demonstrated a detailed knowledge of a range of different Gershwin songs from the early *Swanee* to *Summertime*.

## **18 George Gershwin**

This question focused on Structure and form. Candidates should have shown an appreciation of the arrangement of Gershwin’s work and how the music came first before the words were added, in direct contrast to most Tin Pan Alley songs in which the music was written to fit the lyrics. Some candidates did not fully appreciate Gershwin’s approach to composition and these responses tended to become generalised. Many candidates discussed the collaboration

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between Ira and George Gershwin and how this affected the forming of the lyrics. Better candidates were able to clarify where and how Gershwin had been influenced by Tin Pan Alley's structural form and where he had chosen to move away from it. Candidates were often able to identify some of the features of Gershwin's work such as blue notes, the use of chromatic notes, ascending and descending scale and were able in some cases to discuss the relationship of structure to the emotions in the lyrics. There was some interesting debate as to whether the emotional intention was Ira's rather than George's. There were some perceptive responses that explored the opposing idea that the music of George Gershwin was innately emotional with Ira just finding words to go with it so that it was George who had determined the intended emotion whilst Ira clarified it. Few candidates used musical annotation but for those that did it clarified the points made.

***Works studied included: Summertime, Swanee, The Man I Love, Nice Work, Foggy Day.***

## G403 Performance Contexts 2

### General Comments

All centres are advised to consult the report for January 2010 on this unit. It covered a number of areas, which centres would be wise to consider.

Some centres have stayed with the required approach they used for 2560 in the previous specification, ie 3 works from 3 practitioners. The new specification encourages a move away from this in order to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on the knowledge and understanding of the four topics – Twentieth century American musical, politics and performance, post - modern approaches and performance in the Far East. Whilst it may still be possible to only use three practitioners to represent one of these topics, the opportunity to widen the exemplar reference material is strongly encouraged. The intention behind the withdrawal of the restriction was also to allow a broader range of 'studied' repertoire for G404.

There is no doubt that the freedom offered by the new specification is being enjoyed by many centres with some enthusiasm for the topics shining through answers. Where centres have ensured that candidates approach the answer from the point of view of the topic, namely Twentieth century American musical or politics and performance, rather than the works or practitioners studied then they are having greater success. Too many candidates are still writing works-led or names-led answers, discussing the works rather than discussing the topic in relation to the question and using the works as examples.

It is the approach to answering the question that is still the biggest barrier to higher marks for many candidates. Despite exhortations to the contrary, many candidates are still writing everything they know about practitioners and works in blocks of, often, very general writing.

Many candidates had no plan whatsoever and some had four or five pages of planning with relatively short answers.

Helpful plans should indicate the points the candidate is to make in response to the question and on the topic and possibly mementoes of the exemplar references they intend to use to support their point. All too often there is a list of practitioners and/or their works, which are then written up and an offhand reference to the question offered at the end of the section.

Planning would also help candidates 'pace themselves' through the two hours allowed. Some answers were rushed in the last sections and fell below the standard they had established earlier on. There were many answers that did not reflect the time allowed. Whilst in some centres it might have been the individual candidate's 'best shot', in others it was clear that insufficient expectation was being made of the candidates in a two hour written examination.

A large number of candidates are willing to discuss everything but the art form activity. For example, Anderson and Bourne are talked about in terms of their sets, costumes and lighting; all of which could possibly be useful but not in the absence of any movement detail. Lyric, character and action again could be potentially relevant as long as there is some evidence of musical understanding.

There needs to be greater evidence of analysis by art form in the answers offered. Generalised reference only creates good "general studies" answers. The expectation is that the topics under consideration in this unit are studied from the point of view of them being works for performance in dance, drama or music form or a combination of any two or all three.

Thus, “Anderson uses Jackie Kennedy’s movements at the time of her husband’s assassination and re-interprets them for a section of the choreography” is a good point, but only if it is then followed up with some detail, maybe describing the jerking back of the upper torso and head in unison, the crawling into the back of the car, the hand-waving – hands are a recurrent motif in this section of Car.

A significant number of centres appear to be offering a standard answer, usually a work through of the pieces “studied” with set references to works, which often are so brief that they mean little. The same line from the same song used in all answers from a centre tends to indicate that the candidates don’t know any other lyrics of that song or any others. Centres are reminded that this is A2 level and candidates should be encouraged, and will be expected, to develop answers to the questions, which reflect their individual knowledge and understanding of the topics in this unit. A mere cursory gloss over the work of three names is insufficient.

Exemplar practitioners and works studied tended to influence the degree of success of the candidate responses. Those centres that had chosen multiple practitioners whose work covered a wide range of time tended to write the most coherent and analytical responses. They were also the most likely to be able link these to the wider context of the genre.

It is clear that in some centres there is only an insufficient minimum of work being done to prepare candidates for this examination. Three songs by Bob Dylan does not constitute a study of politics in music performance, particularly when it appears only the lyrics are considered. When compared to work from a centre with a broad reach including Dylan, Weill, Marley, Bragg, Sex Pistols, Rage Against the Machine, Shostakovitch – explaining why, musically, the 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony is now seen as satirical of Stalin and all totalitarianism – the understanding of the topic is incomparable. Neither is an entirely issues-based approach to Bruce or other choreographers. There is no doubt that the work of Bruce and others could exemplify a political outlook, but there needs to be some detail of the choreography for which the claims are made. The fact that he was inspired by a particular situation is only interesting if the discussion also includes the way the dance makes that situation clear.

Centres must also think about how examples might cover more than one art form. For example, Bruce’s ‘Moonshine’ based on Dylan’s songs has an excellent short solo to his version of the Negro Spiritual “No More Auction Block”. There is also a version by African-American social activist and performer, Paul Robeson, on Youtube, which would give a broader pre-’60s perspective to the Civil Rights Movement.

For the noticeboard or wall:

**Write about the Topic, NOT the works or practitioners.**

**Answer the question on the topic, Don’t work through a list of names or works.**

**Plan/Structure your answer on the topic you studied.**

**Do not use phrases like “the three/nine practitioners/works I have studied...”, “my works...”, “...examples from the ones taught us...”.**

### Quality of Language

Some gradual improvement has been observed in this aspect. However, there are still some candidates who do not get the credit they possibly deserve because of illegibility. Given this is an examination under the pressure of time, copperplate handwriting is not what is expected, but the basic minimum is that the script can be read, otherwise marks cannot be awarded. This is often a significant problem with very able candidates who have a lot to say, but if it cannot be read, it cannot be marked.

Similarly, examiners were faced with eight pages of continuous text with no paragraphing to delineate thought, idea, or point. There are also some of the longest sentences in the world offered with clause upon clause, which in the end become non-sensical.

Candidates should be discouraged from excessive language that means nothing in this context and ends up reading like an extended DVD cover: “the amazing spectacular that is West Side Story”, “compared to the previous awesome music that had been written Threepenny Opera is...”, “her choreography is all influenced by well-known celebrities that you will recognise...”

Finally, spelling, particularly of titles and names, remains a problem that reduces marks available.

For the noticeboard or wall:

**Incorrect spelling limits the marks available to you.**

**If it can't be read, it can't be marked.**

**Analyse don't advertise the examples.**

## **Question Specific Comments**

### **Post Modern Approaches to the Performing Arts since 1960.**

**1** 4% of the candidates answered this question.

There was a disappointing response to this question given the centrality of Irony to post modern thinking, as apparent, for example, in the iconoclasm and in the technique of deliberate juxtaposition of images, ideas, style and form. Several that answered this question did not understand the meaning of 'irony' in this or any context, which limited the responses.

However, this question did provide some very strong answers that were more specific to what was being asked and less generic in response than Question 2. Irony was dealt with intelligently and candidates were able to pick out clear references to back up their points. These answers also tended to link the art forms more effectively as they focused on the topic rather than the practitioners and, generally, were very clear and well written. One answer took the creation of irony through juxtaposition of elements of the work of different artists. The comparison, amongst several others, between the classical parodies of Peter Schickele and Bill Bailey's work, the range of languages used within Berkoff's plays and the vaudeville act of the malevolent guards in Bruce's Swansong were all argued as examples of post-modern irony in the performing arts.

**2** 38 % of the candidates answered this question.

Candidates that only considered the work of three practitioners were at a disadvantage with regards to breadth of the answer. The wider the range of works the more depth and also breadth some answers had, with more scope to draw stronger links and contrasts. However, more centres than was evident in the January series showed coverage of a wider range of practitioners and that had obvious advantages for the candidates.

Some answers incorporated the historical context and relevant cultural background very well. The timeline build-up to post-modernism was relevant and displayed good breadth of knowledge. There was also evidence of knowledge and understanding of social context and the influence on fashion, technology, other non-performance art forms and also politics and these were successfully woven into a strong answer.

The weaker candidates needed to use better expression of language and more dance, drama and music vocabulary. They also answered in a somewhat formulaic fashion, which had its

obvious limitations and showed little evidence of insight and progression from AS. The weaker answers also needed to develop connections between the art forms.

Better answers focused on drawing good comparisons and contrasts, distinguished them thoroughly and also showed depth of knowledge with informative illustrations. Some answers included useful quotations of the definitions of post-modernism and showed clear understanding of contrasts between modernism and post-modernism.

Some better answers included good knowledge and understanding of theories of post-modernism ie Fukuyama on the end of history; Lyotard's idea of micro-narratives; Foucault's universal truths; and Baudrillard's theory of post-modernism.

A number of responses to this question read the "common practice" as something outside of post modern approaches and discussed their works in terms of whether they met traditional approaches to the three art forms. Some never mentioned 'post modern' at all, offering some techniques, the 'common practice' referred to in the question, only as a by-product of the works-focused answer.

### **Politics and Performance since 1914**

Centres that had taken the opportunity to explore a wider range of exemplars for this topic, in the main, the candidates had greater success. Obviously, a candidate able to discuss Nijinska's *Les Noces* alongside Edgar's *Testing the Echo*, Jones' *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin* next to Berkoff's *Sink the Belgrano* and O'Casey's *Shadow of a Gunman* with Marley's *Redemption Song* and *Oh What A Lovely War*, Dylan, Bruce and Manic Street Preachers thrown in for good measure is likely to be confident about their ability to address most likely questions.

Information about the works is usually quite well understood, but the weakness is the lack of understanding on the use of dance, drama and music. Sometimes the 'impact of' is noted but with little clarity of how the art forms create that impact with little evidence of art form understanding. For example: "Fo uses Commedia dell' Arte" but with no example or explication; how music works with the lyrics to give a political song impact; or how verbatim theatre creates drama - it may be edited transcriptions, but it still has characters, dialogue and event 'selected' by the playwright.

Unfortunately, there are also examples where even the work is not completely understood.

"Shostakovitch called it Leningrad because he went there to get away from Starling"

"Berkoff wrote *Metamorphosis* because he thought the world was changing into something"

At the other end of the spectrum there was evidence of candidates researching their own perspectives on post-modernism, exactly what should be happening at A2 level. For example, reference to the early collaborative 'happenings' of Cage & Cunningham, with artist Robert Rauschenberg, in the '50s set the integrated work that followed in an informed context.

**3** 23% of the candidates answered this question.

By far the most popular answer in this topic, but many candidates made heavy weather of their responses by sticking to formulaic responses that discussed works/names in turn with a brief reference to 'a feature' dropped in. The question asked about distinguishing features and variety of techniques, which should have been the starting point for answers.

There was a wide range of responses to this question, largely based on the degree of detail in the explanation and use of examples. Too many candidates just listed their works and explained

why they were 'political' with a general absence of art form. Better ones made comparison of features and techniques across their 'works' and the strongest answers, took the question as their lead and used the works as examples of the points they were making, such as use of vocabulary and language, use of music, comedy and satire.

4 4% of the candidates answered this question.

This question clearly proved a challenge for most candidates, particularly the identification of some form of development. This need not have been chronological, but there was a general lack of overview of the topic. The question had a direct reference to the areas of study for this unit in the specification and thus should not have come as a surprise. Those candidates who could put their list of works into some form of chronological order, managed to make a reasonable argument, but many could not locate their 'studied works' in any sensible order. The difficulty mentioned throughout this report of too much concentration on "works" at the expense of the topic being studied, was much in evidence here. It is not expected that candidates have a complete grasp of international politics for the last 100 years, but some notion of what was being objected to in performance works is helpful. Vague expressions such as "...didn't like corrupt governments..." and "Rage Against The Machine do just that!" do not reflect the level of study required.

**Tip:** In order for candidates to understand the "development of the style", centres are advised to prepare a timeline on politics and performance since 1914 with key works (not just those to be used as examples) reflecting a broad range of practitioners on the top and an outline of relevant political, social, historical and cultural events on the bottom. Candidates could help compile this and also be directed towards a wider range of works that they could investigate themselves.

### The Twentieth Century American Musical

It is quite clearly understood that not all the American Musicals in the twentieth century can be "studied"; that is not the expectation. However, the current assumption by too many responding to this topic is that "nothing happened" between 1927 and 1943 and that those musicals that are looked at are the only ones, giving rise to phrases like "Hammerstein's next collaboration with Rodgers was ..." when, in fact, there were several in between. This kind of approach betrays an ignorance of the context, the title of the unit.

**Tip:** In order for candidates to understand the "development of the style", centres are advised to prepare a timeline on the Twentieth Century with key musicals (not just those to be used as examples) reflecting a broad range of practitioners on the top and an outline of relevant social, historical and cultural events on the bottom. Candidates could help compile this and also be directed towards a wider range of musicals that they could investigate themselves.

There was some evidence this time that candidates could demonstrate understanding of the links between dramatic development and music and dance. This shows itself particularly in the discussion of leitmotif and the songs and dances. However, there is still a considerable blank in any reference to dramatic elements related to dialogue, act/scene structure or plot development. Too many candidates claimed that this or that song, or dance "moved the plot along" without any explanation as to how.

Many candidates are still offering 2-3 pages of "antecedents" or historical background, which is often incorrect and without any sense of accurate chronology and without any points being made. "Then came Vaudeville....then came operetta..... then came .... revue... " characterises much of this pointless approach. It needs to be re-iterated again that this material can be valuable in understanding the development, but should be used judiciously in answers. One of the best examples was of a candidates analysis of Chicago in terms of the Vaudeville acts it re-works.

It was also interesting to see the ways in which some centres are beginning to broaden the scope of reference for this topic. Michael Bennett, Lerner and Loewe and Rodgers and Hart are appearing more often and there are many more. Besides offering a richer diet of understanding in this unit, a broader perspective offers a wider range of material for the repertoire section of G404.

**5** 16% of the candidates answered this question.

Strong answers in this section took a straightforward approach to the question, first discussing the way American society was celebrated across a range of musicals. This included understanding that the musical *The Sound of Music* reinforced 'American' values of loyalty and family, despite its setting in Europe, that *The King & I* includes an allegorical ballet based on an American classic novel on slavery. These answers could give a broad reach from the celebration of the "all-american girl" from Ziegfeld on and patriotism and nationhood from Cohan. There was little reference to anything before the twentieth century apart from a mention that American Musicals actually started in the early part of the century when they broke away from Eurocentric entertainment styles. They then moved on to discussing the ways in which the musical criticises the society that gave it birth, for example, the treatment of race and tolerance of ethnicity and difference, because many of the practitioners were often first or second generation immigrants themselves. The ways in which American society appeared to "lose its way" from the '60s on and therefore a darker more selfish world is reflected – here Sondheim's *Company* was used very effectively. Those that stuck to a laboured trawl through a list of so-called "antecedents" and then a list from *Showboat* onwards, with only cursory reference to celebration or criticism, were less successful.

**6** 14% of the candidates answered this question.

Some answers to this question contained the mis-apprehension that the 'book' musical was so-called because they were based on books, ie novels, short stories, plays. So the listing had to be adjusted as some of their formula didn't fit. Oddly, *Candide* wasn't included in the pantheon of 'book' musicals, not because it is arguably operetta, or music theatre, as we might call it these days, but because it was not based on a book.

However, *West Side Story* and *My Fair Lady* were book musicals because they were based on books by Shakespeare and Shaw.

This question obviously appealed to those who wanted an argument, as some of the best answers challenged the question, for example, the assertion there was a 'peak' was pointless as it was a progression, and that was a far more important topic, or that whilst there may have been a 'peak' you also had to understand what was supporting that peak.

Some very inventive arguments provided excellent reading. Again candidates that approached the question, had greater success, even within this question where a chronological approach was likely.

High quality answers, agreed with the statement indicating that the musical returned to its disparate roots by the end of the century, and supported it with a range of examples, particularly at the end of the century,.. This produced well-expressed discussion lacking any of the excessive language that this topic tends to attract and reflected the notion of 'academic' study in this area very effectively.

## Performance in the Far East

This new topic was attempted by very few candidates. The responses did not reflect a sufficient depth of understanding or breadth of detail, but it was clear that the topic had been covered broadly across three “countries” as required and the forms had been considered.

**7** less than 1% of the candidates answered this question.

There were some valiant attempts on this question. Centres should be very circumspect about the potential range of detail that could be involved in the cultural, historical and social aspects of these forms. Like all the topics under study, there is a PhD thesis or there is a sensible focus on what is key and relevant to an understanding of how the form works as performance. There was some good understanding of how the forms fitted socially and actually several discussed cultural aspects at the same time, possibly without knowing. Historical understanding was less in evidence, with candidates not able to relate across the forms. It should be emphasised, that it is not expected to see detailed historical accounts of what happened before, for example, Peking Opera developed, (the approach that has so petrified the approach to context of the American Musical). All knew the chronological difference between Noh and Kabuki, however, candidates should be aware of the parallel developments across the forms, many that often took centuries.

A timeline as suggested above may help candidates get a broader perspective in this area.

**8** less than 1% of the candidates answered this question.

Given the areas that had been considered, there should have been ample material here to create a comprehensive answer, illustrated from the different forms. However, most of the answers were fairly general on the different areas considered with little on the idea of telling stories. In Noh, for example, the notion that the audience would know the story seemed to suffice rather than the traditional and formal ways in which the story is told – perhaps compared to the less formal, almost improvisational approaches in Indonesian Wayang. Similarly, the hindu myths were referred to but there needs to be some specific illustration that roots that story to the form in which it is performed. A thematic approach across all the ‘countries’ forms being considered is the suggested way forward.

## **Works Studied**

### **Postmodern Approaches to the Performing Arts since 1960**

Anderson - Car, Flesh and Blood, E.Schiele, Double Take, Perfect Moment, Cross Channel

Churchill - Fen, Top Girls, Serious Money, Cloud 9, Ice Cream, vinegar Tom

Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band - Cornology<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Anderson - Car, Double Take, Yippee, Flesh & Blood, Cross Channel

Stoppard - Real Inspector Hound, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

Ravenhill - Pool No Water, Shopping & F....

Berkoff - East, The Trial, Salome, Massage, Actor, Metamorphoses, Greek, Harry's Xmas,

Decadence, Brighton Beach, Scumbag, West

Mark Morris - The Hard Nut

Reich - Different Trains, Phases, City Life

The Beatles - Sgt Pepper, Revolver, Magical Mystery Tour, Hard Days Night, Please Please Me,

Yellow Submarine, Let it Be

Adams - Nixon, Ceiling, Transmigration,

Riley - In C

Khan - Zero Degrees, Rush

Bowie - Ashes to Ashes, Diamond Dogs, Ziggy Stardust

Glass - Candyman Suite, Satyagraha, Facades, Heroes, Strung Out, Einstein on the Beach, Koyaanisqatsi

Bruce - Rooster,

Forced Entertainment - Emmanuelle Enchanted, First Night

Ailey - Revelations

Newson/DV8 - Cost of Living, Dead Dream of Monochrome Men, Enter Achilles, To be straight with you

Frantic Assembly - Stockholm

Elton - Popcorn

Grupo Corpo - Bach, Lecuna, O Corpo

Bourne - SwanLake, Nutcracker, Car Man

Alston - Soda Lake, Strong Language, Pulcinella, Overdrive

Cunningham - Changing Steps, Beach Birds

Bond - Saved

Crimp - Attempts on her Life

Frantic Assembly - Stockholm

Norman Cook - Let Them Eat Bingo, You've come a long way Baby

Bintley - Still Life

Complicite - Mnemonic

Kneehigh - Red Shoes

Eno - Discreet Music

Bailey - Bewilderness

Shickele - PDQ Bach/1712 & Musical Assaults

Kaos - Alice/Dream

Forkbeard Fantasy - Colour of Nonsense

Kiss - God of Thunder

Gorillaz - Punk

Brenton - Epsom Downs,

Muse - The Resistance

Ravenhill - Pool

Keatley - My Mother Said I Never Should,

Ballet Boyz - Rite of Spring

Bausch - Rite of Spring, 1980, Café Müller, Nelken

**Politics and Performance since 1914**

Bruce - Ghost dances, Swansong, Silence is the End, Rooster  
Ailey - Revelations, Cry  
Ludus Dance - Zygote, Sold  
Fo - Anarchist, Can't Pay Won't Pay, Trumpets  
Brecht - Mother Courage, Ui, Caucasian Chalk Circle, Good Person, Fear & Misery, 3d Opera, Exception & Rule  
Hare - Permanent Way, Stuff Happens  
Slovo - Guantanamo  
Shostakovitch - 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony Leningrad  
Sex Pistols - Anarchy in the UK  
Dylan - Times they are..., Lonesome Death of..., Gates of Eden, Hard rain, Blowin' in the Wind, Masters of war, Rainy day Women, Who Killed Davey Moore, No more Auction Block, Hurricane  
Blitzstein -The Cradle will Rock  
Odets - Waiting for Lefty  
Kramer - Normal Heart  
Jooss - The Green Table  
Bausch - Bluebeard, 1980  
Ballet Boyz - Rite of Spring  
DV8 – Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men, Cost of Living, Enter Achilles,  
Treadwell - Machinal  
Fugard - Sizwe Bansi, Bloodknot, The Island  
Graham - Steps in the Street  
Edgar -Testing the Echo, Destiny  
Brenton - Epsom Downs  
Littlewood - Oh! What a Lovely War  
U2 - Where the Streets have No Names, Mothers of the Disappeared, Sunday Bloody Sunday, Crumbs under your table  
Rage Against the Machine - Killing in the Name  
O'Casey - Shadow of a Gunman  
Anderson - Car  
Pinter - One for the Road  
Berkoff - Decadence, Sink the Belgrano, Metamorphosis  
Cartwright - Road, Too, Little Voice  
Arden - Live Like Pigs  
Bintley - Penguin Cafe  
Union Dance - permanent revolution, fractured atlas, Quintessential Vibes, Silence Disrupted  
Hansbury - A Raisin' in the Sun  
Churchill - Top Girls  
Soans - A State Affair  
Marley - Burnin', Redemption Song  
Ms Dynamite - Judgment Day  
Pink - I'm Not Dead  
Baldwin - Comedy of Change  
Burke - Black Watch  
Russell - Educating Rita  
Bragg - Brewing Up  
Jones - Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin

### **Twentieth Century American Musical**

Rodgers & Hammerstein - Oklahoma!, The King & I, Sound of Music, South Pacific, Carousel  
Rodgers & Hart - Babes in Arms, Pal Joey, Boys from Syracuse, On Your Toes (w. Balanchine)  
Bernstein - On The Town, Candide, West Side Story  
Hammerstein & Kern - Showboat  
Kern, Bolton & Wodehouse - Oh Lady, Lady  
Cohan - Little Johnny Jones  
Youmans, Caesar, Harbach, Mandel - No No Nanette  
Sondheim - Sweeney Todd, Sunday in the Park, Into the Woods, Assassins, Passion, Gypsy,  
Company, A Little Night Music, Follies  
Lerner & Loewe - My Fair Lady, Camelot, Brigadoon  
Porter - Kiss Me Kate, Anything Goes  
Jacobs & Casey - Grease  
Dubin & Warren, Bramble & Stewart & Champion - 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Fosse - Sweet Charity, Cab, Chicago, Liza with a Z, Pajama Game  
Robbins - Fiddler, West Side Story, Gypsy, The King & I  
Bennett - Chorus Line  
De Mille - Ok, Carousel, Brigadoon  
Holm - Kiss Me Kate, My Fair Lady, Camelot  
Blitzstein - The Cradle will Rock  
Berlin - This is the Army  
Krieger and Egan - Dreamgirls

### **Performance in the Far East**

China – Peking Opera examples  
Japan – Noh & Kabuki examples  
Indonesia – Wayang Golek and examples from Hindu epics.

## G404 Performance Project

### General comments

This was the first series for Unit G404 and - given the changes from the legacy specification - it was gratifying to report that everything ran extremely smoothly with virtually all centres. The few operational aspects that caused occasional difficulty were as follows.

### Administration of the examination

The timing of the examination was sometimes a problem with some centres allowing insufficient time for marking. At some centres, examiners felt they were being rushed to get through the examination as speedily as possible, which was not in the candidates' best interests. Examiners felt that it would be useful to have a template to base the timetable on, and centres are advised to timetable the visit as follows:

- for repertoire, time the extract and allow as long before and afterwards as the piece lasts in performance (eg a ten-minute piece would be allowed a 30-minute slot)
- allow 90 minutes for each Student-Devised piece
- allow 60 minutes for lunch
- the normal day would last from 9am until 4pm; evening sessions may be included by arrangement with the examiner.

Most centres had a separate room near the performance area for marking. If for any reason this has to be the case, then the examiner should be afforded quiet time in which to work, especially at the end of the examination; some examiners reported that they were forced to compete with noise from staff, candidates and enthusiastic audiences.

The DVDs submitted by centres were generally of a good quality, but would not all play on a standard UK DVD player. Centres are reminded that tapes from video cameras, VHS tapes, CD-ROMs or any other non-standard format are not allowed. In addition, there was a minority of centres who did not divide their DVDs into chapters for ease of playback. Some centres were very dilatory in sending the DVD to the examiner after the examination.

### Advance documentation

Most centres sent all documentation in advance, with helpful, clear photographs of candidates, often in costume. The most common omission was the inclusion of programme notes, which were sometimes only provided on the day of the examination, thus reducing their usefulness to the examiner in preparing for the visit.

A few centres failed to send any documentation beforehand, which meant that the running time of the examination was often extended as examiners had to assimilate a large amount of information that should have been provided in advance.

Some centres sent detailed notes about repertoire extracts, with cuts or adaptations made, which was extremely good practice and warmly welcomed by examiners.

## **Audience to watch the performances**

Few examiners reported the absence of any audience and it is so important to the quality of the work that is presented. Many audiences were badly behaved and this was a major concern of examiners. Centres are requested to advise their audiences in advance of the following:

- all mobile phones should be turned off during the performance
- there must be no talking during the performance
- no photographs or video recordings are to be made by members of the audience
- eating during the performance is a noisy activity and it distracting for candidates and examiner
- there should no applause at all until the end of the piece
- applause at the end should be measured and restrained, and whooping, screaming, hoots, shouting and cheering are completely inappropriate to an examination performance.

Centres are reminded that programme notes should be produced by candidates and given to the examiner and the audience.

## **Performance Realisation**

### **General**

The repertoire performance is derived from the legacy unit 2558, and is designed to encourage high standards of performance of existing works. The assessment is at A2 level rather than AS, and it was evident that many centres had not made this very significant step up.

The performance material should be drawn from that studied for either Unit G402 or G403, which was the case in most instances. However, there was a significant minority of candidates who presented individual and group performance repertoire with no connection with the areas of study in either unit. Centres should be cautious of encouraging candidates to offer a 'party piece' drawn from work outside of the course of study. This is a misappropriation of the specification, and locates the learning for the unit outside of what is provided by the centre. In all cases, the teachers responsible for delivery of the specification should be the arbiter of choice and steer candidates to the work that is the most appropriate to their course of study.

There was also some confusion over the extent to which 'creative interpretation' of repertoire was allowed. In performing repertoire, the expectation is that the integrity of the original is retained, and not (for example) re-written to suit a particular group's preferences or accommodate a group when it is not created for a group.

### **Group size and length of pieces**

The unit requirement was for three minutes' exposure per candidate, although this did not necessarily mean that the total length of the piece was the number of performers multiplied by three. In ensemble pieces, it was possible for candidates to receive sufficient exposure in shorter pieces where everyone was on stage at once. A number of pieces seen were of insufficient length for the number of candidates involved. For example, three candidates singing/dancing one song in unison for three and a half minutes was not adequate in terms of time to demonstrate skills, or for the examiner to attempt to determine any differentiation.

## Performance skills

Performance skills were clearly stronger when candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the style and intention of the practitioner and their original work, as well as how they had interpreted this.

A number of centres used cast recordings of musical numbers and effectively sang along with them. This is not in the spirit of the specification in terms of performing repertoire. Whilst it is appreciated that getting backing tracks for numbers to which candidates can both sing and dance is not easy, some centres were creative in their use of live accompaniment and technology to ensure that performers were not drowned out by Shirley Maclaine or Julie Andrews, but had sufficient presence to ensure that the dance came alive.

Some groups had far too many 'silent partners' – some of them offering too much partnering and little silence. The maximum of two silent partners allowed should be just that. Contributions to dance work, dialogue or harmonies are not appropriate, and often detracted the focus from the assessed candidate. Centres are reminded that 'voices off' or characters having conversation with pre-recorded characters on video are definitely not encouraged.

## Dance Pieces

The work of Matthew Bourne, Lloyd Newson and Christopher Bruce accounted for a significant amount of work seen. Christopher Bruce's *Ghost Dances* was highly popular, although the particular extract was not always well chosen. Since the 'Ghosts' work together as a trio, choosing to isolate one as a solo piece cuts out lifts and supports, which are something of a feature of the piece. Many candidates chose to offer the Prisoner's solo from *Swansong* and this offered opportunities for those who were able to engage both with the movement and emotional intensity of the role.

Matthew Bourne's choreography was popular for its glitter and glamour as much for its movement content, and many candidates had clearly been inspired by seeing a live performance of the piece they had studied. *Carman* allowed for exceptional candidates to really demonstrate their technical and interpretative skills and some parts of *Nutcracker* with lesser technical demands allowed for excellent character presentation. Weaker candidates needed to be more aware of the need for strong body and face expression to deliver the humour that goes alongside the technical material.

The more formal structures of both DV8 and Motionhouse pieces exposed candidates' technique in a manner that did not necessarily help all candidates' marks. DV8 repertoire was frequently chosen by candidates without formal dance training, which meant that the standard was not always high.

Centres are reminded that the music used for pieces of repertoire dance should be those used in the original performance.

## Drama Pieces

Centres are reminded that the presentation of scenes from a play should always follow the order of the material in the play and should not attempt to present scenes in a different order to that intended by the playwright.

As in previous years, the work of John Godber was the biggest single source of repertoire for this unit, with *Bouncers* and *Teechers* accounting for most of these. These included some of the worst-handled performances, however, and examiners reported a frequent lack of pace,

## Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

characterisation (both establishing and shifting), and a tendency towards indulgence in 'the bits we liked'. *Happy Jack* produced a number of duologues; candidates are reminded, however, to work on the text and let the text do the work, rather than trying to force laughs out of every single line.

The plays of Caryl Churchill proved popular with candidates who had studied politics and performance since 1914 for Unit G403. *Top Girls* was the most widely performed and a variety of well-chosen duologues were used effectively with some groups capturing the overlapping dialogue at the dinner table in the opening scene exceedingly well. The work of Steven Berkoff proved highly popular, with a good many solo extracts from *East* being offered. The best of these were outstanding, the worst were little more than an excuse for the candidate to swear in public. Several extracts from *Greek* were presented, which were often strong on physicality, although there was a general tendency to rush the words somewhat, with a resulting loss of full vocal impact and grotesque detail in the language. The extracts showed very strong physicality, with much detail and invention, especially successful in creating intended comic caricature, and climaxing in the excellent choreography of the mimed fight.

A number of scenes from musicals were offered, generally focusing on the dialogue rather than the songs. *A Chorus Line* was a good source of monologues, allowing characterisation and creative delivery. *My Fair Lady*, particularly the Higgins-Liza duologue, offered a well-balanced choice.

### Music Pieces

Music performances provided the greatest diversity, ranging from the political protest songs of the 1960s to a variety of numbers drawn from the repertoire of the American musical. This latter, together with the songs of George Gershwin, provided the majority of the repertoire performed. Some candidates chose more gritty repertoire from Billy Bragg, or Patty Smith or a range of other rock musicians appropriate to Unit G403, the mainstay being, of course, the songs of The Beatles. As in previous series, only candidates who can sing in tune should have been encouraged to offer a song as their repertoire piece.

### Combined Art Form Pieces

Those candidates who had studied American musical theatre were often able to demonstrate two art forms in their performance, although there was no additional credit for this. Scenes from *Oklahoma!* Such as The Farmer & The Cowman Scene – proved a good choice with a range of characterisation, song and dance. The more recent work of Stephen Sondheim was also popular and generally well handled, especially extracts from *Sweeney Todd* or *Into The Woods*, all offered opportunities for candidates to exploit.

The work of Bob Fosse was very popular. Various extracts were offered from *Chicago*, which were often well done but too many candidates inevitably trying to be Zeta-Jones or Zellweger and falling love with their costume rather than concentrating on the roles, music and libretto. There were some good performances of Mr Cellophane, Razzle Dazzle, All That Jazz and Hot Honey Rag. *Cabaret* presented similar problems to *Chicago*.

## Student Devised Performance

### Approach to using commissions

The number of commissions was reduced from 20 in the legacy unit 2561 to 10 in this new unit following feedback from centres that there was too much choice previously. Examiners reported that, as a result, all commissions were attempted (although some were clearly more popular than others) and that groups had not spent weeks in cul-de-sacs before arriving at their chosen commission.

It was encouraging that more candidates than previously seemed to understand that they were required to take a creative approach to the interpretation of the commission whilst at the same time being absolutely clear that their audience could see the original commission without having to have it explained to them. Whilst a number nevertheless indulged in flights of fancy, most showed at least a broad linkage with the commission that inspired the piece.

The overall number of pieces produced on each commission was as follows:

Commission	Total number of group performances
The disappearance of Lord Lucan	202
Vision of Ezekiel	161
Mod revival Youths	160
Vesta Tilley	54
Martin Luther King	53
Who built Stonehenge and why?	53
Wendy Cope - <i>Postcards</i>	40
George Courtauld – <i>Recently become Cool</i>	38
Harold Lloyd	32
The break-up of the Soviet Union	20

### Creating the piece

The challenge for most candidates was more to do with the structuring of the piece as much the linkage with the commission, and here examiners reported a number of areas in which improvements could easily be made.

- Candidates should be discouraged from serial blackouts. There were many instances of blackout being used too often, indiscriminately and unnecessarily, so that the action of the performance was impeded, sometimes severely. Previous examiner's reports have offered alternative suggestions for separation and transition and candidates at this level should be aware of the effect on the audience of numerous lengthy blackouts. However, when used judiciously, singular illumination in a blacked-out space can create a very powerful image.

- Many game shows were seen, and as in previous years this was the single most hackneyed device used. Whilst examiners appreciate that for the candidates concerned this might well seem an original idea, they should be challenged by their tutors to think through whether an alternative approach might be more creative.
- There was generally insufficient use made of the areas studied in other units; this is a synoptic unit as is intended to sum up all that has been learned during the course. Several groups appeared to have virtually forgotten what had been studied in the written papers when it came to devising the student-devised performance. Often the consideration of where ideas came from appeared to have arrived only minutes before the pre-performance discussion.

## **Commissions**

### **Images**

#### **1 David Bomberg – Vision of Ezekiel**

This was a very popular commission, especially for candidates who approached the work through a movement-based approach. The image provided some interesting movement motifs, and these were used to good effect by a number of groups. Some groups, however, went straight to the story of Ezekiel in the Bible with only cursory reference to Bomberg's image, although some fairly unusual interpretations were often placed on the story. There were several pieces set in an art gallery as a means of shaping a narrative for the piece.

The artist's life was allowed to permeate the ideas incorporated into some pieces. Whilst it was helpful that research had been undertaken into the relationship of the picture to the artist, this tended to dominate at times. An audience watching the piece could not be expected to be familiar with biographical detail, although these were on occasion incorporated into the programme notes.

Examiners reported concerns that some candidates appeared to have modelled their work on generic physical theatre-type pieces, which captured the essence of the picture but none of its details. Centres should be wary of slavish copies of previous work, which may have been successful, but only for the group at the time of its original production. Candidates who strove to challenge their own creativity, fared much better than those attempting to emulate previous success.

#### **2 Police detain Mod revival youths at Brighton Station**

This was the third most popular commission, and also one that produced a good level of success in the use and integration of art forms. Dance was often used powerfully and the frustration of youth manifested itself in 'Billy Elliott' style dynamics and energy. The work often became rather 'Godberesque' and did not often go beyond listing mod traits.

Most candidates picked up the inherent physicality of the picture, and a significant number used an actual cage – often borrowed from a retail environment – not just re-creating a memento of the photograph itself, but also in a variety of creative ways. There were also some creative manifestations of scooters. In one centre the combination of sound effects and torches for headlight arrays in blackout worked very well and was a rare example of how blackout can be used for impact and effect.

Research into the commission often involved an investigation into the music of the period and stimulated a good deal of song creation; some pieces excelled by using a 'musical' structure with their own songs and dances, in the style appropriate to the piece. One centre created a range of

musical and lyrical pastiche of 1980s Mod music as interlude between the narrative, and as accompaniment to movement. Weaker pieces relied on 'music' from the time, reminiscence texts and *Quadrophenia*.

Some pieces bore little relationship to the picture other than the subject matter. For example, one piece took the form of a Radio 4 reunion show. The structure of the piece was static and limiting with two sections where all three candidates sat at a table taking part in an imaginary radio show reminiscing about the era, with rather stereotypical dialogue and one-dimensional characterisation.

## **Politics**

### **3 Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement in the USA**

This provided a wide range of work, and was highly successful at engaging candidates in historical research, and translating this into performance. There were some very strong political pieces that consisted of amalgams of montage, physical theatre, dance, protest song and the voice of Martin Luther King himself, in a style inspired by the tape pieces of Steve Reich. There was frequent and generally indiscriminate use of the 'I have a dream' speech.

Less strong candidates took a basic biographical approach, occasionally sidetracking onto his extra-marital affairs as a supposed contrast to the civil rights movement. This generally avoided what could have been a powerful challenging idea about public versus private beliefs, by turning him into the obligatory saint.

Apart from some issues with pace and precision, one strong piece included good use of direct address and verbatim text drawn from a good level of research. There were several clear indications that the commission had influenced the choice and development of performance material, with a creditable attempt to incorporate an African dance style into the piece.

### **4 The break-up of the Soviet Union**

This was the least popular commission, with only twenty groups selecting it. Performances varied between historical re-enactments of events from the dying years of the politburo to narrative pieces focusing on the lives of ordinary people affected by the decisions of those in power, and the situations created by the 'stagflation' of the period and government spending on the stockpiling of weapons. Most groups were able to score quite well in terms of the historical link with the commission, although relatively few were able to demonstrate creative engagement with the material, particularly the incorporation of dance and drama into what were essentially narrative pieces. A few groups who attempted this produced very strong ensemble physical theatre pieces, which managed to capture the spirit of the time very well. It was very interesting to see Marx's Communist Manifesto expressed in physical theatre with some attempts at Cossack dance!

The device of having a display of reproduced posters symbolising the strength of the USSR, which were gradually torn off and destroyed, was used by a few groups. The naturalism of the approach, however, often degenerated into unhelpful caricatures as candidates tended to reproduce the Russian character as stereotypically stony-faced.

## Poetry

### 5 Wendy Cope – *Postcards*

This was less popular than some poems by Wendy Cope set in previous series. Many candidates seeming relatively unaware of the geographical location of most of the places mentioned in the poem. The structure of the poem was occasionally used to inspire the structure of the devised piece but it was more common for groups to create a narrative loosely inspired by the poem. This tended to produce relatively low marks for the link with the commission.

### 6 George Courtauld – *Recently Become Cool*

Whilst the poems were not the most frequently chosen commissions, this generated a good clutch of makeover stories, mainly featuring middle-aged mothers, facelifts, losing weight, going blonde, wearing outfits more suited to teenagers than the middle-aged and generally being embarrassing. Many pieces used satire in a fairly gentle way, however, and the majority ended with a sense of appreciation for the ways in which the mother figure had, despite all the quirky fashion, put herself out and genuinely cared for her children.

There were a number of pieces inspired by musical theatre, and a significant number of songs took the title of the poem as their theme. The style of the music was generally simplistic and appropriately cheesy, and created the desired sense of fun in the piece. Similar dance routines were also a feature of pieces based on this commission.

## Mystery

### 7 Who built Stonehenge, and why?

Whilst the question in the commission was unanswerable, it nevertheless attracted some strong suggestions, with most of them being based on detailed historical research. At the lower end of performance, there were sets that would have been more at home in an episode of *The Flintstones*, the better candidates often adopted a very physical approach to the work and were able to create the scene in a less obvious manner.

The theories offered were extremely diverse, with some of the more offbeat ones producing some of the most interesting work. The incorporation of ritual, chanting, stylised movement and chorus contrasted with the use of music technology, light and costume in other pieces. The commission also offered considerable potential for the use of multi-role.

One piece began with two children playing a computer game called 'Stones of Blood' which was subsequently used as the structure of the piece. The narrative was episodic, each episode focusing on one possible solution to the question, although this became quite mundane as the piece progressed.

### 8 The Disappearance of Lord Lucan

This was by far the most popular commission, with over 200 groups choosing it.

The most common approach was to see the commission as an opportunity to do a 'who-dunnit? -he-dunnit', with a multitude of pointless blackouts and the court scene *de rigueur*. There were some more creative takes on this, such as basing the piece on a murder mystery or even a board game, such as the piece that had the subtitle *I'm sorry I haven't a Cluedo*. There was a preponderance of sleuths who seemed to have been inspired by characters from detective

fiction, sometimes producing bizarrely composite personalities that hovered between Miss Marple and Inspector Columbo.

There was a commendable level of research undertaken by most groups but most got bogged down in the detail. To be fair, they were all trying to be original but there were some fairly tedious pieces ranging from dark impenetrable psychological miasmas *via* 'woman as victim' (to each other as well as men) to wickedly satirical pieces in which mustachioed villains stalked rakishly though the action relishing the upper class life and the peccadilloes of drink, gambling and womanising. Unfortunately none of these worked entirely and it seems that candidates were seduced by the subject matter.

Stronger groups attacked the events with panache, determined to avoid the obvious. One successful group, created the two sides of Lucan's personality, with a violent sarcastic persona and the suave like-able gentleman, which, with interesting original songs, whilst others were heavily reliant on a 'drama' approach. And yet, most re-created Lucan's estranged blood-stained wife staggering into the Plumber's Arms rather than asking the more interesting question as to what would Newson or Bourne or Berkoff made of that brief moment?, which would almost certainly have been created some more imaginative offerings.

## **Performers**

### **9 Harold Lloyd**

Performances were often inspired by the image of Harold Lloyd in the famous 1923 film *Safety Last!* hanging from in mid-air from the hands of a clock. Whilst this image was often not developed fully, some groups took the famous 'clock' image to create a 'time' theme or as a motivic device for movement. Some groups bravely used silent film techniques to tell a story in the Lloyd style, with multi-performance by each character on a range of instruments.

There was no shortage of biographical approaches, many with incidental music created for silent filmic clips from his career, although some groups selected music that would have been unlikely to have been used for silent movies. Indeed, much of the slapstick of silent movies was lost through pieces being too slow-paced. Physicality could have been exploited more by turning the characteristic movement of the 'silents' into integral choreographed movement rather than as a dance moment that stuck out as something added.

One group of candidates had created an inventive piece by offering an engaging tribute to the art of Harold Lloyd and his Glasses character in the form of a silent movie crime caper, with music in the style of 1920s cinema. The on-screen persona of Lloyd and his distinctive vein of comedy were well captured through mime acting and reactive interplay concentrated in the face but also in the whole body. The final dance routine (influenced by Bob Fosse's *Hot Honey Rag*) was energetic, fast paced, and witty, a fitting finale to the piece.

### **10 Vesta Tilley**

Groups that attempted this commission were generally clear about the historical and performance research that needed to underpin their performance work. This varied considerably: some took the idea of her signature songs and worked around the context of them, re-working both lyric and motif into the dialogue and dance vocabulary; others used Julie Andrews' version of *Burlington Bertie*. Some groups adopted a music hall style, which generally worked well although a few relied heavily on singing her songs ad nauseum. A large number focused on her personal relationships with a number of revisionist readings setting her as a champion of gay rights. Her tortured life and gender issues were more prevalent than her actual body of work or her social/political significance.

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