

G401 - Piece Two

Candidate 2: Esther

WRITTEN COMMENTARY

Assessment Criterion	Mark	Please refer to specific aspects of the work which support the mark being awarded
Knowledge and understanding of aspects and applications of the performing arts (max 20)	15	Assured knowledge showing understanding across the art forms
Understanding and evaluation of process and performance (max 12)	10	Process secure showing good understanding with appropriate and evaluative illustrations
Quality of language (max 8)	5	Generally well structured and fluently written although some points need expanding.

PRACTICAL WORK

Assessment Criterion	Mark	Please refer to specific aspects of the work which support the mark being awarded
Devising the community performance project (max 10)	10	A well crafted piece integrating a range of styles across the art forms, including an effective use of puppetry. Excellent structure allowed fluid transitions between scenes, eg the shift from the funeral was particularly poignant and successful. Musically strong, utilising voice, violin and piano. Choregraphically some excellent and innovative integration of movement to aid the narrative, eg - 'The Drawing Dance'. Overall a well structured piece creating a variety of moods and atmospheres. (Some moments needed a little more rehearsal)
Performance skills in dance, drama and music (max 20)	18	Esther is a committed performer who approaches her work with energy. Some moments in her performance slightly lost focus, but otherwise she delivered with clear projection. Vocally she is a sensitive performer and is able to lead or support as an ensemble member. Esther moves with ease and fluidity, and dramatically can also create convincing characters. Overall an excellent performance
Total (max 70)	58	

Creating Performance

Individual Devising Projects

Improvisation

Improvisation is performing or creating something with little or no preparation beforehand. The stimulus we were given for our drama was a poem called "Office Friendships" by Gavin Ewart. After reading through the poem, we started to improvise events that occur within it, and experiment with our characterisation. We discussed creating a highly satirical play, with caricatures. This would mean that what happened would not be politically offensive because all the clichéd characters would be surrounded by others that were the same.

We wanted to have a lot of sexual tension, and for the play to be fast, physical and very funny. We began to explore this by creating our characters; the 'gay' man (Hugh), the sexual pest or 'pervert' (Clive), the 'boss' (Nicky), the socially-rejected 'geeky' character (Richard) and the 'desperately in love' woman (Eve). We worked on their dialogue and physicality to emphasise their personalities, for example, to portray the boss, I spoke in a clipped, formal tone, and moved stiffly, standing tall and poised. We also tried to emphasise Eve's indecisiveness when she wrote the love-email, by having her dance nervously from foot to foot, and repeat the words "Kiss. No kiss. Kiss. Kiss."

The stimulus we were provided for our devising music task was part of a scene from the play 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' by Bertolt Brecht. We were advised to use the dialogue as lyrics for our song, so our first idea was to choose lines which we particularly wanted to use to create the right atmosphere.

To begin with we experimented with different chord structures, and eventually decided to compose in a minor key, to emphasise the tragedy of Grusha (a maid, and the heroine of the play) losing her child. We then tried different harmonies, such as with a male and female voice. This gave a wide range between the notes, and connected with the story of Grusha (as a female) and her child (male). We also tried the use of a solo voice singing, and then another voice adding in, harmonising in 3rds. This exaggerated the effect of the child calling for Grusha.

To produce our dance, we were given two stimuli – a piece of music called "After The War" by Steve Reich, and a painting by Paula Rego called "The Family". We wrote down our initial response, including any words that came to mind, such as 'eerie' and 'controlling' and then we discussed how we could portray such powerful images via dance.

We wanted to explore the background story and what might have led the three women to want to control the man as they do in the painting. This idea meant we tried choreographing a contemporary piece, as we felt this would show the relationships between the characters best. We experimented using pedestrian actions, like running and hitting to show the urgency in the piece, and unison at the points where the females over-powered the male.

We also wanted to create a motif for each character which related to their story. We used spontaneous physical improvisation to create this, for example we took a simple rising movement and changed the dynamics. We added 'jerking' movements and contractions, and changed the speed. We thought this may portray the

determination of the women in bringing their man under control, and the unnaturalness of the situation.

Rehearsal

Rehearsal is repeating, drilling and practicing something in preparation for a performance. In drama, to ensure that our play ran as smoothly and efficiently as possible, repetition was necessary during rehearsals. We practised over and over again in order to make our lines as snappy as possible, and to have the scene transitions flow effortlessly. Unfortunately, we were unable to have an outside eye, and this would have helped a lot in making sure everything looked as effortless and was as funny as possible. There were also elements of the play, such as the large, group-sex ending, which we decided needed to be choreographed even though it wasn't dance. We realised that this needed doing when we started rehearsals; we first improvised it and it looked messy and awkward.

We also developed the proxemics whilst rehearsing, for example, to create the 'office' scene, we positioned ourselves almost equidistant, but so we were all seen whilst onstage. This meant that to create a scene, characters could move forwards and in front of the others, which placed the focus on them, but with the others continuing in a more minor key.

For music rehearsals, we practised and developed our improvised ideas. For example, to add texture, we took the rhythm we had for "the city full of flame and grief" and added a canon using our voices. We also ended with a dissonant chord, which textured the word "grief" and showed Grusha's situation. At "terrible is the temptation to do good" we kept it in an improvisatory style (as if Grusha were talking to the audience) but developed it into an antiphonic, question and answer rhythm. We also changed the dynamics, and sang it loud, because we felt it was a very important phrase in the piece.

We particularly wanted to show Grusha's positive choice, so we decided to change the music by adding a series of descending broken chords which modulated from major to minor, and made this section more buoyant. However, we ended on a minor chord as well, which suggested that there was still danger and temptation in her decision.

To develop our melodies too, we took the section with "too long she sat, too long she watched" which was originally homophonic and added a counter-melody of "evening, night, night, dawn". This meant it became polyphonic, which emphasised the length of time Grusha spent in the mountains.

In order to ensure our dance was as smooth as possible, we practised regularly and got advice from an outside eye. This repetitive run-throughs were especially helpful as we included a lift in which the man was lowered on top of one of the women. This made sure we executed the lift safely and fluently, and our audience gave helpful tips, for example lowering the mans legs first, to make his descent easier.

We decided that using the space effectively would emphasise the relationships between the dancers, for example ending with two dancers closely embraced, and the other two lying quite far away from them. This emphasised the characterisation within the dance, as it showed each characters status within the group.

To make the choreography fit better with the music, we tried to use the same timing as well. This meant that a lot of our dance was fluid and slow, but as the

dynamics changed and the music became louder or more polyphonic, there were moments where we got faster or jerkier. ✓

Performance

When we performed, the audience responded positively, finding our play as comic as we'd hoped it would be. There were a few moments which could have been developed better, for example, when the office workers read out Eve's love-email. Some of the audience found this awkward, as it was quite crude and improvised. If we had scripted a few of the lines better before performing, it could have been done more subtly and would therefore have been funnier. ✓

It also might have worked smoother if we'd worked on transitions more during rehearsal to make the piece smoother. Overall, I think our performance went well, and we achieved our purpose in making the play as comical and over-the-top as possible. ✓

If we were to re-do this music devising piece, it would be better for us to engage with audience better, for example, by learning the words, and using another piano so we were more positioned towards them. Also, there were four very distinct sections, so I would try and connect them and make them more fluid, by adding something like an underlying drone. ✓

There were some moments where we lost the rhythm and harmonies, and had to improvise under pressure and on the spot, but I think we managed it, although I know it could have been done better. We didn't really warm up or have a last practise beforehand, so this would have affected our performance. ✓

Overall, I think this could have been much more coherent if we'd interacted with the audience, and that our rehearsals went better than the final performance, but that we succeeded in portraying the pathos of Grusha's situation. ✓

When it came to the performance, we were able to revise our dance beforehand which meant we were quite confident, and because we danced in front of people we knew, we weren't very nervous. The most nerve-wracking part was the lift, but luckily it was carried out quite successfully, and although the lowering was a little awkward, any mistakes went unnoticed by the audience. ✓

Whilst dancing, our timing seemed to be very precise, and fitted with the music as we'd hoped, but when we ended the dance, we noticed there was about two or three bars extra music. This meant that at some point we had sped up, but there were no comments about this either. ✓

The audience particularly mentioned and enjoyed our recreation of the painting in a tableau at the beginning, how our dance told a story and the contractions and jerking we incorporated as the music became more violent. They also said, however, that we should have made the dance less complicated with less happening, because it was quite cluttered. ✓

Overall, our intentions of the piece exploring the background story of the painting were successful and we conveyed sympathy for the women effectively. ✓

The Community Piece

Our community performance piece was about the life of AA Milne. Milne was particularly personal to our community because he studied at Cambridge University before continuing on to write plays, short stories and, later, creating that which made him most famous – Winnie the Pooh. My group devised Milne's death and what has happened to Pooh since then, including how Disney changed the character to make it

more successful and the release of the newest book in 2009, *Return to Hundred Acre Wood*. These areas gave us a number of opportunities to explore drama, dance and music techniques, for example, in drama we wanted to incorporate both realistic and surreal moments in the piece to create variety and keep the audience intrigued, and we found this was easiest to do during our portrayal of Milne reminiscing before he died. The specific memories were to be realistic, for example, Christmas with his family, but the transitions between were to be surreal, for example, on his wedding day, Daphne would scream during the ceremony and we would then change the scene to show the birth of his son. We also experimented with using satire, like Caryl Churchill, creating caricatures of the 'carers' and of the employees at Disney to introduce humour to such a sombre topic. Churchill particularly uses montage and overlapping dialogue in many of her plays, so we discussed including these as well. We found that montage would work well for the memories as each recollection was very brief, and we needed to merge from one to another fluidly. We used overlapping dialogue in one specific reminiscence too, when, on a train journey, Milne is recognised as the write of Winnie the Pooh and many people ask for his autograph. The clamouring of voices created a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability.

In music, we wanted to devise a lot of pieces with polyphonic textures, regular rhythms and consonant harmonies, (such as our opening and closing songs), drawing influence from the Beatles, as many of their songs featured these, especially close harmonies in 3rds and 5ths. We tried out similar chords, such as flat and sevenths, too and we decided to end some of our songs with unfinished chords, engaging the audience and creating a sense of anticipation. The Beatles were also the first band to move away from the classic Tin Pan Alley structure, and as a result, we didn't want any of our songs following this arrangement. We decided that the opening of the funeral song should be 'a cappella', particularly homophonic, and with just vocal harmonies, as we felt this would keep the mournful quality.

Our dance style was predominantly pedestrian movement, as used specially by Matthew Bourne, and we felt this style would work best in the 'routine' after Milne's stroke. We wanted to create a repetitive movement, much like a motif but with no other dance in between, to show the same things happening to Milne every day for years. Bourne also tries to incorporate humour to catch the audience's attention, and he focuses on characterisation in his performances, and using his dancers as actors. To include this, we thought it would feature best in the introduction of the Disney employees. Although we wanted the employees to be similar, we decided to develop our own characters as well, and ensured we integrated this in all our movement.

When creating our performance, we wanted to evoke feelings of deep sympathy in the audience, as we took them through the loss of a family member and the unresolved situations between him and his son, Christopher, and then the unjust changes that Disney made to Milne's one successful and highly personal creation. We also wanted to shock the audience, to an extent, and decided to use Churchill's technique of a structure which was interrupted and stylised by songs and scenes which change quickly between pathos and comedy. This also succeeded in juxtaposing Pooh before Milne's death and afterwards and exaggerating the caricature that Pooh became once the rights were sold on.

When devising each area of the piece, we decided that drama should be used to set the locations. For example, we included a scene at the beginning in which Milne feeds some ducks and watches a variety of people walking by (with dogs, on the phone, eating ice cream etc) to establish that he was at a park. Our music and dance was

developed to create mood changes within the piece and, therefore, to keep the audience captivated. We wanted to use dance especially to create tension during Milne's stroke, and decided to choreograph a piece that was sharper and more erratic than our other routines. We also wanted to open the performance musically, and with a very tranquil and calm timbre, so we used a simple piano melody and monophonic vocal line to create this.

When it came to finding a space for our performance, we were, unfortunately, unsuccessful in obtaining somewhere outside of the college. We originally tried to secure a venue at Trinity College in Cambridge as this was where Milne studied, and when this failed we tried several other university venues as well. Eventually, we had to perform at the Robinson Theatre, Hills Road Sixth Form College. This was beneficial as we finally had a designated space, with a dance floor specifically designed to be light on the feet. We were also used to the lighting and sound technicalities and the stage set-up, so knew easily how to present our performance to create the best atmosphere for the audience as possible. However, performing in college did disadvantage the show as it didn't bring the extra dimension of being somewhere new and was not particularly related to Milne personally.

Once we were told the subject for our community performance, as a group we discussed what we wanted to achieve through the show. We decided that mainly we wanted to educate the audience on the topic, but at the same time keep it interesting, evoke pathos and sympathy for Milne, and end the piece with a feeling of contentment. Developing on these ideas, we thought that we could establish Milne's life before his stroke and then juxtapose it with the differences of his life afterwards. Also, throughout the piece, we wanted to portray Disney as the adversary to Milne's successes. We brainstormed all our ideas, mapped out which areas we needed to cover and created a structure for them, which turned out to be episodic, like many of Churchill's plays. We then decided where our elements of dance, drama and music could be within the areas, and began to spontaneously develop some ideas. We experimented with different chords until melodies and rhythms were created and framed simple movements which could be used to portray particular moments.

We wanted to show that Milne was very old, so we explored using a puppet to represent Milne, as we thought this would be more realistic than a young person trying to act elderly. It also meant to we could incorporate shoaling, as we needed the entire group to control it. We also used shoaling when Disney approaches Daphne to buy the rights. We wanted to show her being harassed by this company, so we improvised a scene in which she is being followed relentlessly around the stage by a group of Disney employees, using proxemics to constantly show eagerness from the workers as they tried to stay close to her and hostility from Daphne as she keeps hurrying away. We tried combining the art forms here as well, and started creating a 'patter' song for Disney. Other dramatic techniques we explored included audience interaction, in an airport scene, where we thought someone could make their way into the audience and then run through them as if late for a plane, and caricature, because we wanted the characterisation of Milne's carers to be exaggeratedly patronising.

We experimented with different actions in our dance, such as rolling – in the 'drawing' dance, we introduced rolling onto our backs and repeating the movements from a different perspective – and turning, such as in the carers' routine where we decided to turn and face stage-right during the motions. We also added in other

KJ choreographic devices such as performing the carers' routine in unison, and adding canon to the gestures during the recital of 'If I Were A King'. We created patterns within the space too, setting ourselves in a square for the 'drawing' dance and standing linearly for the train scene. For the funeral specifically, we tried out music ideas such as a five-part harmony, including a drone underneath, to give variation to the song, but keeping an element of consistency.

Once we had created the beginning elements and ideas for our piece, we realised that a lot of rehearsal was needed to ensure that we all knew what we were doing, that particular moments fit together well and that everything flowed smoothly. We rehearsed by repeatedly practicing songs, scenes and dances (focussing on counting here) and we used an outside eye to give feedback on the piece. When this wasn't possible, we watch ourselves in a mirror to check that we were harmonising well as a group.

A lot of our movements and transitions needed to be perfectly timed, so they didn't become messy, especially when using the puppet. As we were supposed to be representing one person, each move as a group had to be succinct and concurrent. In order to achieve this, at the beginning of each rehearsal we revised the opening, so we remembered how to hold and move the puppet. We also had the 'patter' song which involved everyone singing simultaneously. The song was very fast and therefore difficult to say, so we practised it every rehearsal, focussing on enunciation so the audience could hear everything we said. The melody also had to be very precise, because with this type of song there was a new note for every syllable, and we integrated a key change which had to be smooth and in tune.

During the memories, there was one sentence ("Please can I have your autograph, Sir?") which was split between four of us, but still had to sound as if only one person was saying it. This was practiced many times too, as the timing had to be very accurate, so each person said their section immediately after those before them. The dance to symbolise the stroke involved the use of elastic to show Milne's loss of control of his body, because when someone else pulled part of the elastic, the area of Josh's body it was attached to would move too, so effectively we were controlling him. Adding in such a precarious prop made the dance much trickier, particularly when we had to tie the elastic to Josh's wrists and waist. This also had to be rehearsed a lot to make the set-up as fluid as possible. To compliment this idea of powerlessness and the stroke taking over Milne, we made Ed's music on the violin much harsher and staccato, creating tension and making the mood more edgy. We also used music to compliment and add directly to the quality of our dance in the 'drawing' scene. The use of the violin created a sense of urgency, and the idea that Walt Disney was in control of the whole situation. The dance itself was quite difficult, as it meant a lot of movement on the floor, and also included props. We had to develop the moves especially so we didn't hurt ourselves whilst on our knees and backs took the pressure on stage, adding in a roll to get from standing to floor-height instead of just falling.

After our performance, we received feedback on its successfulness from the audience, and the other performers. The audience found our smooth transitions particularly joyful, especially after the memories when Hattie threw the coat over her head and Ed caught it and pulled it on. The scene change between the funeral and Disney was enjoyed as well because it was a contrast of styles as the satirical Disney employees were introduced. Slick transitions were also created by our use of props, such as the drum and the veil in the memories which were described as "inventive" by

an audience member. There were some transitions that were very messy and could have been improved though, for example taking the coats off before the 'Pooh Train'.

Other areas could have been worked on much more as well, for example the stroke dance which, being very complex, ended up not entirely choreographed and would have benefited from a lot more rehearsal. There was also a lot of breathlessness in the funeral song, because it came immediately after a very active scene. We could have made it easier on ourselves by creating a scene in between the two moments in which we could catch our breath. Overall, our whole performance was scrappy and jumbled with no real story to follow. This was due to lack of rehearsal, because as a group we lacked focus at the beginning of the project ending up in nothing of substance for our first showings. We then chose to completely begin again, which gave us less time.

Despite this, the audience responded very positively. The 'drawing' dance was described as "witty" and "innovative", laughter was provoked in certain comic moments (such as the Disney scene), and tears at the more moving sections, such as the funeral. Our whole piece was said to have "a lot of energy, humour and intelligence" and that it "held interest". Therefore, I think we achieved our aims in presenting Milne's life in a entertaining, but evocative and sympathetic way.

Word Count: 3,876 words