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Candidate Style Answers

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459/31
For first teaching in 2016

Q7 Level 5 - sample answer with commentary: Bouncers

Version 1

www.ocr.org.uk/drama

INTRODUCTION

This resource has been produced by the A Level Drama and Theatre assessor team to offer teachers an insight into how the assessment objectives are applied. Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers. The sample assessment material for this answer and commentary can be found on the A Level Drama and Theatre web page here: http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242806-unit-h459-31-analysing-characters-for-performance-sample-assessment-material.pdf

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SECTION B QUESTION 7

Analyse a live performance you have seen, outlining the director's interpretation and how effective you think it was. At the start of your answer state the name, venue and date (month and year) of the live performance you have seen. **[30]**

SAMPLE ANSWER

Whilst the original play, Bouncers by John Godber, might have been created to show a snapshot of life in a northern nightclub in the 1980s, Tim Haymore's amateur production (at the Town Hall) by the Blackpool Players in April 2016 was much more than this. Haymore effectively managed to combine both the comic and the nightmarish in his interpretation of this classic.

The drama itself is a hard play to stage especially with a small cast. Whilst only using a cast of four actors, the speed and adept swapping of roles meant that the 27 roles required a great versatility. However, some of the roles did sometimes lack finesse and this is perhaps where we noticed the amateur status of the actors. For example, when the men had to play the role of women, the focus seemed to be upon the speed of the role change, rather than the realistic details. Sometimes the female roles were played a little too aggressively, or with masculine gestures. (However, some might argue that this adds more surreal humour to the comedy.) At other points, some of the actors merely adopted high-pitched voices for the female roles resulting in a camp humour being created - this acting could have been more subtle with a greater focus upon actions and feminine gestures rather than stereotyped or over-the-top voices.

The design aspects were effective. The staging had been created with minimalism in mind. There was a large neon sign behind the actors and this was effective in drawing our attention towards the centre of the stage, where the bouncers were constantly positioned - this minimalist design was perfectly counterbalanced by the many character swaps and quick changing actions and jokes This sparse design approach also helped to create the subtle atmosphere of boredom that evades the bouncers' night time routine, as they sit outside a nightclub, on barrels of beer, watching the spectacles outside the club. Not only were the spectacles humorous, but once the laughter died down and we were left with a sparse set, we understood a darker message about the loneliness of the clubbers. It seemed that the director wanted us to his interpretation of the nightclubbers' world as dark and lonely.

The occasional use of red lighting (projected from the wings) and dry ice also contributed to creating an image of a nightclub which seemed more like a hellish place, or suggesting that this was the seedier side of life in a northern town. The bouncers seemed to take on the role of guardians of the gates of hell (further reinforced by the white face make-up which made them have an almost deathly appearance) rather than just nightclub bouncers and this helped to convey a serious idea about the dark side of clubbing and dangers of alcoholism. Whilst the jokes might have been entertaining, there was a darker side at play - we started to realise that the nightclub was not necessarily a place you wanted to enter.

Props were also kept to a minimum, presumably because of a low budget within an amateur production yet this did not make the characters less entertaining. When performing the role of a female nightclubber, the actor would simply swing a single prop around such as a bright pink tatty handbag on his shoulder when adopting the new role. (Props were cleverly stored in the beer barrels that the bouncers sat on.) This rejection of naturalistic or detailed props not only adhered to Godber's own beliefs that audiences should not be distracted by small details, but also served to blur together the nightmarish and the comical: one the one hand, the bright pink handbag in the hands of a burly bouncer seemed comical, yet on the other hand, the solitary prop painted a picture of the nightclubbing world and its inhabitants as lonely, lacking money and taste.

Despite being written nearly forty years ago, the director's interpretation was effective in showing how relevant this play is to today's audience. Tim Haymore had chosen to replace the 80s fashions of the play with contemporary additions such as having the bouncers use iphones and musical references were updated to include nods to contemporary artists

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such as Taylor Swift and Kanye West. Such contemporary additions were an effective touch especially so considering much of the audience were made up of GCSE and A Level students presumably studying the play as a set text for an exam. However, such details were incidental in a play where we can still find so much relevance in the universal messages about the drinking culture and gang mentality.

Godber wrote this play as a way to express his own failures at gaining girls' attentions in a disco. One thing is certain: this production certainly managed to keep our attention throughout. One method of doing this was to break the imaginary fourth wall and make the spectator part of the action. For example, at the start of the second act, some members of the audience were encouraged to take part in a conga around the auditorium as if they had suddenly become drunken members of the public waiting to get into a nightclub. During this spectators were led around in the auditorium and on to the stage in a clumsy dance with the actors leading the way. Some participants seemed to enjoy being coerced into this dance, others looked uncomfortable and embarrassed (perhaps their discomfort reflected the sadness of the some of the nightclubbers in this club). This informal approach and breaking down of the fourth wall certainly suited the style of the play although such an informal approach did seem at odds with the traditional, formal proscenium arch stage which the company performed upon.

With a play that is so obviously funny, it was interesting to see how the director opted to create subtle nuances or unexpected touches such as the contrasting physiques of the actors playing the bouncers, or even one of the bouncer's balletic movements when dancing. Such original touches were welcome in a play that has become one of the most performed plays all over the world.

Godber once said about his play, 'although the play is funny, underneath it's actually quite pathetic,' and the director of this production effectively managed to convey this duality or make the drama seem both comic and scathing. The director's interpretation effectively stuck a balance between the comical and the nightmarish aspects of the nightclubbers' lonely, drunken world. Whilst we spent time laughing, once the laughter died down, we were left with a seedy, dark and lonely world. The final sight of the empty stage, with broken glass and what looked like a pool of vomit on the floor left the audience with a harsh reality about the world in front of them and made us think twice about whether we should have found it so funny.

Level 5

Commentary

A sophisticated, well-structured and well-written essay. Ideas raised and the artistic choices discussed are clear, fully evaluated and reflect a developed knowledge and understanding of how meaning is conveyed through theatrical elements. A range of examples is given with each critically analysed and demonstrating the candidate's knowledge and understanding of the performance text and theatrical context. More detail could be provided in terms of the sparse design and what the stage looked like. Technical references are made and there is a sustained line of reasoning and a coherency throughout the work.

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