



**General Certificate of Education**

**Drama and Theatre Studies 1241**

**Unit 1A Live Theatre Production Seen**

**Report on the Examination**

*2011 examination - January series*

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## Unit 1A – Live Theatre Production Seen

### General

Examiners reported seeing a range of responses to questions in this paper but in almost all cases it was evident that candidates had clearly engaged with the productions they had seen and were often very enthusiastic about the work. In the best cases this enthusiasm was translated into directly meeting the focus of the question with some excellent analyses of the three key areas that make up each question: i.e. addressing the specific demands, making reference to particular moments, and assessing success or effectiveness. Less successful responses failed to carefully consider one or more of these areas, resulting in answers that became either very generalised overviews of the production seen or, in some cases, where candidates had clearly practised using questions from previous series, the focus was replaced with one that the candidate had hoped for; it is unlikely that a candidate will be successful if trying to shape pre-prepared material to fit the specific demands of the question.

### Choice of production

- Although examiners reported seeing responses to quite a range of work seen, there did seem to be more of a tendency towards mainstream productions over previous sessions. In itself this is certainly not a problem; for many of these long-running productions such as *39 Steps* and *An Inspector Calls* there is much material available for candidates to use both in preparation for their visit and also when discussing and analysing the work after it.
- Many candidates wrote about productions that had been seen more than a year previously, presumably as they were re-sitting the paper; often in these cases their notes were rather thin, and consequently their ability to recall the precise details of the productions was not particularly well developed.
- Examiners reported seeing a greater number of candidates writing about in-house work. As with the first point made, this is perfectly acceptable as long as the candidate is writing to the focus; the problem that examiners noted frequently though was an apparent lack of objectivity in these responses with candidates making very generalised observations about the work. It was also apparent that, when candidates were analysing work that had clearly been performed as part of DRAM2 or DRAM4, the range of moments that were available for them to discuss was not sufficiently broad to allow them to clearly meet all requirements of the question.

### Overview of production style and use of notes and sketches

- It was pleasing to note that most candidates had included some overview of the production seen (and all but a very few had followed the rubric by including the date and venue); this is of most use when they set the production in some kind of context, particularly where this is linked to the focus of the question.
- Candidates should be reminded not to assume prior knowledge on the part of the examiner, both in terms of the style of the production but also in the way in which moments are placed in context. Whilst there is clearly no requirement to offer a detailed synopsis of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Blood Brothers*, a recognition of the physical style of Frantic Assembly and an explanation of the context of some of the fight or training scenes in *Beautiful Burnout* proved very useful in assisting the candidate with their explanation of performance or design elements.

- Examiners reported seeing a wide range of notes, from the extremely detailed to the cursory. Candidates should be reminded that the notes are a tool to assist them in referring in detail to specific moments but may not contain any downloaded or printed material including production photographs.
- Although examiners reported fewer instances of candidates not including sketches in their answers, the effectiveness of these ranged from being very good to being of barely any use. Simple, but well labelled sketches that are larger than one line of an exam booklet, showing the relationship of set to space, performer and audience are of most use in conveying the candidates' understanding of both the production and the demands of the question. Surprisingly, very few candidates in responding to Question 02 thought to include a sketch.

### **Choosing appropriate productions for the question and choice of appropriate moments**

- It continues to be very important that candidates select productions that are going to be appropriate for the specific focus of the question. Examiners reported several instances of candidates who had only taken one page of notes into the exam, having made the decision that they were going to write about that particular production. Whilst the candidates do have a choice of four questions to answer, offering them considerable flexibility, a candidate who had only taken notes in on one production intending to answer one of the design questions needed to be very aware that in this particular case, the focus required them to consider very specific elements of either technical elements and realism or directorial use of space. The greater the range of work that candidates can draw upon, the greater their chances of success.
- The same is true of the candidates' selection of moments that are used to exemplify their understanding of the focus of the question. In many cases examiners reported seeing answers using potentially appropriate productions but where the candidates failed to write about suitable moments. Frantic Assembly's *Beautiful Burnout* and *Woman in Black* often fell into this category.

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

- Even weaker responses contained some element of assessment and evaluation, with stronger answers revealing a clear grasp of exactly why a particular element or moment was successful, often developing this beyond simply stating that it had made the audience laugh or cry by making clear reference back to the production or directorial aims.

**Question 01**

This was the least popular of the questions, and examiners reported seeing a range of responses. At best, candidates considered every aspect of the question carefully and wrote purposefully about moments in productions where the technical elements really had been used to convince the audience. However, many candidates failed to understand or recognise what the term 'realism' meant or alternatively, despite the fact that the question informed them as to what comprises technical elements, wrote about fixed sets or indeed costumes. Better candidates were able to take examples from productions which, although not in any way 'realistic', contained moments which could be well applied to the question, e.g. the train sequence in *39 Steps*, or the barricades in *Les Miserables*. Some candidates identified moments and had some awareness of the function of lighting and/or sound but lacked the necessary technical vocabulary to explain convincingly how the realism was created. Conversely, some candidates included a great range of technical detail, aptly identifying lighting sources from birdies to parcans but with little explanation as to their precise function in terms of the question. All too often where candidates had written about productions which overall might be termed realism, they missed the point about the technical elements, and the answer became a consideration of the set design.

**Question 02**

This was also not a particularly popular question, and again one that could have been better approached. Most candidates who undertook it recognised the need to consider the space but unfortunately many failed to go beyond a description of the set design. Those who did and who selected a production where there was clearly an interesting or non-traditional use of the space were able to achieve high marks. The best candidates interpreted the question according to the production they were writing about, so there were some very interesting and detailed accounts of Cameron climbing out of the washing machine, or the frozen sparring sequence in *Beautiful Burnout*. Some candidates however failed to really get to grips with the central demands of the question (the use of space to create visual interest), and instead treated this as another performance-based question. Where this was the case, answers tended to be very generalised. This question is one example of how important it is for candidates to choose their question and production carefully - far too many candidates made enormous assertions about visual interest in moments that, although obviously engaging, were not particularly visual. The use of space in a black box studio with a performance that took place entirely on one level was unlikely to fulfil the demands of being an appropriate production. Where candidates had written almost exclusively about performers there seemed to be little awareness of the role the director had played in shaping the performance.

**Question 03**

This was by far the most popular question with the vast majority of candidates tackling it. Examiners reported seeing a real range of responses, with many candidates achieving at a very high level. It was particularly pleasing to note that most candidates seemed to have understood and focussed on the performance skills of the performers with some very apt explanations of vocal and physical work. As this question lent itself to virtually any production where there were identifiable characters, it was important that candidates explained the context of the characters within the piece as a whole and their chosen moments. Most candidates made some attempt at defining who the character was and the way in which they were brought to life, with some very clear explanations of performers playing naturalistic characters. At their best, candidates provided excellent, precise details which discussed elements such as the way performers had aged their characters, had used particular skills to create a role or used their physical

appearance alongside their vocal and physical skills to bring characters to life. Weaker responses either failed to address precise moments in enough detail or made generalised statements about the narrative rather than the performance skills. Some candidates also relied rather heavily on assertion without clearly explaining what it was that the performer was actually doing that was so impressive. In the very best responses candidates took a range of moments for each of the chosen performers (often where they appeared on stage at the same time as one another) and provided well developed and clearly evoked examples that really captured the moment.

#### **Question 04**

Although not a particularly popular question, responses to it were often polarised. Examiners reported seeing some truly excellent examples where candidates had clearly thought about exactly how the performers' skills were being used to create effects. Generally, most candidates were able to offer some detail regarding the effects created, the most frequent of these being to amuse or shock the audience. The best responses clearly identified which particular non-naturalistic skill was being used to create this. However, all too often candidates appeared to misunderstand the question. Many identified a production that was not naturalistic because of its use of multi role, direct address or narration but then went on to discuss what were very naturalistic skills of characterisation; in these cases the candidate would have done far better to have chosen Question 03. Similarly many responses were focused on potentially very appropriate productions by companies such as Frantic Assembly or Kneehigh where the performers clearly do use their performance skills in a non-naturalistic way. However, their analysis of exactly what they were doing on stage was restricted to very generalised statements. Only the best responses discussed with precision physical skills such as synchronised movement, poise, balance and timing; and vocal skills of pitch, pace and emphasis as methods of creating clear effects for an audience, all too often candidates failed to clarify for the examiner what it was that was being created for an audience.

#### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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