

## A Level Performance Studies

### The 'What is Integration?' Lesson

#### *Instructions and answers for teachers*

##### **The Activity:**

The lesson introduces students to, or reminds them of, the concept of integrated performing arts.



*This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.*

#### **Introduction**

The lesson introduces students to, or reminds them of, the concept of integrated performing arts.

For the G401 and G404 units it is vital that dance, drama and music, while being accepted as discrete subjects, are also seen as strands of the rope that is the performing arts.

Integrated means a complete whole made of different or separate parts.

Performers can sing, make/play music, dance, speak, mime any tragedy, comedy, message or to entertain. There are no rules of separation in performing arts.

Key terms/elements, the building blocks of the language of performing arts:

- Motif, action, relationships, dynamics, space (dance)
- Dialogue, characterisation, physicality, proxemics, tension (drama)
- Rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, texture (music)

However, most of these are applicable to more than one art form. That is integration, when they merge seamlessly to create performance.

The first part of this lesson is based on comedy/circus clowning skills derived from the commedia dell'Arte traditions, also found in the roots of British pantomime and Punch and Judy.

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## Lesson Element

Circus is an example of an integrated art form, with practitioners such as Cirque du Soleil blurring the boundaries between the arts successfully. Musical theatre is the best expression of music, dance and drama working together (and discretely at times) to create a true piece of performance theatre.

Common student misconceptions to watch out for:

- if I am dancing, I cannot speak dialogue
- if we write a song it has to be performed in one go and separate from anything else in a piece
- if we don't have lighting, proper staging, entrances/exits and audience sitting facing us, we will not succeed

### Preparation

Teachers will need a space free of any clutter for the lesson and a selection of musical instruments will be helpful.

No props or furniture beyond the odd chair are needed. Mime is all important and real props are distractions, leading to prop-reliance.

Students should be asked to come dressed in appropriate, loose-fitting practical clothing.

The following materials would be useful for both teacher and students:

- selections from any Cirque du Soleil DVDs either before or after session;
- Theatre Alibi or Forced Entertainment DVDs for exploring physical comedy, and
- 'Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook', by John Rudlin (1994) (978-0415047708)

Teachers will need a piece of music that suggests a robotic-like, futuristic, dehumanised environment.

The following suggested music could be used, but is not prescribed:

- Steve Reich, The Art of Noise, Aphex Twin
- Kroke album, The Sounds of the Vanishing World, 'Time'.
- Film soundtracks such as 'Planet of the Apes', 'Watchmen', 'Long Walk Home', 'Requiem for a Dream'.

A follow up suggested worksheet is supplied for students to record learning in the practical lesson and for use as a template for further devising on the themes given for their exam work.

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### Task 1 Warm up, whole group

**Instruction to students:** Stand in line, one behind another, arms' length apart. Like dominoes, front one falls into next, and so on down the line.

Maintain control and discipline.

Then, try changing direction in slow motion or double time.

**Instruction to students:** Into pairs. You are both in a hurry to get into one toilet cubicle.

- Discuss with students:**
- Physical comedy, how does it work?
  - What elements do we need? Physicality, proxemics, space, dynamics, tension.
  - What do we know about commedia dell'Arte's exaggerated movement, facial expressions (or fixed masks) and body sounds?

**Instruction to students:** Into pairs for mime scene, no words at all.

First, at the hairdressers – A is hairdresser, B is customer and something terrible goes wrong.

Teacher selects a couple of pairs to share and show.

Second, at the dentist – A is dentist pulling out teeth with inappropriate instruments, tools, weapons to make exaggerated comic effect. B is patient with stinking breath.

Teacher selects a different couple of pairs to share and show.

**Teacher information to students:** Stereotyped commedia characters had their own walks and used 'centring' to make them.

**Instruction to students:** Choose a stereotypical character from commedia or not. Imagine a centre (spot on end of nose, ball on stomach, tight knot in buttocks) – that leads the way your character walks. Experiment with it.

Then try longer walks and varied postures – frontal, three quarters and profile; thrusting pelvis forward or back; tapping foot to gain attention; moving in a rhythmic gait; developing a repeated motif.

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Meet and greet others as you walk around (mime only).

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### Rapid solo scenes with stereotypes

**Instruction to students:** You are a character with short jerky steps, head like a bird, bothered by a fly which you catch after much falling about and eat it fragment by fragment.

Instruction to students: You are a dirty old person disgustingly eating a plate of spaghetti, distracted by others walking by, including attractive people.

**Instruction to students:** In pairs. A speaks in gibberish, B translates into English. See if it is naturally funny or not.

Teacher selects a pair to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** In pairs, comedy fighting, safe and exaggerated in which the protagonists never actually touch. Choose 3 moves each (hit, slap, stamp).

Teacher selects a pair to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** In same pairs develop the combat – spun round by hair, pulled by nose, thrown across room, left hook sends flying, multiple face-slaps. Victim must do all the work, not the aggressor.

Teacher selects a different pair to share and show.

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**Teacher information to** Commedia obsessions were sex, food and the body. Instruction to students:

**students:** In small groups, set a scene in a restaurant and exaggerate it fully. Take long distances to table with stereotypical walks. Add in menu misunderstandings. Waiter/waitress is incompetent and drops and/or falls regularly. Create distractions like sneezing, bowel troubles and argument nearby.

Your plot should be thin with a deterioration in patience, understandings and common sense as it progresses.

Finish with the comedy fight, slapstick started previously involving all group.

Teacher selects a few key moments from each group to share and show.

- Discuss with students:**
- What is an accurate summary of commedia?
  - Besides experiencing a good physical warm up, have you learned how to devise entertainment from simple physical things?

## Task 2 Teacher-chosen music as stimulus

**Instruction to students:** Using the music to help fill your minds, build a sequence of straight line movements around the whole area, making no contact with others, use 90 degree turns to avoid people and obstacles, avoid eye contact.

Repeat, giving it a narrative – you are trapped in your body, desperate to find a way out, afraid of others.

Teacher selects one or two to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** In pairs, A is desperately racing time to rescue B from a dangerous high ledge.

Teacher selects a pair to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** In pairs, both A and B are desperately trying to escape something unpleasant down endless corridors, upstairs, through countless doors as if in a nightmare.

Teacher selects a different pair to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** In same pairs, develop the idea. Set your sequence to the music used

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earlier and when the music stops, each person speaks a line or two from their thoughts/feelings.

Each character should develop his/her own repeated motif to show distress.

Teacher selects a different pair to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** In groups of 4/5, use the better paired idea and develop it for all the group, using musical instruments including body drumming to make a soundtrack.

Each character must now add a musical motif.

Heighten tension by ensuring nobody in the group gets on with anyone else.

Expand the monologues into short speeches, spoken and sung, some in harmony and some not.

Teacher selects a different pair to share and show.

**Discuss with students:**

- Could that approach serve to develop an integrated piece?
- If it has a theme, movement, music and spoken words, uses physicality, tension, characterisation, rhythm, motifs in movement and music, relationships, dynamics, space, dialogue, proxemics (but not all the musical terms) ... is it an integrated piece?

**Discuss with students:** Let's take a new theme: TIME. What are time's possibilities in integrated art form use?

**Instruction to students:** Find a space on your own and make a motif showing time passing.

Teacher selects a few to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** Combine the solo motifs into paired motifs.

Teacher selects different few to share and show.

**Instructions to students:** Combine the paired motifs into small (4/5) group motifs.

**students:** Teacher selects a group to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** Create and add a vocal soundtrack using a full range of voice differences in the group to reflect timbres and textures to reflect by melody, not words, the sense of time passing and then being in short supply.

Teacher selects a different group to share and show.

**Instruction to students:** Back to solos, find a space and mime love for a baby you are holding.

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Create rhythms to show your fear for you and the baby in danger.

Dance the child being taken away from you.

Vocalise your rising panic.

The child is returned – express your vocal, wordless harmonies to reflect your relief.

Put together as a narrative-sequence, from love of the baby to relief at finale.

Teacher asks for volunteer student(s) to share his/her sequence.

- Discuss with students:**
- Is it clear how through the mix of drama, movement and sound you can express anger, fear, pain and almost any other emotion in the same piece?

**Instruction to student:** Keeping Time as our motif/stimulus, look at the painting: Salvador Dali's 'The Persistence of Memory'.

Listen to a few minutes of music from Kroke, track called 'Time'.

Read from the poem – 'Leisure' by WH Davies, 'What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare...'

In groups of 4/5 create a scene drawing on one or more of the stimuli and all art forms to show time passing in a calm and happy situation. Establish that before something arrives that changes the scene and impacts the characters in a bad way. How it ends is up to each group. Time may or may not be the ultimate healer.

If masks are available, they can be used provided voices are audible when needed.

Each group in turn shares and shows.

- Discuss with students:**
- Do you agree with German choreographer Mary Wigman who said: 'Dance is a form of expression just as speech, music, painting and philosophy are.'
  - What have we learned about mixing art forms?
  - Are there occasions when one medium is more appropriate than another?

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- Does music always have to be the add-on or accompaniment to other art forms?
- How can we make music central and first?
- How do we deal with transitions when moving from one art form to another?
- What did you think of your own group's success in integrating?
- What did you think of any of the other groups' success in integrating?
- What shape for the audience would be appropriate if the piece was developed to performance?
- For Unit G401, what notes do you need to keep of this session and learning?

### Student Worksheet

It is suggested students make notes on and do further research around:

1. Commedia dell'Arte for influences on physical comedy. Stereotypes, exaggerated humour, interaction with audiences.
2. Circus, such as exemplified by Cirque du Soleil for the way different acts mix media and art forms and how the shows are transitioned.
3. Circus clowning particularly for the physical comedy, slapstick, stereotypical roles and situations.
4. British pantomime for the way it has evolved from taking traditional, well-known tales and legends into the modern version of music hall/variety show.
5. Punch and Judy for stereotypical, simplistic stories that have become traditional and nostalgic attractions.
6. Exploring how choreographic vocabulary can help physicalise theatre, e.g. Lloyd Newson, Lea Anderson, Matthew Bourne, Christopher Bruce.
7. How practitioners use dance with dialogue to tell a story, such as Lloyd Newson and Bill T Jones.
8. Lyrics in songs that narrate stories, that express feelings, that encompass everything a play might do, but in just a few minutes. Particularly the work of Gershwin or early folk period Bob Dylan encapsulate that.
9. How musical instruments including the voice can tell wordless stories as well as accompanying lyrics.
10. Musicals and musical theatre in general all use dance, drama and music to tell their story throughout entertainment and often with a need to get across a message, such as Hair, Hairspray, The Threepenny Opera, Billy Elliot.
11. Story telling theatre, such as that practised by Mike Alfreds and Tim Etchells.
12. Interpreting music through movement and voice, voice and mime, narration.
13. Making music through non-traditional ways, such as found and junk instruments, like Stomp.

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14. Practise transitions from one art form to another and see if each change can be better used as part of the whole process rather than being a mere add-on.
15. Use Brechtian ideas to keep whole group on stage throughout, so avoiding entrances and exits but using 'spare' bodies as props, chorus or narrators.

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