

## **Performance Studies**

Advanced GCE **A2 H548**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H148**

### **Examiners' Reports**

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**HX48/R/11**

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# Chief Examiner's Report

## Introduction

There were no significant changes to either the assessment regime or the mark schemes in this session. Examiners reported that the assessment processes had run smoothly and that there had been a good range of work on each unit. Within that context, some trends were discerned. These are covered in the body of this report, and highlighted in the summary below.

### G401

There was a continuing concern in this Unit that candidates did not make explicit enough the links between dance, drama and music in the work they had produced. It was often the case that candidates left it to the moderator to fill in the gaps in what they had written, rather than drawing them out to demonstrate the synergies across the art forms.

The style of the community piece continues to be a source of confusion in some Centres, most noticeably where candidates claim to have produced an eclectic piece. Some of this work was diverse, exciting and energetic, but in a number of cases, the word 'eclectic' had been used to describe a piece that was confused with diverse elements jarring with each other rather than being brought together effectively.

### G402

The most common concern in this unit was the prevalence of formulaic essays which would appear to have been learned in advance of the examination. It is good for candidates to be able to practice examination technique on past papers, and there is a good repository of these available. However, candidates should be discouraged from preparing answers to these with the intention of regurgitating them in the examination room.

Other candidates struggled with the structure of their answers and a number of scripts tapered out into note form at the end, with broad indications of what might have been included next. It was ironic that some of the most poorly structured answers were those dealing with the structural aspects of the works the candidates had studied.

### G403

There was a significant number of candidates resitting this unit, and entry patterns for the unit suggest that many candidates attempt the paper first in the January of their A2 year.

Practice continues to develop on this unit, and the majority of Centres had selected each of their nine extracts from a different practitioner in order to give a better perspective on the topic. Although not mandatory, Centres are strongly recommended to consider this approach since candidates who adopted it in this session appeared more confident in their discussion of the topic they had studied.

There was a good sense of sophistication in the writing of the most able candidates and examiners were pleased to report that the unit continues to provide an opportunity to demonstrate breadth and depth of understanding. In the best responses seen the work produced reflected a very good level of stretch and challenge for candidates, who appeared well prepared to enter higher education on the basis of this work.

**G404**

The commitment and enthusiasm of the candidates was obvious in almost every performance that was seen by visiting examiners.

The quality of the repertoire performances tended to be better than those of the original devised performances, possibly because it was possible to begin work on rehearsal much earlier in the process. The range of repertoire selected also showed greater breadth than in previous series.

The Student-Devised Performance was also delivered enthusiastically in most cases, although the content of the pieces was often more difficult to focus. Whilst examiners were keen to reward groups for creative, innovative responses to the commission, there were several candidates whose ideas appeared far removed from it. It was refreshing that despite this, the quality of the performance was not often affected by eccentricities in devising content.

## G401 Creating Performance

### Administration

The administration for this unit is crucial as it is important that moderators can clearly see what it is the candidates have done and where the Centre is awarding marks. Therefore clear notes on each CCS form are vital. The clarity and succinctness of these are greatly helped when centres use the interactive forms where typed comments are possible. Annotated commentaries are also required: the majority of centres show where they have awarded marks by the use of the abbreviations KU, LKs, EPP and QL. Although Links between art forms is not a separate marking criterion they do form an important part of Knowledge and Understanding. If marks awarded are high, it is important to draw the moderator's attention to these Links. A commentary that did not make any links between the art forms cannot be marked in the top bands. In this series there has been a use of electronic comments on the commentaries. Whereas this is a usual device for feedback in the drafting process for the candidate it is not always the best way for the final presentation. At no point should the text of the candidate be interrupted by a comment from the centre: annotations should only ever appear in the margin. Electronic comments often highlight the text, sometimes even obscuring what the candidates have written and commentaries should not be submitted for moderation in this way. Centres should also be aware that the final submission to the moderator should only include annotations and comments to draw attention to where marks have been awarded; they should not be part of a dialogue with the candidate. Care should also be taken that font size and commentary layout is not affected as this can influence the mark for QL.

With this unit it is important that care is taken over the recording of the performance piece and the subsequent presentation of the DVD. Candidates should introduce themselves, in costume, at the start of the performance piece and the DVD should be chaptered appropriately so that performances can be accessed. Some centres provided additional photographic evidence of candidates and this greatly aided the moderation process. There were several occasions this session where candidates had undertaken promenade style performances which were very difficult to film. Moderators were very grateful for the majority of centres that had made the necessary arrangements to provide clear evidence of the event. It is important to stress that this recording is the primary evidence of the candidates' performing skills and it is against this that moderators will confirm the marks of the centre. In this series there were several instances where the stage lighting was such that candidates' faces were continually blurred so that the moderator was unable to take account of the facial focus and language of the candidates. It is therefore important that the visual evidence is of a high quality, is supported by the comments on each CCS and that a final mark is awarded from the mark scheme that is consistent with this.

- Comments on the CCS should be candidate specific and draw the moderator's attention to examples in the commentary or performance that exemplify why marks have been awarded.
- Only annotate the commentary with the relevant abbreviations showing where marks have been awarded.
- DVDs should be of a high quality with care taken over the final filming.
- Marking should be specific – for example only Performing Skills as witnessed in the piece for submission should be credited. The Devising mark should not include reference to the quality of the performance.

## **Commentary**

The Specification is clear on the length of the commentaries. Therefore full marks are possible when the work is within the word limit and candidates should not write excessively over this in order to gain high marks. There is no justification for writing double the word count and centres need to be aware that this is in contravention of the rubric. High marks were awarded where submissions were objective, concise and showed a clear understanding of the techniques used through practical situations.

The majority of written submissions used the correct structure of *Improvise, Rehearse, Perform* for the first section when discussing the individual art forms. It is important that a similar weight in discussion is given to each aspect of the process. In particular the performance aspect should not merely be a short comment that it happened and that it was enjoyable. For candidates to be awarded high marks it is expected that the discussion should be objective and evaluative. Some candidates still insisted on breaking each section down within this and discuss the three performances separately. Too often this led to a repetitive discussion which did not encourage conceptual links between the art forms and prevented candidates from accessing the higher marks.

In discussion of the art forms it is important to show how a piece has developed from the initial improvisation to the final performance. Candidates should avoid anecdotal comments that are not focused on the use of techniques to realise the final piece. The written submission needs to be analytical and show an engagement with the correct technical language. It is therefore expected that candidates move beyond a narrative discussion of the story of the piece, the number of counts needed in dance or the lyrics in the development of a piece of music. In Drama the focus needs to be on the theatrical techniques developed; for Dance the movement techniques required and in Music the putting together of sound to create the desired effect. Within this range of techniques there are conceptual links and candidates should be making these in preparation for the final Community Performance.

## **Knowledge and Understanding**

Centres appear to be confident now with respect to the discussion of the fifteen elements. Candidates who scored most highly in this assessment area were those who successfully grounded their discussion of the elements in the practical work undertaken. Candidates who addressed the elements in a more theoretical way were unable to access the higher mark bands as their discussions of the elements often lacked the specific examples that are required. Some candidates discussed the fifteen elements in relation to the three pieces in discrete art forms, but not with regard to the Community Performance. Again, it tended to be candidates who addressed the elements throughout both sections of the work who gained the highest marks.

Many of the Community Performances included little or no integration between the art forms and this often made it difficult for candidates to gain marks for discussing links between the art forms.

There were some centres where the candidates did not identify the chosen style for the Community Performance, and others that included little discussion of how the style informed the development of the practical work. Centres are reminded that it is important for candidates to research the chosen style in depth, and to use this knowledge in conjunction with the intent and information about their audience and knowledge of their performing space when developing the performance.

## **Evaluation of Performance**

There was still some disparity evident in the level of detail applied to the three stages of the devising process. Often, the discussion of the improvisation process was as long as the discussions of the other two stages combined. Candidates who gained the highest marks were those who were able to allocate approximately the same amount of detail to each of the three stages. Many candidates struggled with the evaluation of performance, and this was often because they attempted a general evaluation of each piece as a whole. Candidates were often rewarded with marks in the top bands who focused on specific, detailed moments within a piece, and who were able to ascribe a particular performance intention to that moment and then evaluate the extent to which that intention was achieved. When discussing the rehearsal stage, the more successful candidates were those who could demonstrate how performance material had been shaped and developed in order to better achieve a specific performance outcome. Weaker candidates tended to focus on the repetition of material in order to learn it, and personal problems within the group, neither of which allow high marks to be awarded.

In the discussion of the Community Performance candidates need to focus totally on the project they are submitting for examination. Commentaries that spend time on anecdotal, hypothetical details cannot be awarded high marks. Centres need to ensure that candidates are guided correctly in the initial stages of the preparation of the Community Piece so that the project is clear and that they are aware that their writing should be focused solely on the piece seen by the moderator on the DVD. Examples of good practice were witnessed when candidates wrote an opening paragraph which clearly stated the context of their performance in terms of subject matter, intended performance style and influences, intended venue and audience. This was often achieved succinctly and became the reference point for the rest of the discussion and provided the benchmark for the evaluation of the project.

## **Quality of Language**

Many centres demonstrated robust and accurate marking in this assessment area, but there were also a number of centres that were particularly lenient in applying the mark scheme. There is an expectation that in order to access the top band, a commentary must have practically no errors in terms of spelling, grammar and punctuation, must display a fluent writing style that moves easily between ideas, and must deal with complex topics that are communicated with clarity and conciseness. There were a number of instances where quite simplistic work with many errors was awarded marks in the top band, and these often required an adjustment to be made through the moderation process.

## **Devising**

In awarding marks for Devising moderators are looking for clear evidence that the candidate has been an integral part of the process and that the ability to devise credible performance images that affect the audience beyond simple entertainment is supported by the evidence on the DVD. Top marks for Devising may not be awarded if the piece is not totally original. This includes the use of existing music. Although there are examples in the professional world where existing material has been altered to be included in a performance, for the purposes of this examination the requirements are that for marks in the top bands the work should be the original work of the candidates themselves.

Devising needs also to take into account the venue and these have ranged from theatres to churches, and there was one interesting piece that was set in a glass factory. One centre offered a street theatre performance, but the success of the piece was hampered by proxemics and spacing issues as they were too far away from their audience to make a strong impact. Many of the themes and stimuli taken from the community are become more and more adventurous and interesting, with some high levels of creativity and originality being displayed.

The two main focuses in this assessment area are the quality of the material that has been produced, and the extent to which individual candidates have contributed to that devising process. There were some occasions where candidates had been awarded high marks even though the work produced was predominantly in one art form. Centres are reminded that there is an expectation that candidates will devise work in all three art forms and that simply changing lyrics to an existing music piece does not constitute devising in the art form of music.

There were some centres where the students did not identify the chosen style for the Community Performance, and others that include little discussion of how the style informed the development of the practical work. Centres are reminded that it is important for candidates to research the chosen style in depth, and to use this knowledge in conjunction with the intent and information about their audience and knowledge of their performing space when developing the performance.

The marking for Performance Skills has become more consistent. In the top band moderators are looking for evidence that a candidate has a high degree of skills in at least two of the art forms with a clear ability to use elements of another without it affecting the performance image of the candidate. Therefore a candidate that shows a high degree of skill in Drama and Dance and is able to show strong rhythmic skills, for example, by including the influence of 'Stomp' in their performance work can be awarded marks in the top band. Where marks differed to those agreed by moderators it was often because a Centre had awarded marks at the bottom of a band rather than at the top of the one below. Where all the conditions of a mark band have been met then the centre needs to award full marks for that specific band. It is not an indication that the candidate is at the bottom of the band above.

### **Performance Pieces**

The heart of this unit is the development of performance techniques and this final piece is the opportunity for the candidates to show that they have been involved in a rigorous process in terms of developing their theoretical and practical skills of devising and their actual skills as a performer in the three art forms. It is therefore exciting to see the wide range of performances from across the country that has happened in a range of venues within the various communities. Where historical topics have been used it is important that candidates are clear about their choice of performing style and that this is consistent with the topic they have chosen. Similarly it is important that appropriate planning has been made about the location of the performance so that candidates can focus on performance rather than organisational issues. Performances need to go beyond a single intent of entertainment or shock to achieve high marks. There were excellent examples of work where candidates had been given opportunities to see how the style and techniques they were using affected and influenced an audience. Candidates need to think carefully about the intention behind the structure and the techniques they use. Consideration needs to be given to the timing of lines and the use of shock tactics. An audience can easily be unsettled, or be made to laugh, however it takes skill to continue this or to manipulate the focus of the audience after this. Too often candidates were concerned with the moment of shock, laughter, or unease yet seemed unsure as to how to then build from this. Centres should be aware that choice of projects should not include T.I.E, or issue-based performances to a church or youth-group, for example. The starting point must be one that is specific to that community and not a generic theme such as 'drugs' or 'high street crime'. Good work seen often took a community theatre approach, where past events in that locality that could be related to the present were explored: ones which had passed from recent memory and had become less well-known had the potential to be fulfilling and enjoyable work for a local audience eg West Country myths and legends, a recent sea-rescue or the legend of a convent ghost.

There were fewer examples this series of under-rehearsed or faltering performances. The majority of performance pieces were at least competent in this respect, and several showed a very high degree of preparation and polish. A good range of technique was evident in most of the performances, and there were examples of effective live music performances being well integrated with drama and dance.

In the more successful pieces, there was an evident level of enthusiasm on the part of the candidates and this often translated into pacy and effective performances. At the other end of the spectrum, there were several performances where poor control of pace and transitions led to some very mundane pieces. There were some examples of overly-generous marking in this assessment area which required adjustment.

Good quality work was evidenced from centres when:

- All three art forms were included in live performance. This included live rather than recorded music. The quality of devising was greater where candidates sang their own compositions and engagement with their own work produced a clear range of performance skills.
- The performance had a clear narrative that was communicated to the audience without relying on explanatory notes in the programme. A clear narrative does not have to be drama-focused to be successful: some very good dance-based performance of local myths and legends was seen.
- The performance style was clearly understood and stated at the outset and there was clear reference to performance theory and practitioners. Too often 'Eclectic' and 'Post-modern' were not understood by candidates or used as an excuse to include anything.
- It was devised for a specific and relevant audience.
- Candidates had considered and selected an appropriate venue. Centres should not make finding a venue part of the assignment; the centre should make an appropriate choice for their candidates. Outdoor theatre usually presented problems candidates had not considered. Outdoor performance requires candidates to have the skills to command the space and the relationship with a transient audience and this is demanding for inexperienced performers.
- Candidates had researched in detail and communicated that detail in their work. Some excellent work on mining communities in the North-East was seen, in which the focus was on the language, culture, characters and the vigour of the community in a harsh working environment rather than on a single disastrous event.

# G402 Performance Contexts 1

## General Comments

In this series most examiners felt that the answers were generally well structured responses, especially where a detailed essay plan was present. Most candidates began with an introduction to the practitioner's general aims and biography and ended with a conclusion that re-listed the points that had been made throughout the answer. Weaker candidates were disadvantaged by a less clear structure and these answers lacked detail. This often led to discussions that tried to make a little go along way and strayed from the argument which resulted in responses that lacked focus and a clear sense of what they were trying to state. In a few cases the inclusion of the essay plan had a negative effect and resulted in formulaic answers that were just a general list identifying the fingerprints of the studied practitioner. Answers within the dance section were generally well structured apart from a few rare candidates that produced very narrative answers, especially when using contextual references from Newson's *Strange Fish*.

The terminology in most questions was understood although some candidates struggled with the term "structure" and thought this only related to the narrative structure of a piece. The term "radical" also was not fully appreciated as some candidates referred to this as just meaning "different". Some of the factual information which candidates would be expected to know was incorrect – many essays implied that Isadora Duncan was a modern practitioner; one candidate wrote that Ira Gershwin wrote the music and George the lyrics. There was also some confusion when it came to identifying Brecht and Berkoff in terms of style in some responses.

Stronger candidates were able to offer appropriate examples to exemplify and strengthen their argument, which led logically to clearer, more assured answers. Centres need to strike a balance between offering candidates a range of examples that allow the candidates to appreciate the context of the practitioner's work and offer a real insight into the structure and characteristic features of that work and offering such a wide range of works that the candidates are unable to offer detailed references from any one of the studied works.

The Quality of Language was variable. In some centres it was not very good at all. Many started sentences and paragraphs with *Because* or *And*. Candidates got confused between *there/their/they're* and *theatre* was misspelt by some, as well as *scene* and *props*. Most key terms were used appropriately although as in the past there were some strange spellings of the names of key practitioners and of key terms. Examples of this included misspellings of *Shakespeare*, *Commedia*, *Apartheid*, *minor* instead of *miner*, *practioner* for *practitioner*, *peace* for *piece* and sometimes even *Godber* and *Bourne* were spelt wrong; *Sinovski* was used for *Stanislavski* and *Isabella* for *Isadora*.

There were a few candidates that didn't write more than 4-5 sentences for an answer and showed a clear unprepared attitude. Examiners noted that in a few centres many of the responses were similar in not only points made but also comments and phrasing, examples and even misspellings. The only variance was the degree of understanding which the individual candidate had.

Centres are urged to ensure that candidates resitting this examination are fully prepared and ready to tackle the questions. There were a few examples of candidates who wrote a few lines or paragraphs and then left messages for the examiner stating that they either didn't understand the questions, didn't know anything about the practitioner or didn't need the mark as they had already achieved a grade for the unit.

The standard of the handwriting and the use of language in the responses of the strongest candidates were of a high standard, with well structured prose and fluent movement between ideas. Complex ideas were explained well and the candidates clearly understood the work of the studied practitioners and were able to present their line of argument in a logical and informed manner.

## SECTION A

### Matthew Bourne

#### Q1

The focus of the question was on stylistic influences and the idea that Bourne's work is sometimes considered too simple and relies on the audience recognizing and relating to the familiar rather than on the quality of the piece itself. Candidates were expected to argue for or against the statement, using evidence from the works studied to either support the idea that Bourne combines the best of the arts to create a new spectacle that appeals to a contemporary audience or to refute that assertion.

Some weaker candidates were unable to fully define what they understood by '*showbiz and razzamatazz*' although quite a number of candidates focused on technical staging and were able to discuss the relationship between the ballet content and the setting using examples such as the bed in *Swan Lake* and the Cake in *Nutcracker*. Some candidates also referenced the set in *Cinderella*. The key function of making a spectacle was not always fully appreciated. There were some references to Bourne's use of lavish costume and settings, Walt Disney influences such as fairy tales, Hollywood films such as 'The Wizard of Oz', Hollywood musicals in general for staging ideas and interestingly Film Noir for the darker elements of narrative, set and lighting. The major art forms discussed were ballet, opera, Hollywood musicals and films (particularly Film Noir). Movement examples included social dance, the pedestrian movement of the sweets in *Nutcracker!* Contemporary dance and the Tango. Stronger candidate mentioned music, including the combined use of modern contemporary sound scores with Tchaikovsky's original music for both *Nutcracker!* and *Swan Lake*. Film Noir was discussed in relation to helping tell the darker side of Clara's journey in *Nutcracker!*, as was Bourne's focus on his dancers' ability to act and tell the stories through gesture and facial expression. There were some interesting responses that discussed the social, historical and cultural influence of celebrity icons, folk and world music and dance such as Spanish Flamenco. Some interesting discussion was presented in relation to the influence of films, comparing *Nutcracker* to *West Side Story*.

#### Q2

The focus of the question was on structure and form. Bourne's preoccupation with storytelling is borne out of his love of films. Bourne himself says that the movement comes last in his creative process, after he has undertaken extensive research and has created a detailed storyline and back stories for his characters. This question was most popular but often led to narrative responses. Strongest candidates discussed the elements of drama and theatre and their significance in storytelling, referring to the significance of characterisation through facial expression and body language and pedestrian movement. Such candidates often referred to the importance of setting and set/costume design; lighting and music/sound effects as well as commenting on the linear structure and the introduction of key characters at significant points in the story.

Weaker candidates tended to identify the story being told but did not refer to movement content at all. Some candidates related to setting in the way it was used to help support the story telling. Clara herself, the Nutcracker, various sweets (mainly the Gobstoppers) and the children in the orphanage were the most popular characters to discuss in *Nutcracker!* whilst the focus of character discussion in *Swan Lake* tended to be about the homoerotic nature of the all male swans and linking of this with Bourne's own sexuality as the motivation behind this interpretation

of the story. The gigantic cake with the interaction of the sweets in *Nutcracker!* and the aggressive swan-like movements of the dancers around the giant bed in *Swan Lake* were favourite images for candidates to discuss. Candidates found that the most difficult aspect of the question was the discussion of structure and many chose to give formulaic answers listing Bourne's techniques albeit with often good examples from either *Nutcracker!* or *Swan Lake*. Rarely were candidates able to show how Bourne's pieces were put together to make coherent and exciting theatrical experiences. Only a few candidates focused on the structuring of the work to show storytelling and answers often covered points about pedestrian movement and facial expression, but then only gave narrative examples. Music was occasionally mentioned but only rarely fully explored.

*Works studied included: "Swan Lake" "The Nutcracker!" "The Car Man" "Dorian Gray" "Cinderella"*

### **Shobana Jeyasingh**

#### **Q3**

The focus of the question was on structure and form. Candidates should have recognized how Jeyasingh's work is innovative in that she is not afraid to experiment in terms of the way she melds different dance styles, the way she collaborates with an interesting range of musicians and composers, lighting designers and multimedia artists. She places her work in different settings and her classical South Indian dance vocabulary has been described as "fluid geometry".

#### **Q4**

The focus of the question was on the elements of the performing arts and how Jeyasingh's work is a fusion of classical and contemporary styles. Candidates should have shown that they have an understanding of how Jeyasingh uses a combination of dance styles and an eclectic mix of music to convey the hybrid nature of her movement and the nature of the themes she explores such as migration and the fluidity of culture in contemporary society.

### **Lloyd Newson**

#### **Q5**

The focus of the question was on structure and form. Candidates should have shown an understanding of where their studied work sits in the chronology of Newson's work. There should be an appreciation of how his later works differ from his earlier ones and evidence of an ability to locate studied work in timeline. This proved to be the most difficult question for candidates to give a complete answer. Not one candidate of those who attempted Q5 could place the Newson work studied in any kind of timeline. Many candidates had problems understanding the demands of the question. Often they did not appear to have acquired sufficient evidence from the range of Newson's work to be able to discuss the implications of the question and to provide relevant comments on the evolution of work. The candidates who attempted this question often confused 'evolved' (ie over time in comparison with his other works) with 'developed' (in terms of technique, either within the one work studied or from his early ballet training) or misinterpreted the question believing that the response should consist of a description of how the content of piece developed and changed in terms of structure as it progressed. Some candidates referred to Newson's preoccupation with issues such as disability; homophobia; acceptance by others and how he had continued to challenge the audience's views in his work. Weaker responses seemed to be of the opinion that Newson was not interested in live performance and had little awareness of audience reaction.

The better responses seen discussed Newson's use of the elements of the performing arts and movement techniques and how they were used to create a moment. There were some interesting explorations of ideas such as the use of pedestrian movement in *Enter Achilles* to develop the idea of the male pack mentality, dialogue, contact improvisation to indicate character relationship development, interaction with multimedia, risk taking in the bar scenes in *Enter Achilles* to emphasise male bravado and the use of comedy and Physical Theatre techniques to stop dance being simply 'something pretty to look at'.

#### Q6

The focus of the question is on the elements of the performing arts and how Newson challenges the concept of what constitutes dance and his belief that dance should not be just about beautiful young bodies making pretty pictures but about using whatever means to create work that conveys ideas and challenges important social issues. Newson himself says that he does not create dance work unless he has something to say.

Many candidates commented on Newson's belief that dance 'should not look pretty' and the importance of conveying a meaning. The weakness in the responses was often that having said that Newson only created work when he had something to say, some could then only describe in detail the type of action used without discussing what it might communicate, or in very general terms describe in general terms what sections of the studied work represented, for example identifying the bar scene in *Enter Achilles* as 'an exploration of masculinity' without clear reference to actual movement content nor to the significance of those movements. Some examiners expressed the concern that centres seemed to have 'dipped' into one work and made the same points about the same section with candidates from one large centre discussing only the same two scenes, the writhing on the cross' Nigel Charnock's 'social avoidance' scene where others are desperate to escape from him. The strongest candidates were able to show an indepth understanding of Newson's work and were able to comment on the eclectic styles in *Cost of Living* with a detailed discussion on the mix of balletic style citing examples how the par de deux contrasted with Eddie's head-pecking to support their ideas. These candidates were able to also pinpoint the significance of sets such as The Plough pub in *Enter Achilles* and how it relates to the ordinary man. There were some interesting references to the significance of corridors and rooms in *Strange Fish* in relating to a sense of a psychological/spiritual journey. Strongest responses recognised the influence of the psychological aspect of Newson's work due to his Australian university education and how this manifests itself in a deep concern about the human condition and society's often rigid attitudes to 'being different'. Such candidates were also able to show how atypical dancers question our ideas of beauty and allow for more varied characterisation whilst props (rope, ball and doll) and costume (superman outfit, red shirt, suits) in *Enter Achilles* are semiotic signifiers whilst sporting/gymnastic and acrobatic movement/lifts are used to signify maleness in *Enter Achilles* and contact improvisation to convey the state of relationships between characters in *Never Again*.

*Works studied included : "Strangefish" "Enter Achilles" "To Be Straight With You" "Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men" and "The Cost of Living"*

## SECTION B

### Caryl Churchill

#### Q7

The focus of the question was on the elements of the Performing Arts. Candidates were expected to be able to show how Churchill uses characters and their relative power, status sexuality and moral/social/political stance to raise questions.

Many candidates struggled to connect with the question. Many candidates focused on the fact that Churchill's plays have an episodic structure with weaker candidates focusing solely on this and then just describing different episodes. Some candidates were able to recognise that Margaret Thatcher had historical significance in *Top Girls* but there was little comment on the significance of historical characters within the text. There were some detailed discussions of the characters in *Vinegar Tom*, particularly how 'Man' represents the Devil (often in men), Packer, the Doctor, Kramer and Sprenger as a metaphor for the power of a corrupt meritocracy and the various conformist and non-conformist women portrayed in the play; why they either 'play the game' or are condemned. The Victorian morals in *Cloud Nine* were identified as a metaphor for both the sexual control and the lack of sexual freedom for women (as signified in particular by the character Betty being played by a male actor) and racism (signified by the black servant Joshua being played by a white actor). Few candidates were able to identify both the historical and the allegorical figures such as the shapeshifter in *The Skriker* and the vampire, dog and angel in *Fen*.

A lot of responses focused on Act 1 of *Top Girls*; better answers linked the action to the rest of the play and the non-allegorical roles and recognised that the gathering was of those who represent facets of Marlene's persona; not a gathering of oppressed females comparing experiences. Most candidates ignored the empowered Isabella Bird or the waitress who remains silent and disempowered even in a female gathering. Some better answers discussed Kit and Angie as allegories of female aspiration which appears unlikely to succeed; and Win and Nell as the kind of women who were using men rather than the other way around. Most candidates were able to discuss Brechtian devices used such as song, episodic structure, the 'Verfremdung Effekt', also overlapping dialogue, non-linear narrative, the 'offside' body, cross gender casting and time shifting.

#### Q8

The focus of the question was on structure and form. Candidates were expected to highlight how Churchill used the relationship with men in her work as a theatrical device to reflect/reinforce/highlight the characters on stage. Churchill deals with her male characters in different ways so that in a play such as *Serious Money* the play is written as a verse play and focuses on characters whose main passion is money, *Cloud Nine* explores the relationships between men and women, men and men and women and women.

Only a minority of candidates identified how Churchill expresses two sides to a situation with however better answers recognized that she was concerned with the changing roles of women in society. There was some effective discussion opposing the question implying that in *Top Girls* the abuse the women endured from men only occurred because the women wanted it to happen.

Brechtian influences were usually highlighted but few candidates recognized that Churchill, like Brecht, seeks to provoke dialectic discussion and encourage the audience to think actively when presented with mouthpiece characters. Some very odd interpretations were identified, including that Mrs Kidd was a victim of her husband's oppression, that he had made her confront Marlene and that she had no will of her own. Responses from more than one centre also missed most of the significance of the role of Marlene by arguing that she is actually Churchill's portrayal of a nasty jaundiced view of men because Marlene acted like a man. A rare better answer recognised that Marlene's adoption of aggressive managerial characteristics highlights what is lost to both genders and to herself in the act of doing so. Better responses appreciated Churchill's interest in exploring the problems generated alongside the successes achieved by women.

Some better responses also highlighted the clear anti-Thatcher message in *Serious Money*, that the overriding attitude in 1980s Britain was selfishness, and, again (as in 'Vinegar Tom'), the ruthless power of a corrupt meritocracy, the working class oppressed by the ruling class (as defined by the Tories), the deprived North versus the rich South. In *Cloud Nine* the 'feminist' message, that women are often desexualised and that sexuality cannot (and should not) be controlled.

Those who grasped that Churchill was more interested in raising questions through the complexity of characters' lives and attitudes thrown up by the new freedoms rather than providing answers managed this question well with a range of interesting ideas.

*Works studied included : "Top Girls" "Cloud Nine" "Vinegar Tom"*

## **Athol Fugard**

### **Q9**

The focus of the question was on structure and form. Candidates should have identified the secrets within the studied work and how they affect the relationships between characters and perhaps the repercussions when the secrets are revealed to the characters and to the audience. Strongest candidates were able to identify what they understood by the concept of 'secrets' and were also able to show how the social and political context of the world that Fugard wrote about created a political climate where deceit and deception thrives, and is sometimes a matter of survival rather than malevolent intent.

Most of the responses to this question were quite weak and although there was often a simplistic knowledge of the narrative of the studied work, there was often little appreciation of the secrets contained within that story and the significance of the point of revelation and the consequences and repercussions of those revelations. In some cases the audience is aware of the secret(s) before the characters on stage are and this creates an interesting dramatic tension as the audience anticipates the moment of revelation. There was very little use of specific textual references to support ideas and most of the responses were mundane and narrative in approach with a few rare exceptions that contained in-depth analysis of the text and performance possibilities.

### **Q10**

The focus of the question was on the elements of the Performing Arts. Candidates were expected to analyse the characters in the Fugard play studied and to show how they are a mouthpiece for Fugard's views. Each character has a significance and purpose within the play and candidates were expected to recognise and identify these and show how each character serves the message of the studied play.

Some candidates were able to discuss what the effect was of having a person discussed that did not appear or having the person on the end of the phone. They were able to identify that the reaction of the character on stage gave us information about them as a person, about the person not seen and their relationship. Most candidates failed to recognise how the audience often gained an insight into a character through the retelling of a story by the seen character in relation to an unseen character eg Zach's romanticized retelling of his first sexual encounter with Connie which is clearly the distorted description of a rape. The white characters are often unseen but they have a great effect on the individuals in the plays. When seen they are often lampooned or treated with humour which can quickly change to brutality. Most candidates did not fully address the question, choosing instead to retell the action of the story or to write a list of possible dramatic techniques used by Fugard.

*Works studied included : "Boesman and Lena" "Master Harold...And the Boys" "Blood Knot" "The Island"*

## John Godber

### Q11

The focus of the question was on structure and form. Candidates may feel that Godber's work is simplistic and lacks depth or alternatively that both the content and the structure are robust. In either case candidates were expected to use specific examples from the text to support whichever stance they adopted. In terms of structure this would include Godber's manipulation of chronological action, use of freeze frames and non-linear progression, particularly in the monologues. 'Content' might include the use of monologues, stock phrases, choral speech and coarse language.

Few candidates understood the idea of a 'flimsy structure', but most were able to discuss the 'Punchy content' and identified this concept as including minimalistic, energetic physical theatre style, the use of contemporary 'club' music, exaggerated gestures, 'Taboo' language, fast paced episodic scenes and mime, particularly in *Bouncers*.

This question worked very well as a vehicle for contrasting the upbeat content against the 'events of an evening' episodes in *Bouncers*. One centre cited *Teechers* as being a far less flimsy structure which showed how Godber used both approaches with equal skill. Most candidates could agree or disagree to equal effect with 'flimsy structure' and were able to justify Godber's choices of style/structure. The understanding of the term 'structure' was not always clearly expressed but the majority of candidates were able to discuss a wide range of Godber's techniques, including Brechtian and filmic devices. Candidates often focused on dialogue and how this made an impact and often related to *Teechers* and making statements.

Some candidates just focused on the use of an epilogue and prologue and were able to identify how his works are episodic in structure. A handful of candidates ignored the question until the conclusion. More than a few supported the statement although it felt that they did so because they did not know what to say about the structure of the plays.

### Q12

The focus of the question was on cultural, historical and social context. Candidates were expected to identify specific moments within the studied work where Godber's influences are clearly seen and what effect Godber sought to create at that moment rather than just listing Godber's techniques and the characteristic features of his work.

The majority of candidates who attempted this question were able to discuss a wide range of social influences on Godber's writing. These included: Yorkshire, Hull, the Northern 'male' culture, his years as a drama teacher, writing for TV, particularly soaps, mining, sport, family, nightlife & club music, working class issues – lack of money/deprivation, his wife's experiences having a direct influence on 'Shakers' and the suicide of his best friend. Strongest candidates were able to then go on to identify dramatic influences upon Godber's work with Brecht, Stanislavski, Berkoff and Shakespeare being the most popular influences.

One candidate referred to Charles Dickens and his play on words and Chekov was sometimes quoted but was not always fully explored. Best responses showed an understanding of the classical conventions and how Godber uses these. Many candidates were able to identify Brechtian conventions such as breaking the 'fourth wall', Spass and narration as seen in *Teechers*, Shakespearian-style poetic language, humour through taboo language.

Most candidates were able to show how the identified influences were reflected in the studied work with some excellent highlighting of significant moments in the text regarding the use of Greek Theatre techniques, including choral speaking for the Greek chorus in *Bouncers*, Berkovian unison movement and 'Total Theatre' techniques, emotional engagement with characters using Stanislavskian principles and the use of poor theatre (minimalism).

Often candidates were able to make a clear connection with some influences and made reference to key moments in the text but at times examples tended to be narrative in approach. In the weaker responses points were not fully discussed and lacked any real development of ideas or a full exploration of the influences. Quotes were generally the same for all candidates in a centre, but some did show good practice with candidates drawing from a range of works and using varied examples to justify opinions.

Some candidates lost their connection with the question and discussed works in performance. In one centre candidates only referred to a production seen and the directorial interpretation in that production which the candidates accepted as reflecting Godber's intention rather than as an interpretation of an original text.

Many candidates focused on Godber's background and used the 'open the vein' quote and discussed the misspelling of Teechers relating to Godber's knowledge of the poor quality of education at the time of writing. Less thoroughly prepared candidates knew about Godber as a Drama teacher and a screenwriter for soaps and Grange Hill, but no more, and the responses quickly became generic and repetitive where this was so.

*Works studied included : "Shakers" "Bouncers" "Teechers" "Salt of the Earth"*

## SECTION C

### John Adams

#### Q13

The focus of the question was on stylistic influences and candidates should have been able to show how Adams has managed to produce work that is eclectic in style and which draws on a range of styles that are quintessentially American. Candidate responses were expected to include the influence of Minimalism as well as the other styles that Adams was exposed to. These might include Gospel music in *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and then I Saw the Sky*, folk and vernacular influences in *Gnarly Buttons* and the influence of the musical greats that Adams heard in his youth such as The Beatles, Joni Mitchell and Pink Floyd.

Strongest candidates were able to offer a clear overview of Adams' work and its characteristic features and were able to place him in his appropriate position in the timeline of music and to show how diverse musical influences are reflected in his work. These candidates recognised that Adams' work falls into three distinct periods and were able to show his progression through those three phases and which influences provoked a change or development in his work. Weaker candidates wrote very narrative responses focusing on biographical detail and failed to really get to grips with the question, often becoming anecdotal and narrative in approach.

#### Q14

The focus of the question was on the elements of the Performing Arts. Candidates should have logically referenced their studied work and identified the musical structure and form and the style being used. They were expected to recognize that each work has a unique quality and purpose despite sharing some common features. Adams writes for instruments in a way that engages them technically in an interesting and varied way.

Some candidates struggled with the analysis of their studied work and found great difficulty in showing how the various musical elements fit together to form a more unified, stronger collaboration. A few candidates just listed the features of Adams work and struggled to show how each work is unique and how the features are utilised to create that uniqueness. Strongest candidates recognised that Adams' works demand tight discipline and a clear understanding of the relationship between instrument performers and song performers as in *The Wound-Dresser* for baritone voice and orchestra or the relationship between the children's choir, the orchestra

and the pre-recorded soundtrack in *On the Transmigration of Souls*. Such candidates used appropriate examples from the works to support their ideas.

*Works studied included : “Shaker Loops” “Nixon in China”*

## The Beatles

### Q15

The focus of the question was on cultural, historical and social context. Candidates were expected to define what they understand by the themes and characters within the studied work and the musical techniques that are used to project those to the listener.

Only a couple responses were seen and in most cases the examiners felt that there was a distinct lack of knowledge of the practitioner and of musical devices. Few candidates mentioned musical techniques such as Melody, Harmony, Rhythm and Tempo. Most candidates focused on a narrative retelling of the story of the songs with some odd personal observations. Better candidates were able to identify the social themes being explored such as the sometimes humorous look at dark subjects such as the aging process in *'When I'm 64'*, the exploration of the relationship between politics and money in *'Taxman'*, references to Brian Epstein's homosexuality in *'You've got to hide your love away'*, poverty and a working class life in *'Hard Day's Night'* and social issues such as loneliness and death in *'Eleanor Rigby'* and Lennon's depression *'Help'*. Although there was often some very narrative; in the stronger candidates the answers were complex and very detailed and were able to relate the lyrics and music and intention together.

The best answers included a detailed analysis of the musical techniques and reflected a clear understanding of how these were used to project themes/characters. Often these candidates were able to articulate the clear difference between the early Rock and Roll style with repetitive lyrics, simple chord structures and harmonies, call and response, popular melodies as in *'She Loves You'* and the later songs with increasingly complex texture and timbre using latest recording techniques as in *'Strawberry Fields'*. The strongest responses were very detailed and identified the significance of specific moments in the studied work such as the tonic pause and sudden ending to *'She's Leaving Home'* and how these related to the parents sudden realisation of loss. The use of the harp and major arpeggios giving a sense of optimism and the cyclic structure of *'Tomorrow Never Knows'* to parallel its theme of reincarnation and rebirth. The use of clarinets in *'When I'm 64'* to instill a sad mood appropriate to the ageing process.

### Q16

The focus of the question was on the elements of the Performing Arts. It important that candidates were able to show how the music of The Beatles evolved and developed to become more expressive and complex. This might have included a recognition that some songs have a distinctive style of their own whilst others contain a fusion of styles.

There was some confusion over when certain songs were written with one centre thinking that *Hey Jude* and *Love Me Do* were written at the same point in their career. Many candidates concentrated on the background and cultural setting of their work and it would be very difficult at times to decide which of the two questions in this section that they were answering from the content because the responses lacked a specific focus.

Some stronger candidates were able to identify earlier works and then later works within their “drug” phase. Some candidates clearly identified how their work did change with some candidates identifying how use of instruments changed due to Indian influences as well as the structure of the songs using Indian traditions. A few identified the technological changes in the work but this lacked detail or clear evaluation. Some candidates struggled to present any comparison between the songs although the general style of songs was explored and there was

some discussion of how the two songwriters could create one piece considering that they had such vastly different styles.

*Works studied included : "Get Back" "Please Please me" "She's Leaving Home" "When I'm 64" "Norwegian Wood" "Help" "She Loves You"*

## **George Gershwin**

### **Q17**

The focus of the question was on structure and form and candidates were expected to identify the relationship between the voice and the accompaniment in Gershwin's work and should have been able to pinpoint examples of where each element has been used effectively and what effect was created on the listener. Candidates may have referred to the lyrics and their role in creating mood and emotional power as well as the memorable choruses and the use of pentatonic scales in the melodies.

The majority of candidates focused on the compositional skills of Gershwin and although some could reflect on the modern performances of Michael Buble for example there was little evidence of any knowledge of how the songs would or could be performed. Generally there was a lack of focus on the question and a lack of specific references to the songs.

Overall there was a lack of reference to the piano and the voice working together. Some struggled to try and make connections with their knowledge of the structure of the song but generally the voice was ignored or dealt with separately.

It is worth centres noting that the inclusion of music script with musical notation is not always to the candidate's advantage if it is fairly clear that the notes on the staff are not those of the melodic pattern. Some candidates referenced far less than the four contrasting works which is the minimum specification requirement. Weaker candidates tended to answer this question in a very generic way. Such responses consisted of a large introduction focusing on biographical background relating to Gershwin's experience as a song plugger in Tin Pan Alley followed by a narrative retelling of the story of the songs studied with little reference to compositional techniques or to the relationship between the piano and voice. The better answers managed to explain how the piano supported the singer allowing them to improvise and kept the rhythm underneath that. The worst answers just got lost and said the pianist had to adjust the rhythm and melody to follow the singer.

### **Q18**

The focus of the question was on the elements of the performing arts. Candidates were rewarded for accurate quotations from the songs, either in the form of music notation or detailed verbal description. Candidates were expected to be able to make specific reference to the lyrics and music in relation to their understanding of how the songs achieve a sense of drama.

Centres which had studied at least four contrasting works offered their candidates the opportunity to apply their knowledge to this question although some answers became narrative discussions of the songs' lyrics and various performers' interpretations of the songs. Few candidates recognized humour as a dramatic quality, not recognising the skewed rhyming patterns or the mockery of the Gershwins' own profession. Some candidates had remembered aspects of the memorable choruses but had forgotten the forgettable verses which made it difficult to answer the question effectively beyond asserting that the chorus was more dramatic than the verse. Some answers identified the technical musical elements without then going on further to identify the dramatic effect created.

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Few candidates really grasped the function of both the lyrics and music although most were able to quote some lyrics from the songs but struggled to effectively discuss the music and how the two were interrelated connected. Candidates did mention word painting but often without explore the point.

The strongest candidates presented some excellent examples of notation to support their ideas and used these examples in a highly effective way. These candidates were able to highlight how techniques such as word painting, the use of pentatonic scales and the inclusion of blue notes affected the dramatic impact of the songs.

*Works studied included : “ The Man I Love” “Fascinating Rhythm” “I Got Rhythm” “Summertime” “Foggy Day” “Someone to watch over me” “They can't take that away from me” “Nice Work”*

## G403 Performance Contexts 2

### General Comments

The dominant approach to creating answers to the questions in this Unit still tended to be a step-by-step account of a list of works, rather than looking at the topic as a style. To enable candidates, especially those likely to score highly, to attract the marks, centres must emphasise the study of the topic, not a list of works, or set of given practitioners.

That said, however, there was much to commend in the answers this series. Short answers were only a problem in a minority of cases, with most candidates answering in a quantity appropriate to the time allocated. Some managed extraordinary length, but the majority had things to say and were going to say them.

Fewer candidates referenced only three practitioners, and overall there was a better weaving together of answers that deal with the question through performing arts, using illustrations from art forms in no special order. However there were a number of candidates that still relied on only three practitioners and invariably this led to responses at the weaker end, because it was self-penalising through lack of depth and breadth.

Comparison across works within the topic area was more frequent, for instance, political musicals, like Hair, Avenue Q, Showboat) being acknowledged in Politics and Performance and Paul Robeson as a political activist as well as a performer. Centres are reminded that candidates do not have to refer to a work just the once and never again; works can be returned to as appropriate.

Use of old questions as part of candidates' preparation, is quite helpful in getting them to work through what is relevant and expanding their view of the whole genre. Lament, satire, showing political teeth appeared in responses to this year's questions. Although, there is an unhelpful flip-side to this if there is only one practice answer attempted. Candidates then learn their practice answer and regurgitate it in the examination, with little relevance to the question on the topic, which, of necessity, is different.

Fewer candidates in this series, simply offered a list of works to make a point, but more often than previously, did make varying efforts to explain something from the material to justify the point they had made.

Where there room for further improvement is in the ways in which candidates discuss the topics and the exemplar material they are using. This should be done in terms of the vocabulary relevant to performing within the particular art form. Music should be explained as music, not just lyrics. Dance, requires knowledge of movement detail in order for it to be readily used as reference for points about its performance. Too often this series there was a list of techniques (fingerprints) for Fosse, for example, without any example of where they are used and how, offered, except possibly to discuss costume, his use of costume and props. Drama, should be discussed in terms of characterisation and dialogue, and how they contribute to the creation of dramatic tension.

Many, but still not enough, were able to distinguish between a minor and major key and will note where they were used and to what purpose. However, the structure of the music is important to be aware of, if only to give further intelligence for use in the student-devised piece. How the music is manipulated in order to create impact and effect is also important. The same interrogation in art form detail would apply to both Dance and Drama, particularly the latter. Question 6 on this paper, assumes that candidates will know what 'dramatic elements' could be and yet few even recognised they were being asked to compare the use of the art forms. The

use of the 15 terms at the heart of Unit G401 were rarely utilised. Many candidates did not see an ongoing connection across art forms (and therefore also across the units of this specification).

Finally, there were still many who thought that a single song (or two) was sufficient to discuss the music element in all three topic areas. One Bowie, Bragg, Marley, Dylan song does not really provide enough points to discuss, in order to illustrate the question. Other songs need to be studied too to give breadth.

### Quality of Language

This has seen gradual improvement and higher scores. Most used language with some facility and made clear arguments in support of their assertions. Although there were some odd informalities in otherwise more formal answers; 'Post-modernism takes a bunch of art forms and throws them together' *Chicago* 'takes the mick' out of the legal system; also some attempt to use personal response rather than analysis 'I liked it because...' which may be some basic awareness that the audience is free to take their own meaning from the work – if that had been added to the comment, it would have been worth more.

There were still widespread errors of some common (and often given on question paper) terms and words. Practitioner, original, piece are most common misspellings; lack of initial capital letters for proper nouns and poor paragraphing stand out as most often inadequate. In terms of style, candidates should avoid phrases, which limit their field of reference, for example, ..."the works I have studied"...." the next work I have studied"... Similarly, the use of 'etc' is poor style, it shows a poverty of thinking.

More widespread reading around the topic, and around/about practitioners would widen Knowledge and Understanding but also improve Quality of Language. For example, there is masses of material on Dylan, Pinter, Littlewood, Fo, Bourne, Bruce, that can provide useful ideas.

Use of word processing is generally helping the Quality of Language mark. Candidates can see their errors more clearly, and if they see them as errors, they can correct.

### Question-specific Comments

#### Q1

Approaches to this question ranged from: ignoring it completely and hammering away at discussion of pieces work by work, to a few who argued nothing had changed, to some who argued the turn of the nineteenth century as the turn of the millennium, to those who discussed the '60s only. For some this was largely because they were considering only the exemplar works they had studied rather than the idea of post-modernism across the whole of the period under scrutiny. Centres are reminded that the "Breadth and Depth of Study"(Specification p.16) requires the **development of the style** to be addressed.

The better responses took it as a wide spread of works over 50 years; weaker ones didn't, so often failed to get across ideas of the changes that have occurred over many years. Progress of Technology was used most effectively in several answers to indicate practical changes to presentation and mixed media performance. It was often cited as representing the biggest change, while the modern fascination with fusion of arts was hardly picked up on at all. Some identified performers like Prince, Madonna, Elton John, and Bowie as performers who have reinvented themselves over the years, so become 'constants' across the decades, which made for an interesting addition to the debate. It was made more alive when several referenced Lady Gaga's continuous iconic reinvention of herself.

In the responses from one centre there appeared to have been some useful discussion that had taken place that allowed candidates to compare “in-Yer-Face” Theatre with what one candidate called “In-your-lap” theatre of the ‘60s, pre-abolition of the censor, and “armchair theatre” on the TV. References were mainly to Daniels, Kane and Ravenhill, but the candidates were aware of their antecedents with Bond’s *Lear*, called “In-Yer-Eye” theatre. This was potentially a quirky approach, but made for a highly informed read. There was a real sense of understanding of what had happened in drama over the period. Dance had been considered in a similar thematic way, taking Tharp’s phrase about the ‘60s differences between “the shod and the un-shod” as the starting point, it picked up on the predominance of barefoot contemporary dance with the ubiquitous ‘flexed foot’ in a range of works, Michael Clark’s use of Dr Marten’s and Tap Dogs boots with taps, to the Knickerbocker Glory’s spats in Bourne’s ‘Nutcracker’. This clearly provided an engaging approach to covering the period, but more significantly the candidates understood what the differences were in the dance and could discuss them using appropriate terminology.

## Q2

This was the most popular question on the paper and gave rise to answers that spanned the entire mark range. Many candidates wrote with enthusiasm showing clear, detailed knowledge about the works studied. The strongest responses addressed the question, delivered a clear line of argument and used the extracts to illustrate the points they were making rather than discussing an extract at a time or the work of each practitioner in turn. This second approach separates the art forms and leaves little opportunity to make comparisons and draw conclusions about the topic as a whole.

The question provoked some into thinking, perhaps for the first time, how they were going to use what they knew within such a deliberately contentious statement. There were widespread variations in how to interpret originality. Some reckoned that if works merely re-invented the past, then that was not original! Others thought that originality was only in the past, therefore it must be dead!

Many answers discussed recycling, refiguring and reworking, which are key features of post-modern works and appropriate for this question. Candidates then pointed out how the practitioners used styles, techniques, devices, multi-media, choice of venue and unusual theatrical presentation to offer their audience something new.

One centre was well prepared with theoretical underpinning of post-modernism. In the past, this Knowledge and Understanding of what ‘experts’ have said on the genre has outweighed the arts practitioners, but there was less of that approach evident this year, with more sensible use of theory to reference and underpin ideas and approaches in post-modern practice. If the balance is wrong then discussion of theorists becomes irrelevant without the examples from performance practice.

As above, in Question 1, there were some inventive ways at looking at and across the art forms, finding the right approach for each group of candidates. One approach that didn’t seem to work involved a hefty paragraph on the comparison between Modernism and Postmodernism with no further reference to it in the rest of the answer.

There was some good understanding on the mix of styles, like Verbatim theatre. The best responses made comparisons between the ways that practitioners used the post-modern elements for different effects but this was not a standard approach. One of the features of better answers was an understanding of the relationship with the audience, that they are entitled to take their own meanings and interpretations from what is presented, which lends a new quality even to a reworked and re-used work of art.

There were still too many answers that assumed that post-modern practitioners set out to deliberately include the characterised features in their work, some even talked about x being more post-modern than y “because they use more fingerprints”. Centres should encourage candidates to understand that most practitioners are absorbing and reflecting the climate of their times, feeling the freedom to rifle through the past, but creating for themselves what we might refer to as ‘post-modern’ pieces. Few, if any successful artists or performance practitioners achieve anything from a “painting by numbers” approach. The nearest some may get is, for example, The Beatles creating a pastiche of the Beach Boys’ style, but they certainly didn’t do it because they wanted to be post-modernist.

### Q3

Most candidates seemed comfortable with the question and were able to discuss the motivation and stylistic features of practitioners. The question was generally well answered, because ‘performance styles’ is a broad brush. It did lead to a deal of narrative on individual works to explain styles, without much analysis of the political motivation of practitioners. Some motivation is explicit (eg Littlewood, Brecht, Bragg,); others are less obvious with it. The extent to which political motivation drives creativity and performance was an area for the better answers. Bob Dylan’s denial of his role in protest (and therefore politics) despite song evidence to the contrary was worthy of discussion.

There was much reference to Brecht as the ‘god-father’ of political theatre, some relying too heavily on his influence. Similarly Guthrie was used as the main influence for American protest songs. Whilst both Brecht and Guthrie have a part to play in the development of political performance, the lionisation of them was not helpful in displaying breadth and knowledge of this topic, as it suggests exclusion of others and a limited perspective on the topic. Surprisingly, there was scant reference to Gil-Scott Heron, for whom there were several retrospectives and obituaries when he died a month before the examination. Similarly, with the current tour and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Ghost Town* by The Specials, there could have been some useful comparative reference that would have been credited.

An open approach to the study of the topic that encourages the candidates to recognize potential material beyond the examples offered to them, should be something that centres strive to achieve, so that candidates are finding their own reference material.

This was a popular question, which led to many coherent and articulate responses where candidates could focus on the key terms in the question and show developments that have taken place throughout the period of the topic. Again, centres must choose exemplary works carefully so that the period is covered. Too often each art form is looked at through one practitioner’s work, which usually means the works are then from a narrow historical period. This distorts the argument presented in the answer because, for example, the drama discusses works from the beginning of the period, the music, the middle and the dance at the end. Some centres ensured spread for each art form eg *Green Table*, *Ghost Dances* and *To Be Straight With You*, which span several decades.

### Q4

This was the least popular of the two questions on this area with very few answers. Those that knew what propaganda is, made some very reasonable responses to this question. There were many who did not and blustered through a list of works. Discussion of ‘agit-prop’ should feature at some point in the study of this topic and would therefore give rise to an understanding of the term. Centres should consider their approach to ensure that styles of political performance are at the centre of the study rather than individual works. One candidate made a competent argument around the simple premise that political performance was intentionally propagandist in response to the propaganda it challenges and then proceeded to offer examples of that ‘intention’.

### Q5

Although a potentially complicated question, most immediately understood the kernel and responded accordingly. There were some interesting examples of what constitutes denial of reality, but the better ones understood war, poverty, race, social injustice, generally. There were some mature responses which used the extracts well to create an argument either for or against the question.

Many responses included reference to the American Dream, which was relevant indeed. The moral certainty provided reassurance to audiences as well as offering a retreat from the real world. The ambivalence to the aspiration during the '60s was reflected in knowledge of the repertoire and also the context. *Camelot* was used very well as an idealistic reflection but also a memento mori of the Kennedy and King assassinations. *Hair* was also very useful here for some, particularly in view of 2010 London revival.

The contextual elements came across strongly in this question and the impact was dealt with well in relation to the topic. One centre referred to *The Producers* as a good example of escapism post 9/11. Whilst the show itself is just out of the period under study, the one line comparative reference supported the comments being made about *Oklahoma!* in '43. Some candidates missed the underlying messages, which criticised American society in the 'Golden Age'. Whilst candidates were able to use their Knowledge and Understanding about practitioners flexibly in responding to questions, Fosse was dealt with in a formulaic way with a list of stylistic keys and where they are shown. Some talked about "gritty reality" but few commented on his representation of those who did not benefit from the American Dream.

This topic continues to attract eulogistic writing that often meant little and was often incorrect, for example, "*Sondheim knew all the tricks to a great musical and how to make it successful, everything he touched turned to gold, but all his musicals ended happily, good triumphing over evil, the guy getting the girl,...*" Centres should discourage this effusive style of writing in favour of a more analytical approach.

### Q6

Many candidates interpreted this as a question about integration of art forms and carried on regardless, usually in a chronological survey of nine examples. There was clearly an opportunity to discuss the ways in which the three art forms work together, but the focus of the question was around drama and its relationship with the two other art forms. Despite the word being in the question, far too many then spelt it – '*intergration*'.

Many candidates did not appear to understand what was meant by dramatic elements. Many referred to the issues of the piece as the 'drama', for example, racism in *Showboat*, gang warfare in *West Side Story*, marriage in *Company*. Centres must emphasise to candidates that the drama, with the music and dance, creates what we call a musical, which may highlight or touch on social, political, ethical and historical perspectives on the world, or, more specifically, the United States. A fight is not necessarily dramatic; how that fight is used, constructed, caused, manipulated, ended is likely to demonstrate and exemplify dramatic elements at work.

A few candidates referred back to the guidance vocabulary in Unit G401, and discussed dialogue, characterisation, tension and physicality and how they were made manifest in the musical and whether they were enhanced or compromised by the other art forms. Proxemics proved more problematic, as many took to narrating what they had seen on film versions, eg describing Emile approaching on his horse while Nellie sings "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair", rather than discuss this from a point of view that shows understanding of the show, eg the waltz in "Shall We Dance?" brings the two leads together in a visible proximity, which acts as an indicator for the audience of the growing relationship between them.

There appeared to be a general understanding of what compromise or enhancement meant, but even after having identified and set out an argument, some candidates resorted to a plod through of a list of works with little ability to compare or show generic understanding evident. This option in the Unit is concerned with a study of the American Musical in the Twentieth Century, not just a list of examples.

Many candidates did not treat the art forms equally. With no dance in *Sweeney Todd*, for instance, some needed to work harder on, say, Robbins to give a balanced viewpoint. There was less historical background on early precursors to the musicals this session than has been seen in the past, and that is to be welcomed. Some historical perspective is often useful; but heavy reliance on it, at the expense of analysis of the Musical, to explore the question is rarely helpful.

Most of the best answers addressed the enhancement and compromises and concluded that the most successful musicals had a generous mix of all three art forms.

**Q7**

There is still only very small numbers of centres approaching this topic, but there is evidence of continued improvement in the approach. The inclusion of the Barong Dances of Indonesia in the studied areas, with the masks of Barong and Rangda seen as sacred, was obviously helpful for this question. Together with Noh and Beijing Opera, the candidates had a full range of reference to exploit as examples. Whilst there was competent Knowledge and Understanding of the significance of the masks, how they are made and used in the works, many of the responses lacked depth and detailed discussion of performance technique associated with the 'look'.

There were detailed discussions of what these masks might mean to the performers and the audience and stronger answers made sound comparisons between different countries' use of masks and offered examples to illustrate points.

**Q8**

There were no responses to this Question.

## **G404 Performance Project**

### **General Comments**

The series ran smoothly and examiners reported that there were no matters of significant concern with the pieces submitted for examination. As in previous years, there was an obvious enthusiasm on the part of the overwhelming majority of candidates for the work they performed, which was reflected in their excitement in the non-assessed discussions with examiners.

### **Administration of the examination**

Examiners reported an improvement in the quality of the materials sent in advance with pictures being generally recent and recognisable. Some Centres did not send their material 14 days in advance, as required, although several sent theirs electronically as pdf files, which enabled the process to be speeded up. Electronic submission is encouraged in future series.

Most timetables were well thought out, with adequate pacing for candidates and examiner and appropriate breaks for refreshment and change of classes. It was appreciated that in centres the performance space was the main Hall and this was required for other purposes, thus requiring the timetable to be flexible in construction. Examiners were grateful that, where this was the case, there was normally a pragmatic approach to making the timetable work. As in previous series, a number of Centres timetabled the examination in the evening or at the weekend, thus enabling an audience to attend and separating the examination from the distractions inherent in Schools and Colleges during operating sessions.

### **Audience to watch the performances**

There were very few performances that did not have an audience and these inevitably suffered as a result since performing solely to the examiner and staff at the centre did not create a heightened relationship between performer and audience. The most successful performances were those where there was a genuine sense of communication and this was made more difficult when the audience was small or non-existent. Repertoire pieces in particular suffered from having no audience, as they often became little more than demonstrations of technical expertise, lacking performance skills.

At the other extreme, some audiences were badly behaved, clapping during the performance, whooping with delight at the end, sometimes talking or even eating during the pieces. This was distracting to candidates and examiners and centres are requested to apprise audiences of what behaviour is appropriate for an examination. The most successful work was where the audience were fully aware of the requirements of the examination, but was also engaged with the content of the performances. In one centre, for example, the candidates had organised their devised performance as a charity event with donations being split between the Freddie Mercury Aids Foundation (Freddie Mercury being their chosen commission) and a local charity, which created a real sense of occasion for all involved whilst ensuring that the event was, first and foremost, an examination.

Some groups did not produce programme notes for their devised pieces, and this was a significant handicap when it came to helping their audiences to understand the relationship between the devised piece and the chosen commission.

## **DVD recordings**

These continued to be of generally good quality, with some excellent examples of chaptering so that specific performances could easily be found. At the other extreme, the entire examination was recorded as a single chapter, making the identification of specific candidates or pieces very problematic. The recordings themselves were also variable. Some were well-lit and provided a very good representation of what took place. At the other extreme, the recording was a transmogrification of the performance into something strange and unrecognisable: pixelated faces, terrifying close-ups, wild camera movements and eccentric filming angles were all too evident, each in turn serving to distort the nature of the performance event.

## **PERFORMANCE REALISATION**

### **General**

The quality of repertoire performances was generally good, with very few candidates requiring a prompt, or forgetting their piece. There were one or two centres where a significant number of 'false starts' were evident. Examiners reported a trend for candidates who presented dance extracts to score higher than those who presented extracts in drama – the main reason being that delivering a monologue is not simply standing and reciting learned lines (many candidates remained stationary and seemed to be simply going through the motions). Music performances were often the weakest seen, with a number of performances being judged as falling below the standard required for A Level.

### **Mark Scheme**

The mark scheme was further revised from June 2010 to provide an even more detailed set of performance descriptors. This worked extremely effectively and enabled effective differentiation between the work of candidates.

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

Most pieces were of appropriate length, with candidates working in group sizes that enabled them to demonstrate their skills effectively.

### **Performance skills**

Examiners reported a broadening of the skills base in the session. At the higher end, skills continued to improve, whilst at the lower end they appeared to have diminished with a worryingly high number of candidates presenting work appropriate to assessment at Key Stage 4 or even lower, often without conviction. The overall standard was therefore variable, with some very professional performances cheek-by-jowl with others that clearly did not represent A level standard. The weakest candidates often suffered from being under-rehearsed and not having a real idea of what performance work at this level should look like. There was a particular concern about candidates using music on music stands, and on occasion lyrics as well.

In devised work there was a common trend to produce scenes where everyone speaks or shouts at once but which resulted only in frustration for the audience since none of the candidates demanding to be heard could be. In many ways, this was an extension of a banal technique of 'one word drama', still in evidence in many centres, where one monosyllabic word was repeated meaningfully whilst often the 'voices' swirl around threateningly: Hate, Death, Guilt, Die, Blame, Money, Fame, Drugs, Aids, War, Peace and others were generally ineffective methods of creating engaging dialogue.

Examiners reported a continued dominance of wearing theatre 'blacks' rather than giving serious thought to the use of appropriate costume. Costume should be a performance consideration, just as much as space, rather than an afterthought, and is an integral part of creating a role, irrespective of the art form of the performance.

## **Dance Pieces**

As in previous series, the work of Matthew Bourne, Lloyd Newson and Christopher Bruce accounted for the majority of work seen. Matthew Bourne's *Car Man* was very popular, with girls often successfully playing the male roles. On the whole, these were well-performed, demonstrating a good range of skills, strong technique and rigorous rehearsal. Weaker candidates focused on the narrative story and were less successful in terms of combining the technical skills and narrative content.

The work of Lea Anderson was more popular this session although this was often consumed by filmic techniques that relied close ups on the faces of the performer and did not work in a full live performance as the subtleties were lost on the audience. Matthew Bourne's *Cinderella* and *Swan Lake* proved enduringly popular, with most groups rising to the technical challenge of the demanding choreography, and also establishing situation and contrasting movement styles. There were also many extracts performed from *Nutcracker* although it was noted that there were instances where some of the motifs performed varied too much from the original. Whilst there is some opportunity for choreography to be adapted to reflect a candidate's technical ability (for example replacing a triple pirouette with a single), it should not become the candidate's own devised work.

## **Drama Pieces**

The quality of drama performances ranged from the under-rehearsed and lacklustre to committed, confident and absorbing renditions of set pieces. The best examples adopted the essence of the playwright's style within the performance and demonstrated outstanding evidence of flair.

The work of Stephen Berkoff was exceptionally popular and accounted for a similar number of performances as the work of John Godber. Berkoff pieces were often stronger in their physicality than in their dialogue and, whilst some candidates demonstrated masterly renditions of characters from *East*, others were more reminiscent of Dick Van Dyke's 'cockney' accent in *Mary Poppins*. Renditions of *Metamorphosis* were often more successful in combining the physical and vocal aspects of performance.

There were a number of engaging performances of Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*, which proved an excellent piece to do as the possible interpretations are so wide. Tara's monologue from Sarah Daniels' *Ripen our Darkness* was also a useful and workable choice. The comedic elements of Dario Fo's work were taken up enthusiastically by a number of candidates, with the comedy generally being held in check. However, a small number of pieces became indulgent and extremely over-the-top, and bordered on the farcical rather than the comedic.

As in previous series, the comic dimensions of John Godber's work proved popular with candidates, with a strong focus on *Teechers*, *Shakers* and *Bouncers*. Candidates achieved some fair success in monologues to audience, but this sometimes proved to be a restrictive mode of performance. Nevertheless, candidates at several centres gave powerful, accomplished performances, with controlled energy and range of effect that captured (for example) the ambivalent qualities of Godber's 'world' of clubbing in *Bouncers*, including striking intensification of accent and precise character definition, both for stock characters and when conveying the dark side of one bouncer's mind. All performances of Godber's work, whether solos or group, depended on strong acting skills, and not all candidates realised the technical and expressive challenge, with some renditions of *Teechers* in particular appearing under-rehearsed almost to the point of being amateurish.

## **Music Pieces**

The majority of performances were of songs, with a significant number of performances taken from the repertoire of American Musical Theatre. The work of a number of significant practitioners was well in evidence: Steven Sondheim; Kander & Ebb; Rodgers & Hammerstein; Lerner and Loewe. Some were excellent, carefully staged, appropriately costumed, and with an evident sense of musicality. The attention to the context of each song was a differentiator here, with the best performances demonstrating careful consideration of the show from which the song had been taken. In addition, a good number of candidates sang songs by George Gershwin, which they would have studied for their AS work in Unit G402.

There was a pleasing range of Gershwin songs. Candidates showed care and interest as performers in the character and qualities of an individual song. Lyrics were often delivered clearly with close attention to tempo and rhythmic aspects, and a cherishing of melody. There was notable success for several candidates in communicating the personality or narrative of the chosen song through imaginative use of the performance space, movement and rapport with audience. For example, one candidate who performed *Fascinating Rhythm* made sense of the song in a fresh manner, with good control and expression of contrasts and feeling of the piece, with excellent projection of the rhythm throughout, and a resounding climax.

The work of 1960s practitioners Bob Dylan and The Beatles were also popular choices. Dylan's unique personal and style was not easy to replicate convincingly, in cases where that proved part of the aim of the candidate. The most successful did not simply attempt to ape Dylan's singing voice, but captured something of the essential nature of the songs through their performance. The songs of The Beatles were as popular as in previous series, although the majority of these suffered from being conceived as 'cover versions' sung over a backing track with the original voices removed. Whilst not problematic in itself, the most creative performances tended to be those where the candidates had given more thought and consideration to the instrumental accompaniment.

There were hardly any music performances that did not involve singing. Some candidates attempted songs when their strengths were clearly in drama, which meant that they were disadvantaged by their choice of art form. There were some very significant tuning issues with a lot of out-of-tune singers who would have been better advised to do another art form where their weaknesses were not so exposed. Vocal clarity and projection was also an issue, even among those candidates whose tuning was more melodious.

## **Combined Art Form Pieces**

These were often taken from the canon of Musical Theatre, but with some recognition of the importance of the way the art forms work together in this genre. In particular, this allowed candidates to consider the relationship between the framing dialogue around a particular song as well as the characterisation of that song. In other cases, the choreography formed an important aspect of the extract and was appropriately handled. Good examples included Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* and *Chicago* where candidates were clearly inspired by the clarity and rhythmic qualities and enjoyed the opportunity to explore the style.

## **STUDENT DEVISED PERFORMANCE**

### **COMMISSIONS**

#### **Images**

##### **1 The Cruise by Mary Adshead**

Many performances picked up on the comedic dimensions of the picture, and where these were handled well there was a good performance structure; weak pieces were more akin to a parody of *Carry on Cruising*. The better responses showed excellent physicality of the each of characters in the painting, albeit in a stylised manner but well-suited to the era typified by the painting. Good use of props and rhythmic sound to highlight the aristocratic nature of the holiday and the class of the different characters. The strongest performances were complemented by an excellent choice of costume, which brought the painting alive.

There were some extremely creative approaches. One group, centring on the contorted shape and malign presence of the waiter, developed as a triangular love story of jealousy and murder, with the symbolism of a floating purgatory from which there was no escape. The performances offered an effective blend of dance, tableaux, mime and exaggerated acting techniques, enhanced by composed music for atmosphere, resonant of the physical energy in the picture.

Another piece closely related to the picture by including the two figures in the foreground, which appeared as stuffed life-size figures throughout and came into their own at the end of the piece. Characters were linked to the figures in the picture brought to life. There was attention to period detail in set, costume and performance details (dialogue and dance) and a coherent storyline had been devised in the style of a whodunit. Other pieces were rather more prosaic: one group created five grand-daughters who found grandmother's diary and trunk marked 'Cruise' in attic and gave flashbacks to the holiday. Even more tangential approaches dealt with such themes as 1930s domestic violence, or life in the Foreign Legion.

##### **2 Nebuchadnezzar by William Blake**

This was one of the most popular choices, especially because of the physical potential of Blake's image. It was evident that a number of candidates had examined the biblical narrative in order to understand Blake's painting and this formed a sound platform for success. There were some very strong pieces, fired by research, which were able to discover, explore and communicate the thoughts of Blake as he worked with the biblical story to produce the image.

Many pieces concentrated on Nebuchadnezzar's descent into madness, although with varying success. One group focused on the madness angle of the Nebuchadnezzar and treated the story in an epic theatre style. There were some powerful and lasting physical images and this was a closely-knit group piece with well written dialogue. Several groups adopted an Artaud-inspired approach, including an on-stage audience, evocative sound, and courageously extreme performance of insanity. There was some expressive acting, which dwelt on the image of animal-like insanity. There were a number of pieces that fell into the trap of retelling the story of *Lord of the Flies* complete with conch, piggy, war paint, cannibalism and rescue.

## **Political Struggle**

### **3 The abolition of apartheid in South Africa**

This proved less popular than had been anticipated. Work on this commission was characterised by careful research sometimes including blogs of people directly involved, and led to a major dance in the performance influenced by South African dance forms. There was often the suggestion that, although apartheid had ended, inequalities remained. One group of candidates successfully focused on Reconciliation Tribunals that took place after the initial abolition and retold through three true stories – two of victims wanting justice and one of a perpetrator asking for forgiveness. Each told separately through either song, or dance or drama and there was clear evidence of research-informed performance. Some pieces demonstrated an excellent application of research using verbatim theatre to explore the issues faced and the outcomes achieved.

### **4 Berlin between 1961 and 1989: a city divided?**

This was the most popular commission in 2011, and the most variable in terms of results. Strong pieces were often based on extracts of direct accounts, verbatim, from people involved, and remained clearly about the Berlin Wall from creation to fall, and the effects of division. There were many creative approaches to the construction and demolition of the wall itself, often providing a very good focal point for the performance image, and an effective means of delineating the performance space. The commission was often approached through the use of multi-media, with back projection, soundscapes and lighting plans all forming a significant part of the devising process.

Several pieces wove together unfulfilled love stories and political events, using a range of physical theatre techniques to create mood and atmosphere effectively. There were also a good number of physical portrayals of East Berliners running across No Man's Land and being shot in the trying. Some groups created very engaging parallel narratives between the situation in Palestine/Israel or during the time of the border between Gibraltar and Spain being closed.

Other attempts were little short of dire in attempting to combine historical authenticity with the creation of original performance. Many candidates were unsure of the difference between JFK's 1960s speech at the start of the historical period and Ronald Reagan's at the end. Indeed, the historical dimension and the events that led to the erection and demolition of the Wall were often glossed over. The creation of believable characters was often an exceptionally weak aspect of the work, relying far too much on stereotype and one-dimensional accent, rather than dramatic crafting and shaping. The groups that attempted to introduce phrases in German suffered badly, and few had any idea what the slogans meant. There was a significant minority of pieces that degenerated into something more akin to a low-budget television sitcom.

## **Poetry**

### **5 I cannot dance upon my toes by Emily Dickinson**

This proved to be one of the least popular commissions, with many candidates struggling to come to terms with Dickinson's style of poetry, generally missing its obvious metrical features. One very strong piece represented a thoughtful, sensitive response to the poem in the context of Emily Dickinson's life, using individual lines to enact the repressive forces acting on her, through drama and dance. Her human situation was symbolised by the boxes on set, with one composed piece of music (Tchaikovsky 'distorted'). The 'glee' periodically broke through, and the ending, nicely muted, suggested a precarious balance.

Several pieces showed the candidates to have misunderstood the poem with groups appearing to have seized on a simplistic idea early on in the devising process. In one case, the candidates had two or three ideas (ballet, the poet's life and an interpretation of the poem as being autobiographical), which ended up as a straitjacket. Whilst earnest attempts had been made to work in a variety of art forms, the use of serial blackouts, weak dialogue and characterisation made for a bleak piece, the candidates often becoming bogged down by the poet's life and a series of deaths that had occurred and which they chose to depict.

The poem was used by occasionally for a flight of fancy. One group's research had yielded the speculation that Emily Dickinson had never married because she might have been a lesbian, and so the performance was about a thwarted lesbian love affair, couched in an uneasy mix of period and demotic language, in modern dress, and focusing on a young woman called Emily.

## **6 If by Rudyard Kipling**

Rudyard Kipling's poem has maintained its popularity for several generations and proved enduringly popular this series. However, it is doubtful whether groups really faced up to the nature of the poem – in its time, in its astonishing popularity, and especially in its possible social and political implications. Nevertheless there was a wide range of approaches. In one case, the performance piece maintained a creative approach to the commission while remaining linked to it, taking a darker view of human possibilities using thematic key words from the poem – perhaps originally inspired by initial research into disturbed aspects of Kipling's own childhood. It was fairly naturalistic early on; deeper, darker notes emerged through dance and movement imaginatively shaped to convey inner hurt, and achieving a degree of real power.

In another case, the poem was interpreted through the story of Kipling's son, Jack, and his death in World War One, with some interweaving of lines from the poem at certain points. This approach took some historical liberties but offered a potentially workable approach. A similar theme was picked up by stronger group who approached this commission by giving it a modern context. The piece became an episodic look at what constitutes a modern man, bookended by a snapshot of Kipling's relationship with his son. The modern sections of the piece were very well acted and conceived with some nice comic touches and Brechtian songs to comment on the action.

Another piece offered a feminist response to the poem, charting the representative history of women's personal development from the 1920s to the present, through episodes about five different female characters, incorporating the selected line in each case as a theme. A different Feminist piece was inspired by Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, but centred bizarrely on a group of beer-swilling anarchic nuns!

## **Stories**

### **7 The Trojan Horse (from Virgil's *The Aeneid*)**

This commission inspired a small number of pieces. One interpretation was about the Paris and Helen story; the role of the gods, and Hecuba's suffering rather than the specific events of the Trojan Horse, though that was referred to. Nevertheless, candidates were at pains to create a stylised classical world, influenced by their study of *The Trojan Women* by Euripides, through poetic speech, use of chorus, and ritualised movement and song, the final song being particularly effective, all overseen by a quartet of harsh deities. Other groups used epic theatre style, sometimes with lavish set and costumes and a clear historical setting and including opportunities for multi-rolling and powerful imagery.

Another group approached this commission giving it a modern context. Taking inspiration from Berkoff's *Greek and East*, they explored the idea of The Trojan Horse itself, a Trojan Horse computer virus and the idea of a drink in a nightclub spiked with date rape drug. One particular section in the piece was very well conceived: a physical representation of Microsoft Windows and the relevant security features actually being attacked by a Trojan Horse virus – this provided the opportunity for some very well observed comic characterisation.

## **8 Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi**

Together with Commission 4 this was the most popular choice in the series. Collodi's version was often significantly different from the version known by candidates and many of the discussions with examiners focused on the ways in which pieces had been shaped to reflect this. There was a strong sense of the physicality of the piece, often reinforced by the breaking free of the puppet at the high point of the piece.

Many interpretations focused on the tortured identity of Pinocchio himself, with some risk of cliché and lack of justice to the richness of Collodi's narrative. In one bizarre response, Pinocchio was recast as an IVF-produced baby. Elements of the story were retained, but transformed: the Cricket announces his role as conscience in "post modern fashion"; the Cat and Fox become dark forces, the 'whisperers' about the unnaturally produced child. In another, the piece concentrated on a psychological conception of Pinocchio as puppet come to life but afflicted by three demonic consciences. A striking performance image was created and pursued with conviction as Pinocchio descends into disaster – enhanced by physical theatre, expressionist lighting and tableaux, and dance. The physicality of both pieces ensured that the nuanced 'take' on the story did not serve to derail the narrative. Some groups, however, strayed too far from the story, with no reference to the nose or to lies, or to the fox and cat part of the story.

Many pieces took a musical theatre approach. One interesting take was inspired by Sondheim's *Into the Woods* and used a soundtrack of Bernard Hermann's music. It explored the later part of Pinocchio's life – set in a toy shop and using flash back and multi-role by the other group members to explore why Pinocchio's nose grew and using the idea of Pinocchio in therapy. This had strong movement work, an effective set and strong integration of drama and dance in this sequel to the Pinocchio story. There were several superbly crafted pieces, one of which managed to incorporate the parallel device of a group of wandering (each well characterised) players touring a puppet theatre production of the story of Pinocchio. The two narratives wove in and out of the performance throughout and even managing to create a classic moment of opera buffa.

## **Performers**

### **9 The Andrews Sisters**

This commission appealed to groups whose strengths included singing, and there were some excellent examples of close harmony singing. The most able groups were able to create short snippets of song harmonised in the same style as The Andrews Sisters. Others became embroiled in the singing of the actual songs and tended to include extracts that dominated or even swamped the piece.

The narrative structures chosen varied greatly. Several groups attempted to show the influence of the sisters on modern day women. One piece brought the sisters into 21st century to take part in *The Apprentice*, but appeared to focus instead on ridiculing the sisters because of their style of music and dance and the stereo typicality of domesticity of their times. A widely-employed device was that of analepsis, jumping back to earlier events through flashback, in some cases linking this to the degeneration of the sister with age. It

was rare for a group to create an interesting structure, and many struggled to handle the relationship between historical detail, existing songs and the creation of new content in music and drama.

## **10 Freddie Mercury**

There was an enormous temptation for candidates to produce their own version of the musical *We Will Rock You*, with a number of songs by Queen loosely draped around a plot of greater or less improbability. These tended to be enthusiastically delivered, even though the content was lacking in originality. In an attempt to move away from over-reliance on Mercury's songs, others focused on different aspects of his life. These included Freddie's religious beliefs, his relationship with men and women, interspersed with lines from the songs. Others adopted a dance-based approach in which the spectacle and glamour of Queen performances became a framing narrative for the piece.

The use of a tribute band as a vehicle was used in a number of instances although these gave the most licence for candidates to indulge in costume that lent an unintentional comic air to the whole piece. Thus there was a plethora of comedy moustaches (which inevitably fell off), fake hairy chests, glittery, tight-fitting costumes and cropped wigs, all of which were received uproariously by the audiences of peers but made little impact on examiners who did not know the candidates personally.

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