



GCE

Performance Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H548**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H148**

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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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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Overview

The overall quality of work was consistent with that submitted before and examiners/moderated reported no major concerns with candidate submissions. A number of centres new to the Specification entered for the first time in June 2013.

G401

There was an increase in the number of candidates resitting the Unit and these accounted for 11% of the entry. Although the overall standard was similar to that seen in previous examination series, several Centres had their marks adjusted for the following reasons.

In terms of written work, there was some confusion as to the style and approach required in a critical commentary, with many candidates offering little more than an uncritical narrative review. Although often based on strong ideas, several devised pieces suffered from flimsy structures and poor transitions, which invariably affected the pacing of candidates' performance. In terms of technique, examiners expressed particular concerns about the physical aspects of candidates' performance. A number of performers claimed to be working in the style of Physical Theatre but this appeared to attempt to explain under-developed dance skills. The strongest work was where candidates devised work that was stylistically coherent and stretched them to develop their performance skills.

G402

There were fewer resits than in previous years. The strongest candidates demonstrated a strong command of technical vocabulary, able to use what they had learned in Unit G401 as the basis for their analytical toolkit in discussing the approach of pieces of repertoire. These candidates also demonstrated a reasonably good command of spelling, punctuation and grammar which was an essential ingredient in enabling them to express complex ideas in a helpful manner, rather than detracting from it. Finally, although it was seldom helpful, a significant number of candidates provided extensive amounts of biographical detail of the practitioner they were discussing.

G403

The number of re-sits was similar to that in previous series and accounted for 53% of the candidature. The number of responses was broadly balanced between the two topics of *Postmodern Approaches to the Performing Arts Since 1960* and *The Twentieth-Century American Musical*. Approximately 20% of candidates answered questions about *Political Performance since 1914*. This is the last series that candidates will be required to complete the tables at the front of the examination paper as to which works they have studied. From June 2014 there will no longer be a requirement for candidates to provide this information as a separate table.

There were fewer short, weak answers in June 2013 but there were nevertheless a considerable number that worked laboriously through the individual extracts, rather than relating their knowledge to trends in the topic they had studied. Candidates who scored higher marks were invariably those who demonstrated an overview of the topic rather than approaching their answer by art form or by separate works.

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The style of the mark scheme was reviewed and amended for the January 2013 series with the same approach being successfully repeated in the June 2013 series. Specifically, marks for the Quality of Written Communication were rewarded for the use of terminology appropriate to topic as well as generic standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The use of command words in questions continued to create problems for candidates who ignored them. Examiners reported that the most focused responses were from candidates who shaped their answer as required by the command word. A discussion is different to an analysis for example with 'analysis' of works being the most problematic activity in terms of discussing extracts studied.

G404

Performance standards continued to be higher in repertoire than in devised work, as in previous series. For some candidates, this skewed their total mark since the performance realisation accounts for less than one-third of the marks for the Unit. The quality of the student-devised pieces was more variable, especially when it came to creating original work from the commission. Many groups suffered from being too wed to their first idea, which was often one-dimensional and as a result not challenging their initial ideas sufficiently. As a result, the roles they went on to create often lacked depth, and occasionally purpose, and inevitably restricted the level of performance skills that could be demonstrated. The best candidates were able to work creatively with the commission whilst working clearly within it. Whilst all commissions produced examples of strong work, in the current series there were particularly strong responses from a number of groups that chose to work with one of the two images in the commissions.

G401 Creating Performance

This series mainly saw centres submitting AS candidates for their first submission, although there were a few resubmissions from the January series. Centres generally identified these candidates clearly. In the case of a resubmission it is normally the commentary which is reworked. However centres are reminded that they need to submit the performance evidence as well in all cases.

Administration

Centres supplied the correct paperwork and identified candidates clearly on the DVD. Moderators reported few problems with incorrect transcription of marks. Commentaries were generally well annotated, although there are still the occasional centres who submit commentaries without the appropriate annotations showing where marks have been awarded. Comments from the Centres on the Coursework Cover Sheet (CCS) are variable. The best are those that are word processed, are detailed and draw attention to areas in the Commentary or Performance that exemplify the marks awarded. Some centres need to be reminded that comments should be specific. The main area of concern is the awarding of marks for Devising and Performance Skills. Marks for Devising should be specific to the Community Piece and the Candidate's role and contribution to it. Marks for Performance Skills likewise should be specific to that piece and thus can be verified by the moderator when watching the work.

The quality of the DVDs is now of a generally good standard. However, there were still instances where candidates wore very similar clothing with no clear means of identification. The simple addition of a clearly visible coloured wristband is often all that is needed in these instances.

Commentary

Knowledge and Understanding

This area was marked well by centres. There was a clear awareness that candidates needed to show their understanding through the practical work they had devised, not only in the separate art forms but also in the Community Piece. High marks were gained by those candidates who ensured a balanced discussion between the separate art forms and the combined piece and were able to use technical language fluently. The majority of commentaries were structured correctly and the more able candidates correctly focused on the Devising Process and charted the development and refinement of their performance pieces through this. Centres correctly marked candidates at the bottom of a mark range if there were insufficient links made between the art forms.

Evaluation of Process and Performance

This area was often over-credited by centres. Often lengthy commentaries received high marks and displayed little developed ability to focus on the most significant aspects of the work and so display a high level skill. Many candidates wrote in a narrative, review fashion and yet were credited with analytical skills. Candidates needed to show that they had an understanding of the performance intention and style and how their work had been shaped by these demands.

Quality of Language

Centres were more rigorous about this set of marking criteria and most did not accept bad presentation and inability to spell technical terms correctly. Candidates need to write objectively and be able to handle complex ideas, producing a mature written style in order to be awarded high marks. Where candidates were unable to use paragraphs, capital letters, commas or full stops correctly, marks at the bottom of the mark range were appropriate. There were a few instances where an adjustment was recommended because of the over-marking of this area.

Community Performance

It is important there is a direct correlation between the Commentary and the Performance. Moderators are expecting to see a Performance that is fully supported by theoretical understanding and evaluation discussed in the Commentary.

Those candidates that achieved this:

- chose a true community issue or event or person;
- researched it thoroughly;
- let the research lead them into the devising of plot, generation of characters, and the preparation of a structure;
- described how the practitioners studied had affected the outcomes as they developed;
- cross-referenced to their intention consistently, not just at the end;
- discussed how their realisation had been successful or not in meeting their intention, what had worked well and why; and what had not worked well and why.

Of concern is that there were several performances that took place in the centre itself without any justification for this. It is a requirement that the choice of performance project is one that genuinely arises from the community and is not a more generic topic. Good examples of projects that have generated good performance work include 'The Manchester Riots', 'The Miners' Strike' and 'The Occupation of Jersey'.

Devising

The moderator needs to be able to see in the Commentary and the Performance evidence of the devising that has taken place in order to justify the marks awarded. Regardless of the individual contribution, if the overall piece does meet the required criteria laid out in the Specifications, it is not appropriate to award high marks. Generally centres are becoming more prepared to differentiate within a group the mark awarded rather than apply a blanket mark to all candidates within a group. There were instances of a strong piece but a single candidate appearing to do very little, and not credited by the centre for a specific contribution yet being awarded a high mark. Instances such as this necessitated a recommendation for marks to be adjusted.

Candidates need to be aware that the mark awarded for Devising not only relates to their own contribution but also to the piece as a whole and they have a responsibility for this. Pieces need to be fluent with appropriate considerations given to pace and transitions. Where the overall pace of piece is held up by unnecessary long scene changes or PowerPoint presentations or voice overs, the candidates need to be able to understand the direction and dynamic of the piece as a whole and not simply from their own viewpoint.

Performance

Candidates are expected to perform original material in all three art forms in order to be awarded marks in the highest mark bands. Candidates should aim for a balance of art forms and ensure that each is represented sufficiently. Common areas of concern were when students relied totally on a backing track to provide the music or assumed that Physical Theatre meant that

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Dance was automatically present. Although use of a backing track during the performance can be very successful, there does need to be some live performance of music to award high marks. Similarly developed Dance skills often suffered when Physical Theatre or symbolic movement was considered to be sufficient for this art form.

Examples of good performance pieces showing a range of skills were evidenced with Musical Theatre, Pantomime and Commedia Dell' Arte. Street Theatre-based pieces were successful when they genuinely considered the demands of the style and candidates had selected a good performance area. Too often Artaud-inspired pieces meant that candidates were concerned with the simple outcome of wanting to shock the audience rather than devise a piece which developed their skills and worked on a range of levels. However, moderators reported that there was more care given to the performing style in this series which allowed candidates to develop skills and characterisation rather than be confined by media stereotypes.

Centres are too often not using the full range of marks available within a mark band but have a tendency to 'clump' candidates either at the bottom or the top.

G402 Performance Contexts 1

General Comments

As with the last series, examiners reported some excellent responses which demonstrated detailed knowledge and understanding of practitioners and their contexts, expressed in well written, accurate English.

The Specification clearly states each question focusses on one of: elements of performance, stylistic influences, structure and form or cultural, social and historical contexts. These areas are not an invitation to write all a candidate knows about a given practitioner and fewer candidates responded in this way this examination series. However, a significant number of candidates, in answering a question about characteristics, stylistic features or structure and form, still gave responses that told all they knew about the biography of the practitioner which in most instances was not relevant.

Planning continues to be a mixed blessing for candidates. Where plans were good spidergrams or detailed enough to be useful without being so long they took a major chunk of time, they helped candidates create a coherent line of argument. Focusing thoughts, logically creating an argument, prompting good illustrations were ways plans were helpful. Other plans were little more than scribbled phrases or words. A plan should serve a purpose and be used. Abruptly ended answers were commonplace, either through running out of time or because of lack of thought given to a round-up paragraph to finish. A good, summative conclusion leading back to the question can finish an essay satisfactorily, just as an interesting, non-formulaic opening can set the answer off to a good start.

There were fewer 'one-size-fits-all' generic or formulaic answers given. Teachers seem to be taking to heart the point that such pre-prepared responses do little to help candidates in dealing with the questions in full. However, many still ignored the question and employed the generic answer. These were almost always matter-of-fact often failing to think of works as being performed to an audience or giving rise to generalisations such as 'the audience will always.....'

Some of the main weaknesses reported by examiners were the same as last series:

- a) Where candidates employed at least some of the language of the performing arts words (15 of them) learned in Unit G401, they performed markedly better. They were able to discuss illustrations from works and describe practitioner traits by real evidence, rather than vague terms - like 'Bourne's squirly movement' or 'The Beatles' happy melodies were very popular'. Weakness was particular marked when addressing elements of music.
- b) An unexplained play quote, a few notes scribbled on the manuscript paper or matchstick men representing choreography do not replace descriptors of how the drama, dance or music carries meaning and/or a message through entertainment. Where candidates acknowledged that the works they studied were meant to be performed (live or recorded), then they were better placed to evaluate performance skills and tended not to produce English literature responses.
- c) The Specification requires that choice of works for study must '*demonstrate broad trends in the output of the practitioner*' and candidates should comment generally on '*the relationship between the work studied and the practitioner's output as a whole*'. Candidates who understood that practitioners may have produced other work, or there are similar/contrasting works from the same or other eras that may illustrate a point, generally fared better.

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Fewer candidates had been prepared with less than four Beatles or Gershwin songs and fewer relied on songs from one album. A large number of responses (particularly to the Godber and Bourne questions) demonstrated a complete lack of reference to works studied, simply a list of techniques. A number of answers, particularly those for the dance and music practitioners lacked any movement/music examples respectively.

Several candidates failed to identify the number of the question they were attempting or wrote down the wrong number. Re-using material from previous papers may be helpful; but often it's shoved into answers like an afterthought or padding. Dance, drama and music terms are essential, especially with pertinent adjectives.

Quality of Written Communication

This continues to be a major weakness for too many candidates. Basic spellings, poor or no paragraphing and inadequate punctuation meant lower marks for many. In some cases the quality of written communication was so bad it made the content and knowledge/understanding almost unreadable.

Up to 6 marks per question (20%) are available for English, both grammar and style. Names of practitioners and studied works and words given in the question are essential to spell correctly. Examiners were concerned that many candidates did not know when to apply initial capital letters, when to use the apostrophe and when not to use text-speak abbreviations.

The practice of appearing to be on first name terms with practitioners is not welcomed as is the increasing use of wrapping people in inverted commas for no reason, such as 'Brecht' and 'Lloyd Newson' as if they were characters or work titles.

A number of candidates either stated the full question or repeated it at the end which is no replacement for a good opener and conclusion.

A quotation from or about the given practitioner or by another related person is a good way to start, but only if it's relevant, apt and concise and leads into the discussion and is not left unmentioned in any way.

While poor, vague or confusing style and expression was the hallmark of many candidates, language that flowed over reasonably complex ideas, that used names, places, titles of works and quotes correctly, was well rewarded.

There were many variations of spellings of Bertolt Brecht, from 'Breckt' to 'Breche' and sometimes Newson was referred to as 'Newsom', Bourne as 'Boune' and Berkoff as 'Berkhoff' or 'Berkhov'. Trinity Laban Conservatoire as 'Larben' or 'Larbon'; also multirole and playwright were rarely correctly spelt. Contemporary, repetition, orphanage, particular, playwright and definitely caused additional problems for many candidates.

Verfremdungseffekt and pas de deux were rarely accurately written. 'Over the top' was too often used as a technical term in the context of an acting technique appropriate for Godber's work. 'As I said earlier ...' was an example of poor style used frequently.

'Serious comedy' was a term used in relation to Godber's style but was rarely explained and often used in a matter-of-fact way. Where practitioners' names or key terms were misspelt, often the rest of the responses lacked knowledge of techniques and their application in the works studied.

A large minority of candidates used expressions such as 'alot', 'aswell' and 'infact' unaware they these are not correct grammatical terms.

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There is no substitute for encouraging candidates to read around and about the genres they are studying to help broaden their vocabularies. Equally, teaching the there/their/they're, where/were/we're and piece/peace differences and the correct way to write practitioner, contemporary, Brecht, 'Teechers' and English ways of writing colours, theatre and programme need to be picked up in centres moving forward.

SECTION A**Matthew Bourne****Q1**

The focus of the question was elements of the performing arts. It was often recognised that the eclectic Bourne is keen to incorporate elements of the original classical music from the original ballet/opera works he adapted, particularly those of Tchaikovsky and Bizet, but few candidates could demonstrate how this music was linked to actual movement sequences/examples in the works studied.

Direct correlation and music visualisation were picked up in top-end responses. Many also discussed the influences of Musical Theatre and Hollywood musicals/films, for example, the *Wizard of Oz*, the work of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers and films such as the *Twilight* series and *True Blood*. However, few candidates demonstrated how the music from these works linked to actual movement sequences/examples in Bourne's shows. One examiner described 'a scarcity of choreographic vocabulary.'

More often answers became a list of Bourne's devices and techniques, although knowledge of these was often extensive. These were noted the most: the ability of Bourne's dancers to act as well as dance and that his dancers must be able to use eclectic dance styles; lavish costumes and sets, lighting and other special effects such as smoke and pyrotechnics and a collaborative approach to choreography.

Most popular works were *Nutcracker*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Car Man* and *Swan Lake*.

Q2

This question focused on structure and form. Weaker responses focused only 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 structures his choreography'. Others became distracted with costume, set and characters.

Some candidates gave formulaic answers and only listed the requirements that Bourne demands of his dancers (although some candidates listed many demands common to all dance works, such as strength, agility, musicality and balance). Some simply focused on short passages they knew without referencing them to the question.

Many stronger responses discussed Bourne's structural techniques, like a strong narrative through-line and thus dancers being required to have acting technique and a rehearsal methodology to create a background to character; 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. Also noted was his way of dividing his pieces into acts and scenes and using music to assist the storytelling and to help keep the audience engaged; using an eclectic range of movement styles, to highlight appropriate moments in the work and thus attract 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 humour, his use of the spectacular and exploring themes such as sexuality.

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Most popular works were *Nutcracker*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Car Man*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Swan Lake*.

Shobana Jeyasingh**Q3 and Q4**

There were no responses to either question this series.

Lloyd Newson**Q5**

The focus of the question was performance techniques and numbers of responses showed a superficial knowledge of the studied works.

In most cases, candidates interpreted 'expectations' only to mean the physical risks and less commonly the aesthetic risks that the dancers took in performance and used the 'Pint Glass' and 'Pool Table' scenes in *Enter Achilles* or Eddie's club scene in *The Cost of Living* as exemplars.

More able candidates also went on to discuss Newson's expectation that his performers are able to identify and be comfortable with exploring taboo themes, particularly homophobia, homosexuality and disability in relation to *Enter Achilles*, *Dead Dreams...* and *The Cost of Living* respectively and how these themes were risky in terms of audience perception and the explicit presentation of these often through nudity and sexual imagery.

The most common examples of the techniques that Newson expects his dancers to be confident in included; use of dialogue and dancers who can act, pedestrian movement, contact improvisation, interaction with multimedia, risk taking, physical theatre, comedy, use of costume and props with better responses giving good movement examples from a range of Newson's works, particularly *Enter Achilles* and *Dead Dreams...*

Dance training led some candidates to confuse ideas, with some saying Newson hates ballet and won't have these dancers in his work. Weaker responses tended to resort to pure narrative. Pina Bausch was often cited as an inspiration, but without specifics.

Enter Achilles, *Strange Fish* and *The Cost of Living* were by far the most popular works.

Q6

The focus of this question was cultural, social and historical contexts and most responses demonstrated knowledge of the issues that Newson explores in his work. However, most candidates ignored the 'How successful...' part of the question. Thus, many responses became more of a list of issues rather than a discussion of the effectiveness of their portrayal in a number of his works.

Several candidates responded only to social issues, with one making a nod in the direction of historical contexts with 'the dance was made a long time ago'.

Most candidates talked of homosexuality as an issue and examples of others included: risk taking/taboo subject matter and how these often resulted from his psychological investigations during his earlier education in Australia; the tyranny of groups was with reference in particular to *Enter Achilles*, as was male pack mentality/identity/masculinity in general and how gay men are treated by homophobic heterosexual men; *Enter Achilles*' blow-up doll scene in terms of how men objectify women; religion and modern social media and its influence on society for good or bad, particularly the apparent rise in extremist thoughts and deeds by some within the Islamic faith in *Can We Talk About This?* and historic hate crimes such as those committed by Dennis Neilsen in *Dead Dreams...*

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Some candidates were clear that Newson requires dance to have a meaning so that is why his work is issue based and why each movement within must have a meaning. His degree in psychology was made relevant in many answers.

A good number of candidates were aware that Newson favours site-specific performance and the use of atypical or non-dancers and specifically disabled dancers (particularly David in *The Cost of Living*); also atypical dancers who can act and be comfortable with the use of dialogue; his time at London Contemporary where he encountered pedestrian movement and Merce Cunningham's methods, contact improvisation through the work of Steve Paxton, interaction with multimedia, physical theatre, comedy and traditional theatre's use of costume and props.

The most popular work was *Enter Achilles* by far, with references to *Can We Talk About This*, *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, *Strange Fish* and *The Cost of Living*.

Section B

Caryl Churchill

Q7

The focus of the question was elements of the performing arts which led some candidates to struggle to interpret the question. Most, however, discussed her use of overlapping dialogue in *Top Girls* and how this affects pace and adds to the realistic nature of the drama; the use of the vernacular, taboo language, song, verse and 17th century vocabulary/idiolect in *Vinegar Tom* but few were able to discuss more complex features of her dialogue, such as rhythm.

Few answers gave textual examples from the works studied, essential to illustrate points made when discussing a practitioner's use of dialogue. Many answers were formulaic and became general discussions on her feminist /political ideology, particularly in *Cloud 9* and ignored the question or focused on the difficulties performers may face in performing her plays, for example portraying historical characters in the opening scene of *Top Girls* and multi-roling.

In some cases the two questions were mixed and it was apparent from the numbers in the margin that candidates had started Question 8 and changed half way through to focus more on dialogue, therefore changing question number.

Most candidates gave a range of points related to dialogue and techniques and function of this. These included overlapping dialogue to convey natural conversation, juxtaposition of 17th century setting and modern language, her use of coarse language to provoke feelings and reaction.

Most candidates gave textual references to the works studied, although for the weaker candidates this became an opportunity to write examples relating to the theme of the piece but not their function.

Most popular works were *Top Girls*, *Cloud Nine* and *Vinegar Tom*.

Q8

The focus of the question was stylistic influences and weaker responses focused on only Brecht, with examples of Churchill's particular use of his techniques, specifically the episodic structure of *Top Girls*, direct address in the songs in *Vinegar Tom* and the use of song and other elements that are influenced by Brecht's 'verfremdungseffekt'.

Stronger candidates mentioned a wider range of influences including Artaud, 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 working in radio.

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Mrs Thatcher and her politics were described as an influence by some candidates. Few candidates gave any textual examples. Some focused only on the opening scene in *Top Girls* and discussed abuses that the historical characters had faced from men over time and then how Marlene and her office staff appeared to behave 'more like men' and the abuses that resulted as an example of Brecht's didactic influence.

Most popular works were *Vinegar Tom*, *Top Girls*, *Fen* and *Seven Jewish Children*.

Athol Fugard**Q9**

The focus of the question was cultural, social and historical contexts. Most candidates understood Fugard's world view, as most could identify the social and political context of apartheid in South Africa in the work and show an understanding of what Fugard was trying to convey to his audience.

However, although on the whole candidates could see the symbolic nature of the characters in *Boesman and Lena* and discuss Fugard's overarching aims and his need to tell the story of a real event, there was little, for example, on his atheist stance, his highly collaborative approach, his use of religious imagery and symbolic allusion to classical theatre to explore universal themes through the local action in South Africa or that the plays have to be performed with a South African audience in mind to convey the intended message.

Most candidates used lines from the text in examples and connected specific moments of action to the social context. The majority of candidates displayed good knowledge of Fugard's characters in *Boesman and Lena* and how the choices each character makes reflect the injustice and imbalance of power thrown up by the apartheid system. Good answers discussed Boesman's seemingly inexplicable treatment of Outa in this light.

Most popular works were *Boesman and Lena*, *No Good Friday* and *The Island*.

Q10

The focus of this question was performance techniques, and as last series, many answers read more like a literature answer than a performance one. Answers tended to the formulaic, with some good knowledge of Fugard's characters in *Boesman and Lena* but little sense of Fugard's demands on actors or his use of Brechtian techniques to structure his plays.

Many of the weaker answers to this question were often a list of narrative moments from the play with the line '...and this is how Fugard challenges his actors' tagged to each. There was little or no discussion of, for example, how Fugard's use of minimal staging, limited scene changes, Brechtian devices or use of small, often all-black, casts to help focus his message for an audience can challenge actors.

There was some acknowledgement of the role of physicality and textual references in support of discussion were generally effective.

Most popular works were *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *Boesman and Lena*.

John Godber**Q11**

The focus of the question was cultural, social and historical contexts. *Teechers* and *Bouncers* offered a focus for how the 'underdog' was represented. Many considered Godber himself to be an underdog.

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Discussions included how Margaret Thatcher's Prime Ministerial terms in office had affected 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 (northern culture defined as; rugby league, differences in nightclub culture, comprehensive schools v public schools, the decline of the fishing industry), 1980s Northern music, poverty of comprehensive schools in general, northern dialect and slang, taboo language and non-elitist theatre.

Weaker candidates provided very generalised/simplistic comments. For example; '...all the working class are poor...', '...the working class are all miserable...', '...the working class never go to the theatre...'. Better answers tied in elements of Marxist theory with Godber's aims and discussed the major influence that Brecht's didactic theatre had on Godber in practical terms, eg direct address, presenting identifiable situations, how government decisions affect ordinary lives, engaging and involving local people in artistic endeavor and widening participation in theatre in general.

Less perceptive candidates misunderstood this question and tried to justify some of the examples of bad 'underdog' behaviour in both 'Teechers' and 'Bouncers' as being good examples of the triumph of the 'underdog' (as the characters involved were seen to be 'enjoying' themselves), eg the culture of 'binge' drinking, having sex in public or Oggy's bullying. Some even started to discuss a nonsensical term, the 'overdog'.

Better answers saw discussion of the pathos/possibilities for change in Lucky Eric's speeches and redemptive power of theatre in *Teechers*. Most candidates used good biographical/contextual knowledge of Godber's influences including drama teaching, Brecht, Classical Theatre, TV soap writing, mining, sport, his own family, nightlife, music, Yorkshire, the north of England, working class issues, particularly lack of money.

The most popular works were *Teechers*, *Bouncers*, *Shakers* and *Salt of the Earth*.

Q12

The focus of the question was performance techniques. The majority of candidates took each of Godber's techniques in turn and demonstrated how these demanded versatility and adaptability from actors and gave specific examples to show how those demands were demonstrated in the work(s) studied.

Demands included: confidence in applying Brechtian conventions (eg breaking the 'fourth wall', spass and narration in *Teechers*); using Shakespearian-style poetic language; having good comic timing and being comfortable with creating humour through taboo language and improvisation; having excellent concentration and focus (particularly when multi-roling characters and getting across political issues); playing episodic scenes at a fast pace; engaging and involving potentially non-theatre audiences through recognition in 'Teechers' and 'Bouncers'; working as part of a Greek-style chorus in *Bouncers*; being familiar with Berkovian unison movement, mime and other 'Total Theatre' techniques, using Stanislavskian principles to emotionally engage with characters and to present identifiable, realistic scenes; coping with poor theatre conditions (touring, minimalism – few props or settings) and being able to dance!

Weaker answers focused on demands that are less specific to Godber and can be seen as requirements for actors in any theatrical production, for example learning lines, having energy on stage and attending long rehearsals. The opportunity to generalise without specific examples was embraced by too many candidates.

The most popular works were *Teechers*, *Bouncers*, *Shakers* and *Lucky Sods*.

Section C**John Adams****Q13 and Q14**

The number of responses to these questions was statistically insignificant, but answers showed a good working knowledge and understanding of musical vocabulary and elements.

The Beatles**Q15**

The focus of the question was stylistic influences and there was a wide range of ways of interpreting the question.

Many responses responded only to the first part of the question and simply launched into a discussion on how the Beatles influenced other artists. Other weaker responses largely focused on drug issues and often contained sweeping statements such as ‘...they were all influenced by drugs’ or that the songs ‘...are all about drugs’.

Better answers documented how the Beatles’ music changed over time with a good analysis of their musical techniques resulting from influences from across the world with examples; the most evident characteristics of the early works, 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, whereas the later songs have increasingly complex textures and timbres and are influenced by the latest recording techniques, such as those on the *Sergeant Pepper...* album.

Most candidates had at least a fair biographical/contextual knowledge of how the Beatles were influenced or involved with drugs, free love and the 60s hippy movement, fashion, the East (particularly the Asian sub-continent and Ravi Shankar), war (and peace), Rock and Roll, youth rebellion, Elvis, ‘Beatlemania’ and the teenage reaction to the 40s & 50s, the Rolling Stones, George Martin & Brian Epstein, Spector’s ‘Wall of Sound’, Broadway show tunes and newspaper reports.

Some candidates just focused on themes of the world and how these were shown in the works studied, which showed that candidates had a fair knowledge of the work of the group.

Most popular albums were *Sgt Pepper’s*, *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*. Specific songs were *Eleanor Rigby*, *When I’m Sixty-Four*, *Penny Lane*, *Strawberry Fields Forever* and *Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds*.

Q16

The focus of the question was structure and form and *Eleanor Rigby*’ proved fertile ground for good responses, how its story of loneliness and desperation is reflected musically, along with *When I’m Sixty Four* and how its bitter-sweet story of the ageing process finds a mirror in the music and instrumentation.

Other better answers discussed in detail how the structure of the Beatles’ work changed over time; the earlier work less story based and aimed at a young female audience, identified by repetitive lyrics (such as *She Loves You* and *Please, Please Me*), simple chord structures and harmonies and popular melodies whilst later songs having increasingly complex narratives (eg *She’s Leaving Home*), texture and timbre and the latest recording techniques such as overdubbing, multi-tracking, reverse tracking and drug influences resulting in unusual sound effects; also unusual Instrumentation (eg Harrison’s experimentation with the sitar), narrative lyrics and darker lyrics in songs such as *Eleanor Rigby*, orchestration and orchestral instrumentation and songs identifiably different from each Beatle (*Within You, Without You*, *For the Benefit of Mr Kite*, *Norwegian Wood*, *A Day in the Life*).

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However many answers lacked musical knowledge and analysis and simply gave a chronological and generalised Beatles' history. Also, nearly all of the weaker responses focused on drug issues and often contained sweeping statements such as the later songs '...are all about drugs', in particular when discussing *Lucy in the Sky*.... Better answers demonstrated how possible drug influences manifested in the 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'.

As last time, the most popular songs by far were from *Sgt Pepper's*.

George Gershwin

Q17

The focus of the question was performance techniques but few candidates discussed actual performances of the songs by any performers at all, current or past or even their own attempts at performing a Gershwin song.

Better responses discussed word painting, the songs providing drama musically and lyrically and identifying with universal themes and emotions. Other elements included singers required to inhabit the character and emotions of the song, providing light relief in dark times, changes in the mood or atmosphere to achieve an impact, the blues, chromatic notes, ascending and descending (pentatonic) scales.

Higher marked answers discussed a number of different performers' interpretations of various Gershwin works, such as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Janis Joplin's version of *Summertime* and Robbie Williams's version of *They Can't Take...* with detail on how these versions varied from the originals musically and in mood and atmosphere.

Many candidates had limited knowledge of other performers in interpretation. Focus was mainly upon the lyrics and the quality of the vocal tone to complement the songs in performance. Some missed the point of the question completely and just gave a biography of Gershwin and his works. Some candidates seemed to know four songs and these were not from across the whole period which limited candidates responses and points were repetitive.

Stronger candidates were focused upon the way the songs can be sung and also some candidates were able to discuss the links to the songs from the musical and gave general views about how they could have been performed.

The most popular songs were *I Got Rhythm*, *Fascinating Rhythm*, *They Can't Take That Away From Me*, *It Ain't Necessarily So*, *Swanee*, *The Man I Loved* and *Summertime*.

Q18

The focus of the question was structure and form and most candidates talked about how influences from Tin Pan Alley (although one candidate referred to 'Tinpanali'), song plugging, Broadway musicals, the Roaring 20s, the Great Depression, escapism, prohibition and cinema affected Gershwin and his ways of structuring his works and how Ira's lyrics enhanced the majority of the songs.

Most answers contained references to songs written to 32-bar melodies, divided into four phrases of eight bars each, the overall pattern of AABA (except *Summertime*), music by George before the lyrics were added by Ira, matching rhythm of words and music, moments where significant changes in emotion take place, manipulation of pause, rubato, verse use, blues notes, chromatic notes, ascending and descending scales, typically pentatonic, with some candidates able to pinpoint precise moments of the use of each in a wide variety of Gershwin's songs.

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Weaker responses were often where candidates did not put forward a strong argument about relating the structure to the story, but simply tried to justify why some of Gershwin's greatest works were structured/written poorly. Some relied on lengthy examples from lyrics with no understanding of syncopation or dotted rhythms, for example.

In almost all cases the justifications were at best tenuous at worst erroneous. For example '*...Summertime* is a lullaby so it puts the listener to sleep...', '*...Fascinatin' Rhythm* is dull because Ira didn't write the lyrics...' Better answers showed real enthusiasm for the works studied and discussed how they were structured 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 and gave the distinctive musical differences/similarities in melody and story between each.

The most popular songs were *I Got Rhythm*, *Fascinating Rhythm*, *They Can't Take That Away From Me*, *It Ain't Necessarily So* and *Summertime*.

G403 Performance Contexts 2

General Comments

There was a continued improvement in approach to the study of a topic area. Most centres appeared to have considered a broad range of works and practitioners for candidates to study. However there appeared to be a small number of centres operating in the way they might before the Specification changed, with reference to only three practitioners overall. This approach limits the marks available for those candidates, who have little to compare.

Treatment and discussion of the three art forms, central to this specification, was still generally weak. In Music, there should be evidence of musical analysis as well as knowledge of lyrics. Too often phrases such as 'simple melodies' or 'basic chords' were the extent of musical knowledge. In Dance, examples should be described using movement vocabulary and at the least considering the terminology from Unit G401. Descriptions of set and costume can be relevant and useful, but these only ever refer to one version of the piece. In Drama, the words learnt in Unit G401 appeared to have been lost and all too often Drama was expressed in terms of the issues raised. Centres should remind candidates of the fundamentals of the three art forms in all the topic areas.

Responses across the questions varied greatly from the chronological approach, particularly where musicals were concerned, to excellent examples of answers, which offered detailed overviews of the topic and exceptional levels of comparisons. The better responses were from candidates who appeared to have spent time on reading the question thoroughly and planning their response rather than getting a flavour of what was asked and then launching into what often became a very general answer.

In the American Musical there were still pointless and often lengthy reference to background styles; vaudeville, burlesque, revue, minstrelsy, operetta. This provided an unnecessary focus for candidates because in the main they did not have sufficient knowledge of works to which to refer. For example, occasionally, Lehar's *The Merry Widow* is mentioned as an example of operetta, but this was only useful if (in this series question 6) candidates had identified the eponymous waltz associated with the lead character.

The use of comparison across works, art forms and practitioners to illustrate points about the topic area enhanced answers. In high-level answers candidates made connections, indicating real knowledge and understanding of the topic area and often, in an individual way, offering illustration based on their own wider exploration.

The majority of centres are using well tried and tested texts some had also covered their own choices of Post-modern music, dance and drama (Gaga, Muse, ECHOA, *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *War Horse*, *Olympic Ceremonies*). There were many formulaic answers and examples of work where there was inaccuracy eg Taiwan instead of Siam for *The King and I*.

There were some very effective illustrations from recent contemporary work in both Post-modern Approaches and Politics and Performance but centres should not forget that the whole period indicated in the Specification should be covered.

Whilst the use of previous questions in preparation for this assessment is helpful in preparing candidates in a number of cases it was clear that candidates were attempting to regurgitate the answer they had learned and bend it to the question, rather than considering the question from the outset and then clarifying the ways they will use their various examples.

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There was an almost even balance across questions 1,2,4,5 and 6 at around 20% each with a very small response to question 3.

Quality of Written Communication

This varied considerably from the engaging, well-expressed, legible writing using vocabulary and terminology appropriate to the study of the three art forms to the barely literate and/or illegible, with many errors of spelling and grammar. Few gave thought to structuring an answer to the question, preferring to work through remembered lists, most commonly work-by-work and only in exceptional cases ideas, themes or even techniques.

Centres are advised to encourage candidates to consider the command words of the question in structuring their answers; thus 'analyse' expects a response that breaks down and interrogates a particular aspect, 'how far' or 'to what extent' expects the candidate to argue their stance and make a value judgement, 'discuss' allows for a broad response, but should come to some conclusion.

Stylistically, candidates should be encouraged to remember that when talking about the activity of a work then the present tense is used as it is a live thing. The past tense is used for review of a particular performance. Similarly, when writing about the work of particular people, the surname is used with the first name reserved to distinguish them from another of the same name. Over familiar references to 'Joan' or 'Christopher' ('Bruce' takes less time to write), Oscar or Jerome as though they are personal friends is inappropriate in this type of answer. The worst example of this was a reference to 'David' when even the artist nurtured the use of his surname 'Bowie'.

Candidates that had not learned the spelling of the names of the practitioners or works they had explored in the study of the topic area reduced their opportunities to gain credit. Some mistakes have appeared consistently in these reports for many series - practitioner, integrated, Rodgers, Hammerstein, Bernstein, Zeigfeld for example. The mis-spelling of key terms and practitioners in some responses gave an impression of ignorance rather than knowledge.

Understanding of the use of the apostrophe was generally weak and often tenses were confused, making for an interrupted read. There was an increasing tendency to create words such as 'alot' and 'aswell'. Some attention to the basics of literacy prior to the examination would benefit many candidates as 20% of the marks are given over to Quality of Written Communication.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1

Some of the answers appeared to adapt a prepared answer on use of high/low art and the mixing of the two, not anticipating inclusion of the idea of 'elitism' and 'guilt' so these tended to be afterthought references.

Most managed to address the question to an extent although there was some lack of certainty about high and low art. In dance, Anderson's 1950's images in *Cross-Channel* were discussed as high art but the more modern images were low, which seemed to miss the point slightly. Reich was asserted as 'high' but without identifying qualities that made his work so. It was not absolutely clear for some whether Drama was a high or a low art form - Churchill was sometimes considered 'high' where Act 1 of *Top Girls* was cited, but 'low' where Acts 2 & 3 of the same play were referenced. Candidates felt more secure in referring to popular music as low, especially Lady Gaga.

Question 2

Responses for this question tended to be more successful. Strong answers dealt with the characteristic techniques and offered examples from extracts that were familiar to a number of works from the three art forms. Weaker responses dealt with the response in a work-by-work account drawing attention to the techniques in each work. This type of response though tended to miss the idea of ‘characteristic’.

There were a few examples of candidates who interpreted the term ‘characteristic techniques’ somewhat awkwardly and did not really relate this term to the common features of post-modern works but rather to general dramatic terminology that is not really unique to the genre. Higher achieving responses compared texts throughout and allowed the post-modern features to drive the argument. Some did recognise that not all techniques used are ‘characteristic’ but many are individualistic, especially in this genre.

Some answers were approached by giving background of Classicism and all other time periods leading up to Post-modernism. These answers varied from quite weak lacking in breadth, depth and good knowledge and understanding of the development of the style to some very sophisticated answers that displayed good contrasts and comparisons across the art forms and in general were very engaging essays. One particularly strong answer quoted Fukayama: ‘end part of man’s ideological evolution; Jean-Francois Lyotard: ‘death of the grand narrative’ and Michel Foucault’s *Civilisation and madness* essay about the fact that traditional rules are no longer valid and the arts should evoke response, bringing contrast to the argument. These quotes and statements set the tone for a very sophisticated answer. Some answers had particularly good music terminology when evaluating practitioners such as Reich.

Question 3

Few candidates referred back to the Hendrix quote and most missed the nuance of ‘only music’. There was a lack of any sense of agreement or disagreement with the statement but most answers drew comparisons between the art forms and their relation to politics and political change. All answers had good historical context but failed to analyse in depth the political change the practitioners brought about through their works. Most candidates dissected and evaluated the appropriate techniques in terms of the political intent they created and some responses touched on political intent and also analysed the techniques but then failed to expand and give more depth to the point made. Some candidates showed superficial knowledge and understanding of political change brought about through the art forms.

Music tended to be the least well-treated art form.

Question 4

This was a popular question and responses ranged from variable depth to very strong answers that showed excellent detailed analysis about the communication of political views of practitioners through their art form. Some works and practitioners were applied particularly well to this question such as, *The Green Table*, Billie Holiday, *Vinegar Tom* and *Mother Courage*.

Some of the weaker answers were narrative in nature and failed to give any specific examples. This was a common failing across the paper. The strong answers had ample detail and good knowledge and understanding of common techniques across the art forms, practitioner-specific approaches and displayed effective overviews of the topic.

Question 5

Strong answers focused on the three key words in the question and dealt with these one by one which gave a thorough account, fully exemplifying them from a range of musicals. Many answers reinterpreted the question to become a discussion of the 'American Dream', which didn't always work. Whilst there were some valid points, these answers were more generic and were more likely to go off the focus of the question. The other problematic element of responses was that most candidates began with an overview of 'the antecedents' before plodding through the works in date order starting with Show Boat. On the one hand this gave a detailed account of the works but on the other, connections were missed and the responses felt largely generic. Analysis and appropriate terminology and vocabulary was lacking within the art forms.

Question 6

Examiners found a number of strong responses with the best answers discussing characterisation across all three of the art forms.

There were particular answers which discussed in detail the expression of characters through dialogue, music and movements in a wide range of musicals. Analysis of the song 'New York' describing how the music captured the rhythm of the city and the melody communicated excitement and intrigue as the three sailors explored New York and the characters become more realistic and naturalistic making them more identifiable for the audience, was a particularly strong example. Thus, there were some sophisticated answers that managed to analyse character across all three of the art forms making sophisticated connections across the works referenced.

Generally, this question elicited a very good sense of overview of the topic area but also betrayed a very narrow and limited range of 'extracts'. In the worst cases, some candidates were referring to nine numbers from musicals, without any apparent awareness of the rest of the pieces, the context. Thus, being able to explain how characters are created by the three art forms was difficult as they didn't have a clear grasp of the characters in the first place.

Question 7

No responses were reported.

Question 8

No responses were reported.

G404 Performance Project

General Comments

Administration of the examination

Examiners reported that the examination ran smoothly in almost all Centres.

The recording of the performances was generally without hitch and most were recorded in digital format, thus ensuring a good standard of image. Some centres used an external microphone, which greatly improved the quality of sound recording, especially where the camera was situated a distance away from the performance area. The majority of discs were chaptered, which was most useful for sampling purposes and for which examiners were very grateful. Several commented, however, on the length of time taken to receive the DVD after the examination visit, particularly in cases when the visit had taken place at the end of the examination period. There were also concerns about the number of recordings that had been transferred to disc in a format that was not playable to a standard UK DVD player.

A health and safety concern was reported concerning the use of strobe lighting, which occurred in a few Centres. There were requests that strobes are not used in future session as examiners are required to watch the whole piece and may be susceptible to the use of a strobe.

Advance documentation

Communication was mainly by email and this proved highly efficient, allowing easy adjustments to the proposed timetable. There were a few instances where communication between the visiting examiner and the Centre was slow to get going as a result of the Centre not completing a Visit Arrangement Form (VAF) form or supplying incorrect e-mail or mobile phone details.

The quality of candidates' descriptions of their devised pieces was generally good, although some focused only on the 'story' rather than the intention or structure of the piece. Some programme notes were highly detailed, which was not necessary since these aspects are best considered in the pre-performance discussion with the examiner. Some candidates brought bulky working notebooks to the discussion, although this was not required. Whilst the examiner is not expected to read them, some candidates found it useful to refer to their notebooks as an aide-memoire, which was acceptable since the discussion is not assessed.

As in previous series, many teachers provided detailed, informal notes on each candidate's contribution to the piece. Whilst there was not an exact correlation between these and the quality of each candidate's performance, examiners found it useful to know who had taken the lead for areas such as choreography, songwriting, set design or soundscape, which would have been difficult to work out from the piece alone.

Audience to watch the performances

Most candidates performed to a fair-sized audience, generally comprising their peers who were always supportive and responsive. Some centres put on a performance evening with refreshments for an invited audience of parents and friends. A few candidates performed in a large space that was empty save for the visiting examiner. This inevitably made it more challenging for candidates since there was hardly any audience response. As one assessor pointed out, there are many things to observe during a live performance and examiners cannot be relied upon to provide the encouraging response that might be essential for the success of a line, facial expression or nuance.

Performance Realisation

There was a broadly equal balance between the number of pieces taken from candidates' study in Unit G402 *Performance Contexts 1* and that from Unit G403 *Performance Contexts 2*. Those who elected to perform an extract from the latter unit had a broader choice of material available although there were a number of very strong performances of tried-and-tested pieces taken from repertoire studied for G402.

Group size and length of pieces

Many performances consisted of solo extracts, particularly dramatic monologues and songs; solo dance pieces were less common. Group sizes were appropriate, although this was not always reflected in the length of the extract selected, especially when candidates performed in larger ensembles. Some extracts were too short, which meant that only a restricted range of skills could be shown; others were too long, which frequently had the effect of slowing down the tempo and pacing of the piece, often with the performance focus dwindling towards the end.

Performance skills

Many candidates demonstrated a considerable range of skills in the three art forms. These ranged from those with professional aspirations to performances that were little progressed from GCSE standard. The best performances demonstrated a thorough understanding of the intentions of the practitioner and an ability to shape and craft these for an audience. The weakest work was normally typified by the opposite: lack of appreciation of the piece's style and a resulting inability to bring the performance to life.

Dance pieces

The quality of performance work in Dance was reported by examiners to be the best of the three art forms. There was a good variety of pieces seen and a very good level of technical skills that demonstrated consideration rehearsal and preparation.

The most popular practitioner was Matthew Bourne, and there were many performances taken from *Car Man*, *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker*. One notable feature of many of these performances was the candidates' ability to draw out characterisation and create a genuine sense of narrative. Other performances had technical expertise but lacked characterisation and differentiation. Other popular practitioners were Bob Fosse, especially *Cabaret*, *Chicago* and *Sweet Charity*. This also had a clear understanding of the style and technique, but often the energy, subtlety and sense of drama that took the work beyond a mere study. There were fewer Lloyd Newson pieces this session, although the physicality demanded by Newson's technique was not lacking in candidates' performance of pieces by other choreographers.

Drama pieces

The quality of drama work was variable. The two most significant differentiators were the candidates' approach to physicality and dialogue. In the case of the former, strong performers were able to bring to life their character in a manner that expressed bodily the nature of the role, whereas weaker performers were often wooden, or even static. With regard to dialogue, the strongest performers had a clear understanding of the meaning of the words they were speaking, in contrast to the significant number of performances where dialogue was treated as something akin to speaking magic words expected to create impact regardless of how they were spoken. Many candidates projected well, communicating the intention, whilst others were self-conscious in their presentation. There was a particular trend for weaker monologues to exude a sense of last minute preparation that did not fully convey the practitioner's intention.

The plays of John Godber and Steven Berkoff proved the most popular this series, with the most popular plays being Godber's *Teechers* and *Bouncers* and Berkoff's *East*. There were a significant number of performances of Jim Cartwright's *Road*. Candidates who attempted Godber divided easily into those who were able to cope with the demands of high-octane physicality and frequent change of role and those who simply spoke their lines. The scatological

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language used extensively by Berkoff and Cartwright proved a source of great indulgence to some candidates who immersed themselves in a tsunami of swearing only to lose sight of the role they were trying to communicate to their audience.

Music pieces

Virtually all candidates who offered music chose to sing and the quality of these musical renditions was more variable than in other art forms. The strongest candidates were focused, tuneful, able to create character and nuance through the subtleties of breath control and facial expressions, chose appropriate costume and used the performance space well. They showed good interaction with the other musicians, especially the accompanist and were able to communicate the intentions of the songwriter and the mood of the song.

There were many weak performances, however, and the most significant reason for this was the individual candidate's inability to sing in tune. However, this was often exacerbated by a range of other technical issues: poor diction, clenched jaws, poor breathing, sagging posture, inappropriate expressions, and disregard of the performance space, such that the performer appeared to have been rooted on the stage. In many cases the relationship with the accompanist was strained, typified by, both singer and pianist vying for sonic dominance through ever-increasing volume. Songs with live band accompaniment fared a little better but frequently overwhelmed the singer(s), whilst the extreme amplification of microphones occasionally distorted voices. Despite these pitfalls, however, live accompaniment was always preferable to the use of backing tracks.

The songs of George and Ira Gershwin and the albums of The Beatles remained as popular as in previous years. An equally large number of performances were of material drawn from the genre of twentieth-century American Musical Theatre, which allowed many opportunities and challenges in singing, dance and character acting. On one level, musical theatre proved attractive and accessible and not infrequently the stuff of school or college shows. The best performances were not simply those that were tuneful and well-paced but those that additionally conveyed a sense of characterisation and purpose. A small number of performers were outstanding, demonstrating complete mastery of their chosen piece. In other cases, though, candidates needed better levels of technique to achieve convincing performances and a number revealed major insecurities in singing, where there were problems of melody, tuning or musical expressiveness.

Student Devised Performance**COMMISSIONS****Images****1 *The Gray Drape* (2008) by Martha Rosler**

This was a popular choice. The reasons for its popularity were perhaps to do with the subject matter of the picture, which allowed candidates to explore a number of themes: the reality of war versus the falseness of glamour; the plight of the marginalised victims of conflict; cultural dissonance between the participants of war in the Middle East and the perpetrators in the West. Many groups explored the idea of intertextuality implicit in the image and were able to bring to bear their knowledge of the approaches of postmodern practitioners to the creation of the devised piece. The weakest pieces were simply generic presentations of the effects of war with hardly any specific reference to the image.

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2 *The Resurrection in Cookham Churchyard* (1926) by Stanley Spencer

This produced some variable responses, some set in supposed graveyards, others exploring the life of the artist; many interpreting the commission in a highly physicalised and effective manner. Some of the strongest work captured well the physical relationships between people and objects in the performance space and made the very best of the conflicts and resolutions possible through this. Performances inspired by dance were some of the strongest here, whereas more predictable responses included those where each resurrected corpse told the story of their life or perhaps sang a song, the worst versions degenerating into macabre comedies. This notwithstanding, there were also some effective Musical theatre interpretations of the commission.

'Then and Now'

3 *A woman's right to vote – 100 years since the 'Cat and Mouse' Act*

This was another highly popular choice, which allowed candidates the opportunity to explore issues of political injustice, gender inequality and suppression of the weak by the ruling class. Weaker performances were often straightjacketed by creating a generic piece about women's rights: a number of groups gravitated towards the theme of abortion and 'a woman's right to choose'. This made it difficult for candidates to explore the political issues about representation and suffrage that lay at the heart of the commission, although the element of force-feeding was explored fully in most pieces.

Some groups adopted a postmodern approach with a parallel story woven intertextually into the piece. Some of these pieces took their inspiration from Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and candidates were able to speak eloquently about the 'then and now' aspect of universal suffrage, contrasting the dangers of current apathy towards political engagement. The stronger elements in these pieces focused on the facts and figures directly related to the 'Cat and Mouse Act', which were dealt with from a distance with viewpoints expressed from both sides.

4 *1963: the Profumo scandal rocks the UK*

Examiners reported that the historical knowledge of candidates opting for this commission was often shaky. Several pieces attempted a montage of life in Britain in the 1960s in which *Coronation Street*, *The Beatles* and JFK's moment in Berlin merged in a drugs-fuelled romp through a series of scandals. Many were unclear as to who was in government in Britain at the time. That said, the strongest performances were based on solid historical understanding of the characters in the situation, their various interactions, the political sensitivities of the resulting international diplomacy and the significance of the affair in the context of the Cuban Missile crisis. These pieces were able to avoid the temptation of getting mired in sex scandals, exploring instead the relationship between the way in which the various characters manipulated or were manipulated by the events of the Profumo affair.

Poetry

5 *Bars* by Nicolas Guillen

This produced few performances. Those candidates that opted for it based their work on the interpretation of characters in the poem. This sometimes produced an interesting set of life stories of men named John in far-flung places. There was something of a tendency to produce pieces of narrative drama, although this worked reasonably well as structure.

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6 *After eight years of marriage* by Mamta Kalia

Although not a popular choice, this commission gave rise to some sophisticated approaches to issues of family, marriage and duty often including a through exploration of gender stereotypes. Examiners reported that the quality of performance derived from the poem was generally very high, perhaps inspired by the refined and elegant nature of the writing itself as several pieces were structured around the order of the stanzas.

Stories**7** Aesop's fable of *The hare and the tortoise*

This produced a number of allegorical comparisons between the fable and modern situations: effort and attainment at school, the race for political elections, the race for success and so on. Some good work was inspired by the candidates' study of postmodernism, interleaving of a modern story with the original fable. The majority of work was of a fair standard but few were able to develop the ideas with originality.

8 Charles Perrault's *Puss in boots*

Similar strengths and weaknesses emerged between this and the work seen for the previous commission and there were several parallel stories. The challenge for many groups was deciding on what constituted the 'moral' of the tale. There were a number of pieces where the narrative was so complex that it was hard to follow without detailed explanation on the programme notes. Other pieces were essentially pantomime, which often resulted in a clichéd approach that the candidates found amusing but frequently failed to connect well with the audience.

Performers**9** Josephine Baker

Several groups took a chronological approach, interspersed with original songs and snippets of a variety of song types and styles reflecting the era as well as narrating biographical details. Elements of Baker's life tended to be indulged, albeit occasionally to good effect in performance. Baker's relationship with Clara Smith, the blues singer, was often handled in a sophisticated way, sometimes through the use of song. Other pieces focused on Baker's role in the civil rights movement and this produced some strong performance work.

10 Kenneth Williams

This was a very popular commission, producing some of the strongest and weakest work.

The strongest pieces explored with some sophistication the context of light entertainment in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and were based on considerable research into the significance of BBC radio programmes of the era and the stereotypes that provided the staple diet of such comedy. They were also able to demonstrate how such comedy contained hidden subversive messages, such as in the use of Polari by comedians in shows such as *Round the Horne*. Williams' relationship with his father, his inability to form friendships and his secret thought world revealed through his diaries also provided rich pickings.

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By contrast, weaker pieces were more akin to an outtake from a *Carry On* film. Weak *double entendres*, poorly-executed slapstick, one-dimensional characters and vocal and facial impressions of Kenneth Williams were the order of the day. Although occasionally comical, the end result frequently had little by way of sophistication. Other pieces focused on Kenneth Williams' depression, producing clichéd work focused on the idea of an entertainer being 'happy' on the outside but 'sad' on the inside, a description that would apply to many entertainers and especially comedians. There was less focus on the farcical elements that might have generated some strong physicalised humour.

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