

GCE

Performance Studies

Advanced GCE A2 **H548**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H148**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

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

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

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G401/01 Creating Performance

Administration

The vast majority of centres produced submissions that complied with the OCR requirement. However there were some notable exceptions: in one case a large centre sent DVD evidence of a number of groups where the video footage did not contain any identification of candidates, nor was there a completed DVDROF/G401 to assist in identification; in another case the DVD was included in the package unprotected and was discovered upon arrival to have snapped neatly in half.

Whilst the quality of DVDs has improved, there remain problems with a small number of centres that fail to ensure candidates identify themselves to the camera with name and candidate number. This must be done with the candidates wearing the costumes they will be wearing in the performance. In several centres the identification was filmed at a different time, with candidates in different clothes and in one case with different hairstyles. It is essential that centres find ways to ensure that the moderator can identify candidates easily.

The CCS mark and evidence record is an important document. Not only must the marks be recorded correctly, but the comments supporting the mark given by the centre must be concise and address the criteria. It is not acceptable to repeat the wording of the assessment criteria given in the specification. The moderator needs to be guided to the evidence that led the centre examiner to decide the mark given is appropriate.

Annotation of the commentaries improved considerably this session. Clear indications of where evidence within the commentaries occurs points out to the moderator where it is felt the evidence lies to support marks, and links with the comments on the front sheet.

If a centre is re-submitting work for a candidate, not only must the new commentary be sent, but also the DVD of the original work linked with it. The moderation process will be across the whole of the submission, not just the written work, and the moderator needs to assess everything. Moderation cannot take place without the original performance DVD.

Selected Material

Many centres opted for local legends, both in an historical sense and also in the context of significant persons such as L.S. Lowry. One interesting piece grew from letters from the trenches in WW1. Venues ranged from street theatre through performance in a chapel to promenade theatre in a disused quarry, and a civil war battlefield, as well as - where plans had 'fallen through' - performances in centres.

Some centres integrated projected video images into the action, but this can become a little problematic since sections of the piece might be exclusively video thereby, in one example, depriving the audience of a live climax to an otherwise very well-told ghost story. Several other centres used video effects and care should be taken to ensure this does not replace live performance.

Other examples included tales from the First World War relating to the local community; stories about children who had experienced new life styles through being evacuated; and the ten-hour day in mills. There were some very sophisticated pieces, displaying a strong sense of style (physical theatre, musical theatre) drawing on practitioners such as Berkoff, Brecht and Godber for drama, Beatles for music and Bourne for dance. Some centres chose contemporary issues such as a gentleman's club opening up in the town without planning permission; the closing

down of a local theatre; a contentious piece of sculpture in the town; and an archaeological discovery.

Assessment

Knowledge and Understanding

The ability to discuss style and genre as well as the application of research was generally strong. Essay work has been mostly of good quality with candidates in the majority of cases demonstrating a fairly comprehensive grasp of the art forms studied. There was a good range of stimuli drawn from past G404 papers and current practitioners representing good practice across the art forms.

Practitioners and their work were usually cited and in the majority of cases this has enriched the discussion of process. Candidates are very much aware of technical language and are using it appropriately in most cases. There was, however, a tendency to render each technical term in bold or italics to prove in some way to the moderator that key terms had been used. This is not necessary and does interrupt the flow of the writing. They were used appropriately however. Some candidates demonstrated limited consideration of underpinning genre or style when discussing the devising of the community performance.

Moderators reported that the major area of weakness in Knowledge and Understanding related to the links between the art forms. This was true not only in the commentary in the short pieces, but also in the performance project.

Some candidates were very clear on purpose, intention and performance style. It was clear that they had been introduced to several practitioners in order to inform their knowledge and understanding of style. Candidates who scored the highest had used the 15 elements as a basis for their discussion rather than the three art forms themselves. This session fewer candidates focused on just two art forms to the detriment of the third. There was some generous marking where performance style and performance skills had not been discussed in depth.

Understanding and Evaluating Performance Process

There was a good level of Understanding and Evaluation of the Performance Process shown in higher-level responses and overall there was clear evidence of an attempt to provide embedded, ongoing evaluative comment rather than tightly packed end-of-essay paragraphs. In one or two cases the criteria had been awarded slightly generously, but this was not a significant issue. Candidates should remember to evaluate the extent to which specific performance intentions were met. It follows that it is important for candidates to articulate such intentions when devising their work.

The weakest in this area gave little or no thought to performance skills and the success of using a particular performance style. Weaker commentaries were subjective instead of objective.

Quality of Language

There was extensive use of the first person (both singular and plural) in essay writing. Even in the case of quite sophisticated submissions, candidates were prone towards a narrative style in which 'we did' was the dominant mode. Some essays awarded 7 or 8 were clearly reliant on use of the first person and so did not match the assessment criterion details. This is a commentary that requires academic writing; significant spelling, grammar and punctuation errors along with awkward syntax must be taken into account when awarding a mark.

Devising

There was an undoubted tendency to over reward Devising in the Community Performance. In most cases this was manifested where the art forms were not wholly integrated or where there was a significant imbalance between them. Other contributory factors were pieces that did not successfully identify a specific style or genre and which produced work of an eclectic nature resulting in a lack of shape or definition to the performance as a whole. Other shortcomings were related to staging, an example of which is the group that produced a traverse piece with some action behind one flank of the audience.

Some moderators reported that the devising process was weakened by a reliance on clichéd formats such as those inspired by television. *Blind Date*, *Crimewatch* and various game shows were examples where creativity was stifled by the constraints of television content and formats. Other examples where there was evidence of weak devising include performances that were drama-led, with music and/or dance as bolt-on excerpts; and where the performance was structured into the separate art forms in a very rigid way so that it appeared as if each art form was showcased one at a time.

The popularity of promenade and site-specific performance continues and in these cases locations/venues are often selected for their setting or some particular singularity rather than their suitability. Examples included venues that were quite challenging to access for the audience and where health and safety issues should have been a consideration. Where a number of groups were involved in this type of venue the resultant performances were inclined to be similar and restricted in their compass, each looking and sounding much the same. Some pieces were underdeveloped and in several cases the prescribed running time, by candidate, was not achieved. There were also examples of performances that had been conceived for a defined venue but, due to unforeseen circumstances on the part of the group had had to be performed at the last minute in the school venue, thereby reducing the impact of the initial research and its application.

The assessment of this criterion was invariably too generous, and candidates must ensure they demonstrate very clearly their part in the devising process. The centre should also ensure that the evidence they provide to support the mark does not rely simply on the energy, commitment or enthusiasm of the candidate, as these are not being assessed, however laudable they may be. A piece with poor structure, weak characterisation, badly researched content and unsatisfactory transitions means a candidate should be receiving a low devising mark.

One noticeable and welcome improvement is an increase in the amount and sophistication of devised music. It must be remembered that this unit is about creating material, not about using existing material. Whilst it is acceptable to use existing music for atmospheric reasons, or to assist in transitions, existing songs that retain their melodies and have their lyrics re-written are not acceptable as a devised musical contribution. This holds true even where the topic might suggest the use of existing music. It is always possible to devise music in the style of the original (eg, First World War songs, Pantomime songs). Candidates who use existing material should be penalised under the devising heading, and if it is the only form of performance in that art form, they should be penalised in performance skills as well. Whilst artistically it is completely appropriate to include existing material, this unit is about devising content across three art forms, not re-using existing material.

Performance Skills

Centre assessors have shown an appreciation of the level of skills required and have generally awarded marks appropriately. There is a readiness to award fair and uninflated marks in the lower bands but by the same token there is still the tendency in some cases to over-reward candidates who shine in other aspects, thereby producing a 'halo effect'. This is particularly so in

the case of some of the most capable candidates and therefore operates as an enhancement of an already strong mark set.

When awarding very high marks for performance skills, a high level of skills would be expected across the three art forms working together. It is accepted that candidates will have one skill in which they may specialise, but this alone is not sufficient for the awarding of a high mark. On the other hand, candidates should ensure that they showcase skills. Sometimes a moderator sees a short contribution in an art form when it is clear that the candidate has the skill to do much more.

The level of difficulty of what is being attempted should also be considered. There is a big difference between singing a devised nursery rhyme sweetly and a complex four-part harmony.

General

Some commentaries contained pictures that added nothing to the commentary itself, and this should be avoided. There was evidence this session of some candidates including appendices. Appendices will not be read by moderators and should not form part of the commentary. If material is important, it should be included in the body of the writing. Marks should not be awarded by the centre for material that is included in an appendix.

It was noticeable this session that most centres had really entered into the spirit of this unit, and in the way candidates had written it was evident that even weaker candidates had gained a lot from the experience of following the unit.

Inevitably there will be times when candidates fall out, feel they do not have enough time, or even want to criticise a centre's staff. It is important for candidates to realise that none of this is of any interest to the moderator, and to waste words doing this does not help their assessment. No allowance is made for such traumas.

The guidance in the report for the last session is worth repeating. When approaching the devising of the community performance project it might be useful for candidates to consider the following process:

- identification of topic
- research
- initial thinking on community ideas
- storyline
- characters
- intention
- structure
- practitioner influence
- audience
- devising content
- ensuring all three art forms are working together and how they link
- ensuring sufficient exposure for each candidate across all art forms
- rehearsing and amending content
- performing
- evaluating the success of their performance, matched to intention.

In their writing candidates should use the technical terms providing exemplars in action to show they have understood them.

Candidates must ensure they follow the *Improvise – Rehearse - Perform* format in their commentaries. Having separate headed sections for each art form should be avoided as the commentary is more concerned with the technical terms in operation, the way work is devised, performance outcomes and their effectiveness and how the art forms link and work together.

G402/01 Performance Contexts 1

General Comments:

Where candidates did best they had prepared thoroughly the areas of study and the supporting works from practitioners and understood that above all, they were writing about performance arts intended for an audience.

Candidates who did less well generally failed in some degree, or altogether in a few cases, to remember the following, which are regularly mentioned in reports but should help inform teachers for future sessions:

1. The **areas of study** were elements of the performing arts; stylistic influences on a given practitioner; structure and form of works, performance techniques required to interpret and present works and social, historical and cultural contexts of the works.

It was very difficult to write about any one of those areas without some reference to most, if not all, of the others, as they are all linked. Certainly dance, drama and music elements all need to be deployed to discuss any question.

2. The **specification** requires candidates study a work and, in the case of The Beatles and Gershwin, a minimum of 4 songs. It also states (P11) that work studied must demonstrate broad trends in the output of the practitioner. Candidates need to be able to comment generally on the relationship between the work studied and the practitioner's output as a whole.

For example, centres who studied only *Teechers* gave candidates little or no knowledge of *Bouncers* or a later Godber play. Writing about *Swan Lake* is not all that can be said to discuss the Bourne question. To take 4 songs (particularly from one period or album) does not necessarily show a grasp of the repertoire of The Beatles.

3. Examiners reported an increase in the number of **formulaic**, generic or pre-prepared responses. It's helpful to try out previous questions and possibly to incorporate some aspects into a response. However, candidates should be aware that previous responses may not answer the current question.

Formulaic approaches led to many candidates confusing practitioners and/or works mid essay. For example, in a Newson essay he suddenly became Godber, or Bourne's lavish sets and costumes appeared in a Beatles' answer.

Centres who suggested candidates start every response with a biography of the practitioner followed by the 'point-example-rewrite the question' approach in every paragraph did not generally help candidates. The conclusion that simply repeats all that went before is not good practice.

Examiners want personal, individual responses to the works. A few biographical details may be helpful in answering the question; frequently they were not. A common comment from examiners on formulaic answers was that some points were 'a little made to go a long way'.

4. Along with the generic response, centres often prepared all their candidates with the **same piece** of background information or biographical detail. In many cases these 'facts' were either wrong or pure supposition. Such practices work against candidate's making their own minds up and expressing ideas and considered thoughts.

Equally with the practitioner fingerprints or techniques, a list of these was thought by many to be sufficient to answer the question, while showing neither knowledge and understanding nor their use within the particular work(s).

5. **Examples** were often poor. An illustration from a play, dance piece or song should support the point being made, should be relevant to the question and should show knowledge and understanding of dance/drama/music elements and language. Where examples were pre-prepared, the same scene or section or verse from a song had to suffice to support a variety of points. Again, this showed poor candidate preparation.

One centre appeared to have candidates rote-learning quotes and notation, which meant they were not showing independent approaches to questions and followed the same pattern of points, regardless of the question.

Where a music manuscript sheet was given to candidates, it was often a place for planning or to put down a line or two of music, but without any explanation as to how it supported the discussion.

Songs contain both lyrics and music, so it was more effective where candidates could show how these work together. It was clear in many responses that candidates had little or no musical knowledge and relied entirely on lyrics to explain points.

In dance works direct quotes were less possible, but a detailed explanation of a section with attendant lighting, music, dance/movement elements was needed.

6. **Quality of Written Communication** – with up to 6 marks available out of 30, significant importance was attached to basic grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, paragraphing, sentence sequencing and structure and spelling. The mark was equally for style of writing and correctness of grammar.

Examiners were disappointed with the incorrect spelling of the name of a practitioner (Brecht, Caryl Churchill, Lloyd Newson and Bourne were the most frequently misspelt), of the titles of works and songs (particularly the lack of initial capital letters) or of a word that was given in the question. Mixtures of tenses also didn't indicate careful use of English.

Words such as definitely, integrated, their/there/they're, practitioner, rehearsal, repertoire and multi-roling were misspelt regularly. The correct use of the apostrophe was beyond many candidates.

In addition to the language of performing arts learned in Unit G401 (motif, action, relationship, dynamics, space, dialogue, characterisation, physicality, proxemics, tension, rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre and texture) it was expected that dance, drama and music specialist terms, if used, should be spelt correctly.

Examiners took the view that abbreviations such as 'etc', TCTTAFM (They Can't Take That Away From Me) or SPLHCB (Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band) and phrases like 'over the top' were not acceptable.

The use of 'relatable' was widespread. It was only acceptable if used in a context, such as 'to make the piece more relatable to an audience by ...' Where candidates wrote 'the play is relatable' with no further explanation, it was not sufficient.

The calling of practitioners by their first names is an increasing practice. The convention is that Godber, Churchill, Newson, Gershwin, Bourne, Lennon, Harrison are called by their surnames.

7. **Command words** at the start of each question should give a clue to what is expected. Analyse, discuss, explain, to what extent ...? – these are designed to encourage thoughtful consideration of the practitioner's work.
8. **Timings** – it was clear that several candidates ran out of time before finishing the second question. Each question is marked equally, so candidates should spend no more than an hour on each answer.
9. **Planning** was variable. Where plans were written as a prompt to thinking, they helped candidates. Where they were a few squiggles they may have helped. Many candidates didn't plan and so ended up with often dozens of addenda and postscripts later in the booklets. One plan was longer than the answer, which clearly was poor use of time.

Huge areas of crossing-out were much in evidence, showing either lack of planning or second thoughts. While it was understood that candidates were thinking as they went, copious crossings out militated against smooth reading flow.

10. **Presentation.** Increasing numbers of candidates submitted typed work. This was marked as if it were handwritten in terms of the Quality of Written Communication. Font size was often too small for comfort.

A few candidates had poor handwriting and so it was difficult to read their work. However, examiners reported that all work was marked. Candidates who left sufficient space between the first and second question helped examiners write their comments more easily.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1 (Matthew Bourne)

Most candidates defined what was meant by narrative and movement content in his works, although some simply focused on 'narrative' as a generic term which was then linked to a list of Bourne's techniques. Most answers understood the 'narrative' part of the question, as it was often recognised that Bourne was keen to shake up the world of traditional ballet and tell a story through a combination of techniques from across the performing arts disciplines.

However, few discussed the deeper, more serious narratives that Bourne explores, such as the roles of men and women. A few answers simply focused on how Bourne's sexuality manifests in his pieces. Also, few candidates could demonstrate how these works linked to actual movement sequences/examples in Bourne's shows (although it was good to see a number of answers using Bourne's later work, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Late Flowering Lust* and *Lord of the Flies* rather than just old favourites such as *Nutcracker!* and *Swan Lake*).

Sometimes answers became a list of Bourne's devices and techniques, although knowledge of these was often good. These features were noted the most: the ability of Bourne's dancers to act as well as dance; that his dancers must be able to use eclectic dance styles; the use of lavish costumes and sets and lighting; a collaborative approach to choreography; and that movement often correlates with the music, as in *Swan Lake*.

The weakest answers were little more than narratives, often scene by scene, of one work with rare references to movement content. Many used the phrase 'pedestrian movement' without any examples.

Question No. 2 (Matthew Bourne)

In general this question was understood, with musical theatre being interpreted in a variety of ways. Musicals were cited, as expected, but a range of other influences added to the quality of responses. Film Noir, Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham were examples of other influences. Busby Berkeley, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly were linked to the answers through spectacle, use of visual props and entertainment. Examples in these responses were varied, with some clear and accurate examples of content and use of dance elements to explain, but often answers were narrative and lacked specific detail.

Stronger responses discussed a range of Bourne's influences that resulted in comic and tragic moments and gave good examples, particularly from *Swan Lake*. Some discussed these moments in relation to various musical theatre shows, such as *Oliver!*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Wizard of Oz* and Hollywood musicals/films, especially the work of Busby Berkeley and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

Influences from these shows included: his works having a strong narrative through-line and thus dancers being required to have acting technique and a rehearsal methodology to create a background to character; having the ability to mime and gesture effectively; to play character consistently throughout the piece; to be able to play more than one role within a piece; and to use facial expression. Stronger candidates discussed influences other than musical theatre, for example Film Noir and Hitchcock, and other films such as the *Twilight* series and *True Blood*.

Also noted were his ways of using these filmic references to assist the storytelling and thus help to keep the audience engaged. Bourne's use of an eclectic range of movement styles was explored, incorporated to highlight appropriate sad or funny moments in the works and thus hopefully attracting a wider audience than just lovers of ballet. Styles exemplified included ballet, social dance, pedestrian dance, contemporary dance and unison work, resulting in dancers being selected by Bourne for their abilities in a range of dance styles; his use of the spectacular and exploring themes such as sexuality.

Weaker and formulaic responses focused on listing Bourne's performance techniques and often simply added a matter-of-fact sentence after each, along the lines of '...and that is how Bourne's work is influenced by musical theatre'. Some listed techniques common to all dance performance works, such as musicality, strength, agility and balance of the dancers and 'choreography'.

Question No. 3 and No. 4 (Shobana Jeyasingh)

There were no responses to either of these questions.

Question No. 5 (Lloyd Newson)

A few candidates broke down 'grit, determination and persistence' in the question into separate topics and explored these through a variety of examples from different works. Few included references to dance/movement elements.

Many responses demonstrated a good knowledge of the various demands that Newson places on dancers in his works, demands resulting from his psychological studies and his interest in social, cultural and historical issues. However, some responses became more of a list of those issues with the words 'grit, determination and persistence' tacked on to each, rather than a discussion of the effectiveness of their portrayal in Newson's works.

Examples of demands included: dancers needing grit when dealing with risk taking/taboo subject matter and how these often resulted from Newson's psychological investigations during his earlier education in Australia; the dancers' determination to convey accurately the psychological desire to be seen as 'fitting in' or 'one of the boys', discussed with reference in particular to *Enter Achilles*, as was the determination to perform the male pack mentality/identity/masculinity in general and persist with ideas about how gay men are treated by homophobic heterosexual men.

In *Enter Achilles*, the 'Blow-up Doll' and 'Shaving' scenes were often discussed in psychological terms - how men regard and can objectify women and how dancers need grit to perform scenes as explicit as this and similar scenes, such as the 'Stoning' and 'Crucifixion' scenes in *Strange Fish*. Often candidates were clear that Newson requires dance to have a meaning, so that is why his work is issue and psychologically based and why he and his dancers must be determined to create each movement with meaning, which is often linked to Newson's own experiences and psychological background.

Many candidates were aware of his time at London Contemporary Dance, where he encountered pedestrian movement and Isadora Duncan's and Merce Cunningham's methods, and that he uses site-specific performance and atypical or non-dancers and specifically disabled dancers needing grit and determination to perform complex dance movement (particularly David in *The Cost of Living*); also dancers who need determination and persistence to act and be comfortable with the use of dialogue, pedestrian movement, contact improvisation, physical theatre, interaction with multimedia, comedy and persist with the more traditional use of costume and props.

More able candidates also discussed Newson's expectation that his performers identify with and be persistent when exploring taboo themes, particularly homophobia and homosexuality, relationships between men and women and disability, and how these themes were often explicitly presented through nudity and sexual imagery, also requiring grit and determination from the performers.

Common works discussed were *John*, *Enter Achilles*, *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, *The Cost of Living* and *Strange Fish*.

Question No. 6 (Lloyd Newson)

The majority of candidates interpreted 'text' not only to mean the use of voice, but also the strong narrative elements that run through many of Newson's works. Many responses demonstrated that candidates had a good knowledge of the various behaviours that Newson explores through text and movement in his work, resulting from his psychological studies and his interest in social, cultural and historical issues.

However, some responses became more a list of those issues than a discussion of the effectiveness of their portrayal through text and movement. Examples of issues explored through text connected to movement included; taboo subject matter dialogue and risk taking and how these often resulted from Newson's psychological investigations during his earlier education in Australia; the spoken psychological desire to be seen as 'fitting in' or 'one of the boys' with reference in particular to *Enter Achilles*, as was male pack mentality/identity/masculinity talk in general; and how gay men are often insulted verbally by homophobic heterosexual men.

Many candidates were clear that Newson requires dance to have a meaning, so that is why his work often needs dialogue to explore fully the issue and psychologically based narratives and also why the movements' meanings that he and his dancers create are often linked to his own experiences and psychological background.

A good number of candidates were aware that his dancers need to act and be comfortable with the use of dialogue; contact improvisation, physical theatre, comedy text and the more traditional use of costume and props. The fact that Newson combines text and movement was illustrated by the 'Blow-up Doll' and 'Pool Table' scenes in *Enter Achilles* or David's interrogation scene in *The Cost of Living* - exemplars of movement and text clearly working together to 'tell' a story and put across a message.

Some candidates focused upon the movement aspect of the question but in a narrative way, describing the scenes rather than analysing the movement content and its function. Some candidates who had studied *Enter Achilles*, thought there was little text in it and therefore his work is just about movement. In formulaic responses, candidates struggled to find examples of movement content.

Question No. 7 (Caryl Churchill)

Most responses understood that Churchill's interest in gender and sexuality was partly due to her feminist stance from her experiences in the 1970s and these candidates tended to focus on the opening scene in *Top Girls* and discussed the abuses that the historical characters had faced from men over time. Some were then able to discuss how Marlene and her office staff appear to behave 'more like men' and the abuses that result. Some were able to use this as an example of Brecht's didactic influence.

Most candidates discussed Churchill's work from the viewpoint of a performer and gave good examples such as the need for work on singing technique in *Vinegar Tom*, the difficulties in learning the overlapping dialogue in *Top Girls*, cross casting issues and playing a different age.

Most candidates mentioned Brecht's techniques while many didn't understand how Brecht's theories actually related to Churchill. Some examples, such as difficulties in approaching the actor's through-line when confronted with an episodic structure, direct address in the songs in *Vinegar Tom* and the use of dissonant song and other elements that are influenced by Brecht's 'Verfremdungseffekt' were picked up at the higher levels.

Stronger candidates also discussed a wider range of her ideas on the role of women as depicted in *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* and made connections with similar attitudes still prevalent in modern society. A number discussed more than one play and how historically Churchill used improvisation whilst working collaboratively with actors to produce the work, particularly with Joint Stock, Max Stafford Clark and *Monstrous Regiment*, and influences from her time in working in radio. It was pleasing to see that many candidates gave appropriate textual examples.

Candidates in the lower bands often dealt with performance techniques generically by listing how a performer may approach Churchill's work, although many failed to mention any of the drama elements at all.

Question No. 8 (Caryl Churchill)

The command word was largely overlooked, with candidates focusing in the 'uncluttered' elements rather than the realism. Stronger answers looked at both points of view and argued that Churchill's work could be 'uncluttered and not held back by realism' but at the same time they could be cluttered and held back by realism.

Overlapping dialogue was frequently given as an example of clutter, such as in *Top Girls* where it makes the scenes more realistic and the characters more familiar. Also discussed was how this device affects pace and increases tension and how the use of the vernacular, taboo language also adds to the overall familiar nature of the drama.

Stronger answers discussed how the use of song, verse and the 17th century vocabulary/idiolent in *Vinegar Tom* and the cross casting, use of props and age-variable casting in *Cloud Nine* could show that her plays move away from 'realism'.

Textual examples were essential to illustrate points made when discussing her move away from realism to a more abstract style. Formulaic answers became general discussions on her feminist /political ideology, particularly in *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine* and ignored the question or focused on long, generalised discussions about the Conservative Party and Churchill's animosity towards Margaret Thatcher.

Question No. 9 and No. 10 (Athol Fugard)

Candidates had almost exclusively studied *Boesman and Lena* through the film version, so their concept of structure and form was limited to that. The majority of candidates for these questions presented narrative accounts of the work to link to either question.

Most responses were formulaic with a similar use of points and paragraphs. For many, the play was a work of literature rather than a piece of performance to an audience. The higher marks went to candidates who demonstrated how a play, a piece of theatre, illustrated Fugard's influences and the structure and form of his work.

Without at least a passing knowledge of Fugard's other works, it was difficult for candidates to get any sense of repertoire. Occasional reference to other works, such as *The Island*, were little more than token identifications.

Even some grasp of the political, cultural, historical and social contexts, particularly apartheid, were frequently absent, although in Q10 they were more forthcoming, if often rather narrow. There were textual examples of language, if not many drama techniques referenced.

Most used the quote 'he is foremost a storyteller' and referred to picking up a woman who had been thrown out of her home as the influence of the story for *Boesman and Lena* and that he had based Lena on that character. Discussion rarely moved beyond an overview of Fugard and his life and the three main characters.

Question No. 11 (John Godber)

Most candidates had a good biographical/contextual knowledge of Godber's influences, including drama teaching, Brecht, Berkoff, Pinter, Classical Theatre (particularly Shakespeare and his use of soliloquy, prologue and epilogue), writing for TV (particularly soaps), mining, sport, his own family, nightlife, music, Yorkshire, the north of England and a lack of money in general.

However, a number of answers did not explain what is meant by 'working class Britain' or understand the issues that Godber explores in his works, both political and societal. Many candidates handled context in a generic manner with broad, sweeping generalisations such as 'all working class people watch soaps', '...the working class are all poor...', '...the working class do not read...', '...the working class would never go to a Shakespeare play...'

Teechers, *Shakers* and *Bouncers* were the main works studied and most candidates chose to focus on how Godber's influences were represented in these plays. Stronger answers tied in 'working class' with elements of Marxist theory and were clear about Godber's aims.

These candidates discussed the major influence that Brecht's didactic theatre had on Godber in practical terms, e.g. direct address, presenting identifiable situations, how government decisions affect ordinary lives, engaging and involving local working people in artistic endeavour and widening participation in theatre to working and unemployed non-theatre goers in general.

Discussions included how Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership had affected Godber and 'the North', the miner's strike of the 1980s leading to mass unemployment and poverty of the northern working class, northern culture in general seen as disadvantaged as opposed to the culture of the south and manifesting in scenes in his plays. This was one context most subjected to generalisations.

Northern culture was defined as; rugby league, differences in nightclub culture, comprehensive schools v public schools, poverty of comprehensive schools in general, the music of the 1980s, northern dialect and slang, taboo language and non-elitist theatre and how these issues were manifested in the plays.

Many candidates took techniques in turn and demonstrated how they were linked to Godber's working class political ideology or issue, giving specific examples from work(s) to show why Godber's work is effective in putting across these messages. Elements included; Brechtian conventions (e.g. breaking the 'fourth wall' and direct address/narration); use of Shakespearian-style poetic language; actors having good comic timing and being comfortable with creating humour through taboo language and improvisation; having excellent concentration and focus to keep the audience engaged, (particularly when multi-roling characters and putting across political issues); playing episodic scenes at a fast pace; engaging/involving potentially non-theatre audiences through recognition; using a Greek-style chorus; using Berkoff-inspired unison movement and mime and poor theatre conditions (minimalistic, with few props or settings).

The generic responses usually focused on colloquial language, work places, working class characters and content looking at the north-south divide, of class in schools. Some candidates used the response as a soundboard for the current perceived state of educational unfairness and lack of equal opportunities. Candidates were able to give references from works studied, but sometimes used quotes unnecessarily.

Many candidates lacked focus on dramatic elements to support their discussion. One candidate empathised with Nixon and what it's like to be a teacher now and how they spend all of their time marking and not having a life.

There were frequent inaccuracies, such as Hull being Godber's birthplace. At the higher end, there were references to the influence of Commedia dell'Arte and the way stock characters were presented in a working class manner.

Question No. 12 (John Godber)

Many candidates took each of Godber's techniques in turn and demonstrated how these were deployed in *Bouncers*, *Teechers* and/or *Shakers*. Others listed performance techniques common to actors in all performances, including learning lines, using dialect, being able to cope with dim stage lighting, moving with physicality and being able to undertake rehearsals.

Where they were understood, Brechtian conventions and other influences were effectively discussed and the performance techniques were analysed with examples.

These included: actors' needing confidence when breaking the 'fourth wall' and delivering direct address/narration; the skill to deliver Shakespearian-style monologues and soliloquies; having good comic timing and being comfortable with creating humour through taboo language and improvisation; having excellent concentration and focus to keep the audience engaged, particularly when multi-roling, whilst still being able to focus on putting across political issues clearly; keeping energy levels high to play stereotypical characters in episodic scenes at a fast pace; having the confidence to engage and involve potentially rowdy, non-theatre audiences through recognition; being able to dance, using a Greek-style chorus; skill in Berkoff-inspired unison movement, mime and other 'Total Theatre' techniques; and being able to work with 'Poor Theatre' conditions, coping with small-scale touring which by definition does not/cannot have a big set and is thus minimalistic with few props.

Formulaic responses addressed the main performance skills – multi roling, stereotypes, overt theatricality, episodic leading to pace and timing - using the same stock examples which showed lack of independent learning and development of ideas. The range of works often lacked a sense of repertoire.

Where candidates had been able to watch a live performance, they were usually well informed of what techniques performers need.

Question No. 13 and No. 14 (John Adams)

For both of these questions, there was a reliance on biography and background, especially where other composers were referenced. The best responses cited several of Adams' works in order to make comparisons and to illustrate an argument.

Where candidates had little or no apparent knowledge and understanding of musical elements, they failed to address the question fully, relying on narrative accounts of pieces rather than talking about elements and playing skills that are required to perform his music.

Question No. 15 (The Beatles)

Responses were affected by the choice of studied songs. Where strictly four had been explored, there was less opportunity to make contrasts. Stronger answers discussed in detail the musical elements and structure of a range of Beatles' works and how they changed over time and how melody and experimentation often reflected these changes.

Answers needed both music and lyrics to explain the points being made. Some responses used very few lyrical quotes; others had thin knowledge of music and its language.

Most candidates discussed how the earlier works were less story-based and aimed mainly at a young female audience, identified by repetitive lyrics (such as '*Please, Please Me, I Wanna Hold Your Hand* and *She Loves You*); that these works had simple chord structures and harmonies and popular melodies whilst later songs had increasingly complex narratives (e.g. *Eleanor Rigby, A Day in the Life*), more texture and timbre and used the latest recording techniques, including overdubbing, multi-tracking, tape loops and reverse tracking.

Drug influences were discussed (inevitably *Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds*) as resulting in unusual sound effects like a 'laughing' voice, played at double-speed, and a 'seagull' sound in *Tomorrow Never Knows*; also unusual instrumentation (e.g. Harrison's experimentation with the tamboura and sitar); narrative, darker lyrics and more strange lyrics in songs such as *Eleanor Rigby, Strawberry Fields Forever* and *Tomorrow Never Knows*; orchestration and orchestral instrumentation and songs identifiably different from each Beatle (*Eleanor Rigby, I Am the Walrus* and *A Day in the Life*).

Eleanor Rigby produced some good responses showing how loneliness and desperation are reflected musically, *She's Leaving Home* as a story from the media told musically and *Norwegian Wood* as a song about a one-night stand interpreted through the music.

However, some answers lacked any musical knowledge and analysis and simply gave a chronological and generalised Beatles' history or just repeated a few lyrics. Also, nearly all the weaker responses focused on drug issues and often contained sweeping statements such as the later songs were written when '...they were all on drugs'.

Stronger answers demonstrated how possible drug influences manifested in the later works through sound; the latest recording techniques resulting in unusual sound effects reflecting a drug-induced state of mind and body and thus telling a more disconcerting autobiographical 'story'. They also analysed songs and their musical elements using the key words from G401 as a minimum.

Question No. 16 (The Beatles)

Many candidates fell into the trap of talking generically about the 1960s as a time when 'everyone took drugs and slept around'. However, interesting points were made about feelings of alienation reflected in *She's Leaving Home* and loneliness in *Eleanor Rigby*. Analysis was often confined to the lyrics without musical elements

Most candidates had some biographical and contextual knowledge of how The Beatles were influenced by or influenced others or were involved with Rock 'n' Roll, Elvis Presley and/or the Everly Brothers, free love and the 60s hippy movement, drugs, fashion, the East (particularly India), war (and peace), youth rebellion, female empowerment, 'Beatlemania' and the teenage reaction to the 40s & 50s, the Rolling Stones, George Martin and Brian Epstein, Spector's 'Wall of Sound', Bob Dylan, Broadway show tunes and newspaper reports.

Stronger answers documented how The Beatles' music changed over time and how developments in studio recording techniques meant that many of the later songs could not be fully replicated live. There was frequently good analysis of musical techniques from influences from across the world; and of early work characteristics, such as simple lyrics, verse/chorus/verse, aimed at the fans (particularly teenage girls), catchy tunes with a 'happy' feel influenced by Skiffle and the guitar, bass, drums rock 'n roll line-up influenced by Elvis.

However, the later songs having increasingly complex textures and timbres and were influenced by the latest recording techniques, such as those on the *Sgt Pepper* album, and how these techniques/sounds were simply not possible to be played live at that time. Good answers also discussed how musicians now are interpreting Beatles' songs live, with modern technology and the myriad of effects pedals and sophisticated equipment that are now standard equipment for most modern bands.

Weaker responses were mainly conjectural and generalised, confined to one single context or did not link the songs to the changing times at all. Some focused only on drug issues inhibiting the Beatles' ability to play live and often contained sweeping statements such as '...they were all on drugs' or that the songs '...are all about drugs'.

Question No. 17 (George Gershwin)

Many candidates ignored the 'to what extent' command; some analysed songs lyrically rather than musically and there was only some attempt to talk through the structural elements of songs with most candidates referring to the AABA format only.

Others discussed how influences from 'Tin Pan Alley' were reflected in the structure and form of some of Gershwin's songs and how Ira's lyrics enhanced the majority of those songs. Few candidates named any examples of other songs from other songwriters to exemplify the typical 'Tin Pan Alley' style.

Musical influences from 'Tin Pan Alley' that were discussed included the use of rubato, call and response patterns, blues notes, chromatic notes, ascending and descending scales (typically pentatonic). Most referenced songs written to 32 bar melodies, divided into four phrases of eight bars each, the overall pattern of AABA (except *Summertime*), with some candidates able to pinpoint precise moments of the use of each in several Gershwin's songs. Most answers also discussed the music by George being written before the lyrics were added by Ira, matching rhythm of words and music, moments where significant changes in emotion take place, manipulation of pause and word painting.

Weaker answers put forward a weak argument or none at all about how Gershwin's music developed over his career; how developments were made to songs' 'Tin Pan Alley' structures or stories; and simply listed musical elements then tacked on 'and this was inspired by 'Tin Pan Alley' '.

Stronger answers showed real enthusiasm for the works studied and discussed how his time in 'Tin Pan Alley' affected some songs' structure, form, melodies (often enhancing the lyrics), pace and mood, by analysing a range of Gershwin's techniques with examples to show how the songs provide drama musically and lyrically and identify with universal themes and emotions.

Better answers analysed the works studied over time and showed how other influences, such as Broadway musicals, the Roaring 20s, the Great Depression, escapism, prohibition and cinema also led to distinctive musical differences from and similarities to the 'Tin Pan Alley' style, in the structure and form of his songs. Few candidates discussed actual performances of the songs by any performers, current or past, or even their own attempts at performing a Gershwin song.

Candidates generally discussed melodies and then rhythm. Some linked the knowledge of songs to productions they were created for to help contextualise. One centre had prepared the candidates with rote learning of musical notation examples, which led the answers to follow very similar discussion and range of points.

Most candidates did not offer musical notation, but candidates were often aware of the key of the songs and of changes within pieces. The ABAB structure and 32 bars were sometimes linked into the responses. Major and minor key changes were a common theme to show how the themes and tone of the songs and music changed. *Rhapsody in Blue* was a feature of some work, but analysis of the music was often poor, linked just to the thematic changes within the whole work.

In many of the formulaic responses candidates focused on Tin Pan Alley but some were unsure what this was.

Question No. 18 (George Gershwin)

Most candidates who tackled this question did not acknowledge that the songs were written in the 20s and 30s and largely ignored the contextual 'time' aspect. Others focused on the 'people' part in terms of the Great Depression and people being uplifted by the music.

Some wrote of how influences from 'Tin Pan Alley', song plugging and 'Piano Pounding' were reflected in a range of Gershwin's songs. There was from many candidates a complete lack of ability to put the works into any kind of cultural, historical or social context.

Examiners reported that the majority of responses to this question were formulaic, often analysing some musical elements of a song and adding ‘...and this reflects the thoughts and inspirations of the people of the time.’

Even the responses which acknowledged ‘the thoughts and inspirations of the people’ misunderstood this as simply an opportunity to discuss the literal aspects of the lyrics of a number of songs, often in terms of what the singer was aspiring to (e.g. the need to calmly rock a baby to sleep in *Summertime* or yearning to meet the man of her dreams in *The Man I Love*).

However, there was general understanding of a range of Gershwin’s techniques, such as word painting, songs providing drama musically and lyrically, use of rubato, call and response patterns, blues notes, chromatic notes, ascending and descending pentatonic scales, songs written to 32 bar melodies, divided into four phrases of eight bars each, the overall pattern of AABA (except *Summertime*).

Weaker candidates did not use musical elements and quotes from lyrics to support their discussions. It was clear in a minority of cases that they had little grasp of the language of music. Those who wrote some notation down often had no idea what purpose it served.

G403/01 Performance Contexts 2

General Comments:

Almost all responses were of a length and detail that demonstrated two hours' continuous writing; only a very few wrote very little. Whilst it is the quality and not necessarily the quantity that matters, some gained only low level marks from a lot of writing that was not necessarily relevant, when others, more succinct and to the point, did not cover as many sides, but garnered the marks.

Most answers addressed the question to some extent. There were very few entirely 'generic' responses that disregarded the question in its entirety; a slightly larger minority made reference to the question slightly or as an afterthought; these were usually in the area of the American Musical where some tendency to 'prepared' answers was again evident this session. There was more of a focus on key words of the question and an attempt to address the command word if appropriate.

In the main, a good range of works was studied across the three chosen genres (Performance in the Far East is now not seen from any Centres). Whilst there was more of an attempt to address the focus more directly, weakness was reflected in the candidates' inability to analyse effectively across the three art forms using appropriate terminology, and links between works and art forms were, if present, often strained. Discussion of works could be fairly descriptive and narrative in content with some unnecessary biographical information.

Post-Modern approaches to the Performing Arts Since 1960

There was some outstanding analysis across works and time periods, rather than 'key terms', which resulted in a higher quality of response.

Conversely, 'prepared' answers were evident, either taking a practitioner approach discussing one after another and linking to the next via techniques the two might have in common, or taking a technique approach, discussing each in series and linking to the next by referencing a practitioner who uses both. Some Centres clearly have a formula for grouping practitioners under common headings and working through these in turn, referencing the question as they progress. Bending this formula approach to fit the question had varied success and impact on the marks able to be awarded.

Less popular, but no less interesting, works used to exemplify post-modern approaches included Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, Tavener's *The Lamb*, Terry Riley's *Sun Rings*, various pieces by practitioners from the Judson Church Dance Theater, the original postmodernists, and Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*.

Increasingly, Centres are using contemporary artists for this topic area; however, it is important to consider coverage of the entire time frame specified – "since 1960". Candidates without an overview of the topic can be limited in the potential questions they can answer and often betray a lack of understanding of the topic area, generally.

Politics and Performance since 1914

This topic has fewer responses than the other two but energises the committed. Some direct engagement with practitioners was usefully included, for example, a Skype dialogue with Carrie Hanson about *Exit Disclaimer*, and comments from a workshop with a dancer who had

performed in Bruce's *Hurricane*. This type of material should be used judiciously as relevance and appropriateness is crucial. Narrative descriptions of workshops, lectures and even performances can seem important in the pressure of an examination, but are not likely to achieve many marks.

There could be a greater focus on contextual understanding in this topic, as it is often central to the work, but there were some strong answers that linked works to recent contextual events such as the recent shootings in the USA. These were impressive in the handling of the comparison and showed a real understanding of the power and effect of Politics and Performance.

The best responses were able to combine discussions of context and justice alongside an analytical discussion of works studied. Good links were drawn across the works studied in most cases. Lower band marks were often awarded to 'list' approaches to the questions but these were few and far between.

Candidates answering this topic tend to have a very wide breadth and depth of works and practitioners to which they can refer.

The American Musical

Examiners reported that there were noticeably less "all-I-know" answers with more candidates attempting to answer the question asked. The best responses were often able to analyse one scene or song in detail from the perspective of all three art forms, for example, Billy's 'Soliloquy' from *Carousel*, 'One' from *A Chorus Line* and 'The Prologue' of *West Side Story*.

Far more candidates are now seeking to demonstrate both their knowledge and understanding of this topic through comparisons across both art forms and works; for example, the treatment of gang culture in *West Side Story* and *Guys and Dolls* (and see the example given under Question No. 6 below).

However, there are still some very lengthy introductory sections on pre-book musical forms, sometimes related usefully to the question, but more often a somewhat generic introduction to the essay. Better responses did relate this either to how issues were addressed (Q5) or how they contributed to the development of a formula (Q6) but this was not commonly a focus in an extraneous account of 'the antecedents'.

Whilst an understanding of dramatic elements in the American Musical still lags behind the other art forms, depth and breadth of musical understanding is relatively strong and some outstanding dance analysis was in evidence, particularly, Robbins in *On the Town* and De Mille in *Carousel* as well as *Oklahoma!*

Quality of Written Communication

This has been on a steady trajectory of improvement over the past few sessions. Nearly all responses were in the range of 4 to 8 and many around 6 out of 9 available marks. Structured prose using focused ideas together with evidence within a structured paragraph and addressing the question were in evidence in many papers. However, the 15 elements from G401 are not used by many candidates to explain, describe or demonstrate their understanding.

Use of appropriate terminology seemed to take second place to description this session. Some music terminology when used also appeared misunderstood, with many references to 'blues tonality' and 'leitmotif' but in the wrong context. Narrative accounts were fewer but still featured. Errors in spelling and grammar are still too frequent with specialist terms like 'staccato' and

'crescendo' mis-spelt when discussing music. Other common mis-spellings included 'lose' and 'questioned' despite these words appearing in the questions themselves.

Legibility proved challenging in a small number of responses. It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that their work can be read without laborious deciphering on the part of the reader, in order for marks to be awarded.

Links could be quite strong between works but less so between art forms. Conclusions were featured but weaker conclusions simply repeated points that had been raised earlier in the paragraph or listed techniques as a check list of fingerprints for that practitioner. Examples were often simply references to songs/dances/plays rather than specifically addressing the element to back up the point. For example, candidates might say: 'themes of racism are explored in *Show Boat*. For example, in *Ol' Man River*'...and then leave the point at that without explaining HOW those themes were shown or WHY a practitioner used certain techniques. Lack of evidence for, or examples of, points made is still the major obstacle for some candidates to achieve the higher marks.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

This was a popular question, which produced some successful answers. The question referred to 'exciting experimentation' and 'dull predictability'. The question was addressed well when candidates made specific reference to these key terms in the question, for example, the 'dull predictability' of using intertextuality or the 'exciting experimentation' of eclecticism. As well as this, at the top end, the argument was well addressed and a conclusion was reached based on 'How far' there was agreement with the statement. Weaker answers often followed a practitioner-by-practitioner approach and/or work-by-work response. There was a lack of analysis that clearly hindered responses leaving many points vague and limited.

Better answers managed to make links between works and art forms and the strongest answers went beyond the nine extracts to consider both the topic as a whole and more recent developments in the performing arts.

One or two were willing to directly engage with the nature of experimentation and how this might appear in practitioner works, or how an approach might become predictable, although one did venture to suggest that Bourne's serial reworking of classic ballet works might develop elements of predictability.

Answers tended to focus on the quotation in the first part of the question rather considering the extent of development of works across the time frame.

The best answers were able to contextualise the works studied within the development of the post-modern movement, in addition to contrasting this to key modernist concepts, and could also demonstrate a wide understanding of the contexts in which the works were created.

Question No. 2

This was an even more popular response. However, most answers focused on the commonality of techniques across practitioners and works studied. The best answers were able to outline the key concepts of modernism, at times with reference to specific artists and works, and framed their analysis around this, in comparison to the post-modern outlook.

The responses appeared to have two key parts. One looked at 'distinctive techniques' and the other addressed the way in which these differed from 'that which had gone before'. Strong responses dealt with both elements in the question and dissected the works well so that an informed analysis could take place. Most candidates opted to address one of these elements only and often failed to identify the techniques that were 'distinctive'. At the upper end of the mark scheme, candidates dealt with the distinctive techniques first and then used this as a basis to compare these techniques to what had come before post-modernism. Weaker answers often focused on the techniques in a generic way listing these as the fingerprints of the practitioner in question in a work-by-work account.

Frequently, candidates referred to the 'well-made' play or ballet, but without really explaining what the key constructs of these styles were or indeed who might have written/choreographed them. The key to the question was not how much candidates knew about modernism, but how post-modernism was distinctive from that which had gone before.

Some candidates slipped up on this question as they knew a lot about techniques but very little about what had happened pre-1960 and thus how those techniques were different. There were many prepared introductions, which were useful but again allowed for little originality.

Considering the wide number of postmodern techniques, it was disappointing that some candidates narrowed their choice to only three or four features which they considered significant. Some excellent answers could discuss what was "distinctive" about the chosen extracts as compared with pre-1960.

Many candidates were able to refer to, and comment on the work of a range of postmodern theorists in addition to practitioners. This stood them in good stead particularly when answering this question.

Question No. 3

Candidates discussed a range of works but could not always find common features. Some candidates could discuss each work separately but not make links between works. Stronger answers grouped works together and found the common links, through a series of comparisons and contrasts. This tended to indicate that the study had been by work rather than looking at the ways in which different works reflected approaches to Politics and Performance.

Clearly, this was the most popular question, allowing the focus to be on practitioner style and intent more than the political effect; this tended to narrow the depth of content, and audiences were not always considered, as 'intent' was taken as the boundary of question.

Many candidates ignored the first part of the question and chose instead to focus on the common features of political performance and/or the political intent. Stronger responses dealt with the common features first and then linked these to political intent using specific examples, depth and explanation. Weaker responses dealt with the fingerprints of the practitioners as a list of common features and ignored the second part of the question related to 'political intent'.

Question No. 4

This provided a wide range of answers allowing for candidates to argue for or against the statement; most agreed. Strong answers covered many of the decades over the last hundred years and there was a focus on the performance work together with an ability to discuss how it can still be relevant today/ Further comments were made regarding similar events in society in recent years where the works can have the same intention. Some were historically accurate and

others not so. Good answers could explain the context of the extract as well as explaining why it might be relevant at other times and possibly in the future.

There was some judgment, in a few, of the retention of significance, referring to Baez's *We Shall Overcome* sung in 1963 and again at the recent vigil for the victims of the U.S. church massacre; a few judged *Oh What A Lovely War* to have lost relevance as being only about WW1, missing its significance as a warning of a future war potentially close at hand.

The weakest element in this question came from the command of 'how far'. In the main, candidates were able to write about the time at which works were created and their intention. Weaker responses made few comparisons between works, intentions and failed to address the command 'how far'. Works and techniques were often described and not explained leading to a generic response.

Question No. 5

Judging by the number of responses, this question appealed to candidates. Most were able to discuss the critique of American 'ideals' as they are demonstrated in the musicals - the 'stripes', but few could develop the idea of 'stars'; the manifestation of "the ideals of American Society", the performers' or the characters' popularity, or even the commercial success of Broadway musicals. One or two saw the potential to mention 'stars' as main draws in the formative styles early in the century, for example, Bert Williams, George M. Cohan and Fanny Brice, but few exploited the influence and pull of Merman, Martin, Andrews and Verdon, for example, in the rest of the century.

Responses were better at discussing the criticism of "ideals". Racism, class and social injustice were the most common themes, with corruption of the law (*Chicago*); war (*Hair*); family values and divorce (*Company*); and gang warfare (*West Side Story*) included. Rather too often *Oklahoma!* was written off as "happy-go-lucky", ignoring the somewhat darker shades of fundamental (American) good triumphing over evil.

Perhaps because of the current London revival, more candidates this session made reference to *Gypsy* than have been seen previously. Regarded as the apotheosis of the 'book musical'. it is perhaps the most pertinent in terms of content for this question, and yet hardly any candidates using the piece as an example within this question saw the tension between the 'stars', June and Louise and the 'stripes' of failure and rejection of Rose's Dream for them and for herself. Many candidates wrote about the issues and problems dealt with in the musicals, such as, racism, drinking, gambling, looking for the American Dream and wars but not many could explain how the ideals of American culture and society were questioned. Better answers went into detail and explained how the art forms were used to do this. Few candidates used a high level of terminology to explain how their examples from the works studied questioned the ideals. Many candidates could discuss the American Dream but some, it seemed, did not know what an "ideal" was.

South Pacific and *My Fair Lady* represented further difficulty in relating works to the question, although 'You've got to be carefully taught' provided some respite. In only a few answers were candidates able to recognise that audiences might infer allusions to American issues through situations set in other cultures, and that it might have been difficult in that time for practitioners to have addressed the issues more directly. *West Side Story*, *Chicago* and *Company* provided material closer to home, although only a very few were able to recognise that where *Oklahoma!* was a rural fantasy, *Company* was a mirror to the New York audience. Beyond these, *Cabaret* being set outside the U.S. was a further obstacle for most, with only one or two better responses able to relate prejudice and conflict as contemporary issues of the time in the US; and *Sweeney Todd* left quite a few unable to relate it as a prepared work to this question, although a few asserted it was about American values anyway.

Question No. 6

This was another very popular question, but many examiners were surprised at the general lack of understanding of common elements of the American Musical. Those that attempted to discuss structure referred to a “Cinderella” plot line, which they were able to identify in one or two musicals, but with little detail or analysis. ‘Love’ was more frequent as part of the common formula, but even then there were many missed opportunities to discuss common treatments. Thematic elements, such as racism and patriotism, were more often discussed as part of a formula, but only a few responses were able to discuss the structure of musicals, common plot devices such as love triangle, character types, complementary sub-plots, different types of songs, and different arrangements of singers and action, even in a basic way.

One answer, essentially on the theme of gender roles, developed into a very strong argument for a common formula, drawing on characters from works across the entire century. Whilst it was limited in its initial outlook, the candidate was able to bring in detailed music, dance and dramatic analysis, which also exemplified other wider aspects of a common approach and where no commonality existed between works.

Another candidate identified ‘the representation of social impact’ as part of the formula and then proceeded to argue a social issues answer. This could have been risky and avoiding of the question, but the argument was strong, thorough and detailed with evidence. It was further complemented with some very careful musical analysis, comparing common features, such as leitmotif, across works and composers, which made for a most satisfying answer.

One highly engaging answer used a collection of songs on the “common formula” theme of marriage to highlight not only the relative differences in music and lyric treatment, but also comparative character exposition and use of ensemble, duet and solo songs, structurally: ‘I’m Getting Married in the Morning’ from *My Fair Lady*, ‘Not Getting Married Today’ from *Company*, ‘Marry the Man Today’ from *Guys and Dolls*, ‘I Can Hear the Bells’ from *Hairspray*, ‘I Love to Cry at Weddings’ from *Sweet Charity*, ‘If Momma was Married’ from *Gypsy*, ‘The Girl That I Marry’ from *Annie Get Your Gun*, ‘Married’ from *Cabaret* and ‘One Hand, One Heart’ from *West Side Story*. It will come as no surprise that this candidate, who had obviously done some reading and study around the topic, found this question an attractive option. In the same answer, one of a very few, comparison was made across character types: for example, ‘older’ male leads, Gaylord Ravenal, Emile de Becque, King Mongkut and Henry Higgins, or assertive female characters, Roxie Hart, Rose Hovick, Hildy Esterhazy, Anita and Sally Bowles. The characters were not just identified and listed, but discussed with examples drawn from text, lyric or action, in relation to the range of character types found, together with their roles and functions - and even their vocal range - in the American Musical.

Some candidates did not understand the term “common formula”. They could write about aspects of a formula but thought either that each practitioner had their own formula which was common to all their own works or that there were different formulas throughout the period of the American Musical and some of these were common. Stronger responses explained how there was a common formula but it changed over time and some practitioners deliberately broke away from it, only to create another common approach by those that followed.

Many embarked upon the response in the apparent hope that a pattern would emerge from a discussion of the works they felt they knew, which tended to work somewhat irregularly, with the conditional ballad as common favourite, ‘I wish’ and patter songs variously applied, and often, perhaps in some possible desperation, some absorption of the terms of Q5, the tendency to address issues of the time.

Question No. 7

No Responses.

Question No. 8

No responses.

G404/01 Performance Project

Administration

Examiners reported a high level of commitment and enthusiasm for performance work, unquenched by the dismay expressed by almost all Centres at the news that the specification was not to continue beyond 2017.

The practical arrangements for the visiting examination session ran smoothly, with examiners reporting only minor hitches of organisation. These mainly concerned two issues: slowness of response to requests to set the date for the examination, and tardiness in dispatching the final DVD to the examiner following the examination visit. The necessary advance documentation was generally sent electronically, which allowed for effective communication between examiners and Centres.

PERFORMANCE REALISATION

Examiners reported an improvement in the level of practical skills in repertoire, with relatively few examples of weak performance work this session. It was felt that the performance work was the strongest seen in recent sessions, with clear evidence of disciplined rehearsal and strong stage presence.

Dance performances were often drawn from Musical Theatre or works inspired by that genre, such as the works of Matthew Bourne. There were fewer examples of contemporary high art repertoire, although the choreography of Christopher Bruce remained popular in a number of Centres. There was an increased interest in the work of more recent practitioners such as David Bintley, Akram Khan, Jasmin Vardimon. The quality of dance performances seen this session was very high.

Drama performances were dominated by performances of plays by John Godber, but with a significant number of candidates offering extracts from the work of Berkoff. A wide range of other playwrights was also represented, including Samuel Beckett, Jim Cartwright and Sarah Kane. Performances were often impeded where candidates lacked some basic skills, which limited the delivery. At this level, vocal projection, diction, eye focus and blocking should all be understood and prepared for performance, alongside the characterisation. Unfortunately, some drama pieces did not reflect the necessary skills and were hardly beyond having learnt the lines. However, in others, there was an unwavering commitment to character and style, leading to commanding performances in which candidates grabbed the audience's attention and demonstrated evidence of outstanding flair.

Candidates offering Music generally chose to sing a song, most often selected from the works of George and Ira Gershwin, although The Beatles proved almost as popular. These demonstrated the same strengths and weaknesses as in previous sessions, ranging from tuneful, confident, highly personal performances to tuneless, embarrassed renditions that captured almost nothing of the musicality of the song.

Examiners reported an increase in the number of candidates selecting extracts from works of Musical Theatre that they had studied for G402, most often selected from the repertoire of Rodgers and Hammerstein, as well as a good smattering of songs by Stephen Sondheim. These often demonstrated a palpable engagement with the dramatic setting, characterisation and (sometimes) movement content. It was equally apparent that a small number of candidates were utterly overcome with the glitz and glamour of the art form, utterly stage-struck with fame and fortune, and highly dependent on eyes and teeth, basques and bodices, rather than their

singing ability. That said, many of the Musical Theatre pieces were expressive, demonstrating effective pacing and good levels of energy. The best interpretations were performed by candidates whose strong and tuneful voices were inextricably linked to theatrical characterisation skills.

STUDENT-DEvised PERFORMANCE

COMMISSION 1 Dulle Griet by Pieter Bruegel

Most candidates focused on the narrative dimensions of the picture, although a significant number made reference to Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* which makes some dramatic use of the same character. Others focused more generally on the setting of an art gallery or the period in which the picture was painted, although such pieces were generally less related to the commission. One exceptional response produced a fully integrated and sophisticated blend of music, movement and drama, creating a very atmospheric soundscape underpinning the whole piece.

COMMISSION 2 Venezuela's Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra treats a Carnegie Hall audience to their ever-vivacious performance of mambo.

This commission proved to be the least popular of the set. Those who chose it sometimes struggled to know how to handle either the large numbers of people in the picture or the implicit use of musical instruments.

Those who opted for the commission, however, found rich pickings in the purpose and effectiveness of the Simon Bolivar orchestra, particularly its social mission and its success in engaging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in music. Weaker candidates focused on the mambo aspect of the picture, including aspects of music from Lou Bega through to *West Side Story*. These were not obviously related to the commission, and the delight in performing mambo was not matched by the audience experience in receiving it.

COMMISSION 3 1953 – Crick and Watson discover the structure of DNA

This commission – and Commission 4 – were part of a new category introduced in 2015, which focused on scientific discovery. It was hoped that this would reflect the increasing interest in Britain in the relationships between the arts and sciences, and this hope was not disappointed. Both commissions proved popular, and the focus was generally on the narrative surrounding the relevant discoveries rather than their scientific content.

Some candidates, not deterred by their lack of scientific knowledge, attempted to explain the double helix structure of DNA, inevitably becoming hopelessly bogged down in so doing. This approach tended to rely on devices such as back-projections of complex mathematical formulae, lengthy monologues explaining the thought processes behind the discovery, or convoluted structural diagrams annotated with indecipherable scribble.

By contrast, there were also many dance sequences based on a double helix motif, and the patterns provided a strong inspiration for movement-based groups. Other strong pieces focused on the relationship between the scientific discovery and the events surrounding it. While there was inevitably a liberal smattering of white-coated boffins – not always related to the commission – a significant number of pieces explored very effectively the role of the female scientist Rosalind Franklin in the discovery of DNA, and the way in which her contribution went virtually unrecognised in her own lifetime.

COMMISSION 4 - *Sir Isaac Newton's theory of gravity*

This scientific basis of this commission tended to be more accessible to candidates, although this bore little relationship to the quality of the work seen. A number of candidates adopted a 'promotion of the public understanding of science' approach, and there were several presentations of the significance of gravity – sometimes accompanied by a ready supply of apples. The style was often inspired by TIE work.

COMMISSION 5 *Madness Disguises Sanity* by Opal Palmer Adisa

Examiners reported this to be one of the most popular of the commissions this session, although in a number of cases it was the title rather than the content of the poem that provided the greatest inspiration. Weak candidates tended to produce pieces that dealt with the generic theme of madness. Most groups examined the underlying themes of the poem, and at least one enterprising group managed to have a lengthy dialogue with the poet herself, who not only explained the origin of the poem, but its meaning to her as well.

There was a variety of approaches, many of which made effective use of physicality and built on performance work undertaken elsewhere in their Performance Studies course. Some groups took a feminist approach and explored the oppressive impact of patriarchy through the 20th Century. The weakest groups demonstrated all the hallmarks of generic pieces about madness seen from the start of the specification in 1989 through to the present day: plodding pieces, populated by one-dimensional stereotypes, rocking in a chair or screaming in a corner, but achieving little by way of exploring the commission.

COMMISSION 6 - *The Moon Shines in My Body* by Kabir

Few groups selected this option, and a number that did choose it struggled in getting to grips with the language. There were some sophisticated pieces, however, which made full use of the metre, structure, rhythm of the poem to inform their music and movement. Others were equally evocative in their use of imagery drawn from the poem.

COMMISSION 7 - *Brief Encounter*

This proved as popular as Commission 5, with David Lean's 1946 film providing a postmodern delight for several groups.

There were many imaginative recreations of the film's scenario, exploring its elegant social mores, mannered relationships and emphasis on maintaining appearance and social respectability in the face of circumstances that might tear things apart. There were a number of intertextual recreations, in which a modern parallel story was interwoven with episodes from the film, often creating powerful dramatic contrasts between two worlds separated by seven decades.

The creation of stylised movement and gesture was very good in most cases. However, many candidates proved more adept at assimilating the fashions of the 1940s than the clipped accents of that period. While the most able candidates were comfortably at home imitating the speech patterns of Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson, many created a curious hybrid style that was spoilt by poor diction and/or inelegant phraseology.

COMMISSION 8 – *Jaws*

Examiners' fears of where this might lead in the hands of less imaginative performers proved largely unfounded and the number of beach scenes typified by inflatable mammals and screaming crowds was refreshingly few. There was a wide range of approaches, some more related to the commission than others. A few groups opted to focus on the making of the film itself, others the rise of the career of Stephen Spielberg or other key people associated with the movie, still others the popularity of the motion picture itself. Some adopted more thematic approaches, focusing on topics such as terror, power and the abuse of power, or the oppression of the powerless by those who wield authority. A number of candidates had taken the trouble to create intricate lighting designs, and most pieces played excerpts from John Williams' original music.

COMMISSION 9 – *Charlie Cairoli*

Most candidates based their piece around a retelling of aspects of Cairoli's life and career. These tended to be quite selective, with a strong focus on his early work, and his personal life, but considerably less on his later television appearances. There was a variable approach to Cairoli's clowning, with his stylistic approach only occasionally emerging. Nevertheless, there were a good many funny and entertaining performances that engaged their audiences, even if some of them were little more generalised demonstrations of clowning, relatively unrelated to Charlie Cairoli. Many performances had a commendably strong physical aspect to them.

COMMISSION 10 – *Bessie Smith*

This was also a popular choice for many candidates, and there were many dramatically compelling pieces that dealt with racism, the world of pre-Civil Rights America, as well as the power struggles and manipulation endemic in the music industry, both then and now. Candidates who chose this option appeared relatively at ease with integrating details of her life into their piece, although weaker groups focused on its more obvious events.

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