



**GCE**

**Performance Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 **H548**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H148**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2014**

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

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

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## G401/01 Creating Performance

### Administration

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

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

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

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

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

### Selected Material

Centres opted in the main for local legends both in an historical sense and also in the context of significant persons such as L.S. Lowry. There was one piece that dealt with letters from the trenches in WW1. Venues ranged from street theatre through performance in a chapel to promenade theatre in a disused quarry, and a civil war battlefield, as well as, where plans had 'fallen through', performances in centres.

One centre integrated projected video images into the action but this became a little problematic since the final section of the piece was exclusively video thereby depriving the audience of a live climax to an otherwise very well-told ghost story. Several other centres used video effects and care should be taken to ensure this does not replace live performance.

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

## **Assessment**

### **Knowledge and Understanding**

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

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

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

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

### **Understanding and Evaluating Performance Process**

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

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

### **Quality of Language**

There was a noticeable inclination towards the extensive use of the first person, (both singular and plural) in essay writing. Even in the case of quite sophisticated submissions candidates were prone towards a narrative style in which 'we did' was the dominant context. Many essays awarded 7 or 8 were clearly reliant on use of the first person and had to be reduced by as many as four marks. This is a commentary that requires academic writing; significant spelling, grammar and punctuation errors along with awkward syntax must be taken into account when awarding a mark.

## Devising

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

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

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

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

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

## Performance Skills

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

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

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

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

## **General**

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

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

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

When approaching the devising of the community performance project it might be useful for candidates to consider the following process:

- Identification of topic
- Research
- Initial thinking on community ideas
- Storyline
- Characters
- Intention
- Structure
- Practitioner influence
- Audience
- Devising content
- Ensuring all three art forms are working together and how they link
- Ensuring sufficient exposure for each candidate across all art forms
- Rehearsing and amending content
- Performing

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

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

## G402/01 Performance Contexts 1

### General Comments:

Headline advice points arising this year for candidates:

1. Think before writing, plan carefully at the outset;
2. Answer all parts of the chosen question
3. All responses should refer to live performances.

Some other comments are repeated from last session, although it was pleasing to see a number of improvements in responses as a result of previous reports.

Many candidates did not plan or if they did they ignored it with the result there are increasing numbers of after-thoughts and addenda at the end of each response. Poor paragraphing is often the product of weak planning.

The number of formulaic answers remained high. In generic responses, candidates gave a prepared amount of information without regard to the question. Within a centre it is clear if a generic approach has been adopted in teaching with repetition between candidates of the same paragraphs, statements and structure. One example is a centre where almost every candidate began with the same quote.

This approach is counter-productive as it prevents all but the very best candidates from expressing their individual thoughts and ideas and choosing appropriate references.

Examiners also reported more cases of PEE (Point, Evidence, Explanation) as the structure which often also avoided the actual questions. Many candidates forgot or were unaware that they were writing about performances to audiences. The approach to every question should include a sense of practical work.

Repetition of the question at the end of every paragraph in the hope that this would make the point clear, but it often didn't. A few candidates mixed up the questions they were answering across practitioners, such as discussing 'Bourne's use of minimalistic set' and another writing about how 'Godber challenges contemporary attitudes'.

While the majority of candidates were competent in using paragraphs to structure their answers, examiners reported what have become annual irregularities of basic grammar, punctuation and spelling, such as Bertolt Brecht became 'Brekt' to 'Brecht' and sometimes Newson was referred to as 'Newsom', Bourne as 'Boune' and Berkoff as 'Berkhof' or 'Berkov'. The Laban Conservatoire as 'Larben' or 'Larbon'. Multirole and playwright were rarely correctly spelt. 'Over the top' was again too often used as a technical term in the context of an acting technique appropriate for Godber's work. 'Serious comedy' and 'psychic set' were terms used in relation to Godber's style but were rarely explained and often used in a matter-of-fact way.

'Their' was frequently confused with 'there' and 'definitely' was often spelt as 'definatley' or 'defiantley'. Many candidates also had difficulty with the use of capital letters, particularly for the names of works or the practitioners themselves. Some candidates misspelt the names of works or characters in them (e.g. 'boncers', 'Oddy Moxton' Some candidates had problems using apostrophes, unable to distinguish their correct use.

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. The word 'relatable' is one we may have to accept in a living language, but candidates should use it correctly. Terms such as 'keep audience active' and 'tell them what's going on' were frequently used as a substitute for expressions that had real meaning.

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Rarely were candidates' answers illegible. However a sizeable number had large amounts of crossings out scattered throughout or strange symbols leading to parts of the answer at other points in the answer booklet, affecting the fluency of those answers. It was disappointing to see in this session that a number of candidates still referred to repertoire by their initials only, e.g. 'TCTTAFM' for Gershwin's song.

Disappointingly, a large number of responses in this session (particularly to the Godber, Newson and Bourne questions) demonstrated a complete lack of reference to works studied, and were barely more than a list of techniques. Some answers, particularly those for the dance and music practitioners, lacked any movement/music examples respectively.

On the other hand there were some candidates who structured their knowledge individually, using examples from the text to support points and reflecting the focus of the question. None of the questions could be tackled without the use of performing arts elements.

Where there was thin or absent mention of elements/technical terminology, it suggested that candidates lacked the vocabulary to do so. They were able to identify themes, ideas and the aims behind the work but not actually discuss the techniques or elements of dance.

It remains a concern of examiners that many candidates seem incapable of carrying forward their learning of elements and the vocabulary of performing arts from G401 into this exam.

Many candidates did not address all parts/facets of their chosen question. Focus on one alone aspect was usually self-penalising.

Biographical detail of practitioners were generally integrated into the responses, connecting with points made rather than as lengthy introductions, although weaker candidates still took this approach. Generalised comments like, 'The Beatles were the biggest band in the world' and 'breaking the fourth wall was a stylistic influence' were rarely helpful to the candidates.

Good conclusions were summative and rounded referring directly back to the question – on occasion they summed up the 'argument' that had been presented in the response rather than simply repeated everything mentioned earlier. Many responses were simply ended abruptly which may have been due to timing issues.

### **Comments on Individual Questions:**

#### **Question No. 1**

Few candidates defined the contemporary attitudes that Bourne challenges in his works, instead using 'contemporary attitudes' as a generic term linked to a list of his techniques. Some interpreted it as meaning the audience had an attitude to classical/contemporary dance. The idea of a context (social, historical and historical) passed many by. Sexual themes and links to homosexuality often related to ideas that the work thus became modern.

Frequently, answers focused on the 'engaging a wider audience' part of the question and ignored the first part completely. It was often recognised that Bourne was keen to shake up the world of traditional ballet, but few could discuss the deeper, more serious issues that Bourne explores, such as the role of men and women.

A few answers simply focused on how Bourne's homosexuality manifests in his pieces. Candidates discussed the influences of Musical Theatre and Hollywood musicals/films, for example, the Wizard of Oz, the work of Busby Berkley and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers and films such as the 'Twilight' Series and 'True Blood'. However, few candidates demonstrated how these works linked to actual movement sequences/examples in Bourne's shows. It was

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good to see a number of answers using Bourne's later work, 'Lord of the Flies' and 'Late Flowering Lust' rather than just old favourites such as 'Nutcracker!' and 'Swan Lake').

Several answers became a list of Bourne's devices and techniques, although knowledge of these was often good. These elements 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; the use of lavish costumes and sets and lighting; a collaborative approach to choreography and other special effects such as smoke and pyrotechnics.

Many responses lacked enough movement detail to substantiate the points made and often candidates didn't seem to know how to describe what a performer was doing or felt it was too obvious to write. There was a tendency not to locate moments or movements. Terms such as 'ballet, contemporary and social' were used frequently but without definition, explanation or exemplification. Many candidates have seen the work on DVD and either seemed not to realise that the work was performed live or missed the significance of Bourne's work being presented in this way.

**Question No. 2**

The best responses considered Bourne's influences and discussed narrative, juxtaposition, working methods, style and technique along side use of music and set/ costume / props and lighting.

Weaker responses did not realise the focus was on performance techniques and others concentrated only on listing performance techniques and added a matter-of-fact sentence after each, along the lines of '...and that is how Bourne's work is funny and moving'. Others listed the requirements that Bourne demands of his dancers (although some candidates listed many demands common to all dance works, such as musicality, strength, agility and balance).

However, a good number of stronger responses discussed Bourne's use of comic and tragic moments and gave good examples from his repertoire, particularly 'Swan Lake'. Some discussed these moments in relation to elements, such as: his works having a strong narrative through line and thus dancers being required to have acting technique and a rehearsal methodology to create a background to character; having the ability to mime and gesture effectively; playing character consistently throughout a piece; playing more than one role within a piece and using facial expression.

Examiners noted discussion of Bourne's ways of using filmic references to assist the storytelling and thus helping to keep the audience engaged and using an eclectic range of movement styles, incorporated by him highlighting appropriate sad or funny moments in the works and so attracting a wider audience than just lovers of ballet.

Discussion of Bourne's collaborative approach to choreography was often linked to the ability for the dancers to become the characters and suggestion in the selection process on character /actor based dancers were chosen. Relationship to the modernisation was also a key feature into how these ideas were realised. When performance techniques were discussed, focus on facial expressions such as Fritz and Knickerbocker Glory from Nutcracker were key examples. Moving moments often related to Swan Lake and the finale scene with the mother.

**Question Nos. 3 and 4**

There were no responses to these questions.

**Question No. 5**

There were different ways of interpreting 'dance with dialogue' which led some candidates to confine themselves to a musical-theatre approach of dialogue as just a section between dances. Candidates sometimes identified the elements of performing arts but became straight-jacketed by only referring to the actual spoken words in a piece (Nigel's monologue, 'Can we talk about this?'). Better candidates discussed soundscape, muttering, singing and the most sophisticated suggested all of the above plus that the movement itself represented a dialogue between characters or a character and the audience.

Discussion of the quote was often ignored and not discussed. Reference to physical theatre as the main aim of his work was frequent with relevant examples from 'Enter Achilles' and 'Strange Fish'. Few centres referred to more recent works (possibly due to the lack of DVD access). Most popular examples related to Nigel's dialogue and speech in 'Strange Fish' and the questioning of David's disability in 'Cost of Living'.

However, examiners were pleased to see that the majority of candidates interpreted 'dialogue' not only to mean the use of voice, but also the strong narrative elements that run through much of Newson's works. The fact that Newson is not comfortable with 'movement for movement's sake' was illustrated by the physical risks that the dancers take in performance and, for example, using the 'Pint Glass' and 'Pool Table' scenes in 'Enter Achilles' or Eddie's club scene in 'The Cost of Living' as exemplars of movement clearly 'telling' a story.

More able candidates also discussed Newson's expectation that his performers are able to identify and be comfortable with exploring taboo themes, particularly homophobia and homosexuality, relationships between men and women and disability, and how these themes were amplified through various dialogue examples and in terms of audience perception and the explicit presentation of these often through nudity and sexual imagery.

The most common examples of the techniques Newson expects his dancers to be confident in and candidates discussed 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', 'Cost of Living' and 'Strange Fish'

**Question No. 6**

Many responses demonstrated a good knowledge of the various behaviours that Newson explores in his work, resulting from his psychological studies and his interest in social, cultural and historical issues. However, some responses became more of a list of those issues rather than a discussion of the effectiveness of their portrayal in Newson's works.

Examples of behaviours included: risk taking/taboo subject matter and how these often resulted from Newson's psychological investigations during his earlier education in Australia; the psychological desire to be seen as 'fitting in' or 'one of the boys' was discussed with reference in particular to 'Enter Achilles' and male pack mentality/identity/masculinity in general and how gay men are treated by homophobic heterosexual men. In 'Enter Achilles', the blow-up doll scene was often discussed in psychological terms - how men objectify women.

Often candidates were clear that Newson requires dance to have a meaning, so that is why his work is issue and psychologically based and why each movement he and his dancers create must have a meaning is often linked to his own experiences and psychological background.

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Many candidates were aware of his time at London Contemporary Dance where he encountered pedestrian movement and Merce Cunningham's methods and that he uses site specific performance; atypical, non-dancers and disabled dancers (particularly David Toole in 'The Cost of Living'); dancers who can act and are comfortable with the use of dialogue; contact improvisation, physical theatre, comedy and the more traditional use of costume and props.

Some candidates seemed confused as to whether this was a stylistic influences or a context question. Candidates who focused on more contemporary and text based pieces often struggled whereas those who discussed 'Strange Fish; and 'Enter Achilles' were able to make very clear points. Many generic / formulaic responses were given where candidates discussed only how Newson was taboo, shocking and controversial. Often examples needed more detail to qualify the analysis given. Some responses lacked context.

The quote 'I only create when I have something to say' was frequently called upon. Candidates were able to deal with physical and emotional effects. In one centre candidates linked the question to influences such as Pina Bausch, Mary Wigman and Lea Anderson in similar psychological processes.

**Question No. 7**

Many candidates grasped that the focus was context and many had either a solid knowledge surrounding Thatcher, feminism, gender stereotypes through time or very weak understanding. There were some struggles to recognise how these elements were shown on stage but those that did were able to use the Brechtian techniques at work to help them explain.

Responses were often simply narrative but stronger candidates mentioned a wider range of attitudes, particularly towards the role of women as depicted in 'Vinegar Tom' and made connections with similar attitudes still prevalent in modern society. Few discussed more than one play or how historically Churchill would use improvisation whilst working collaboratively with actors to produce the work, particularly with Joint Stock, Max Stafford Clark and Monstrous Regiment and influences from her time in working in radio. The best responses drew on at least one other play, often more, to make a rounded answer.

Weaker responses focused on only one historical context, that of Churchill's feminist stance from her experiences in the 1970s and these candidates tended to focus only on the opening scene in 'Top Girls' to discuss the abuses that the historical characters had faced from men over time. Some discussed how Marlene and her office staff appeared to behave 'more like men' and the abuses that resulted. Some used this as an example of Brecht's didactic influence.

Most candidates mentioned only Brecht as influencing her work with episodic structure and direct address; some understood 'verfremdungseffekt'. Many candidates were unable to give textual examples or understood that it was performed drama they were considering.

**Question No.8**

This question required candidates to refer to elements used to help create the characters but many responses only identified characters and occasionally their contexts. Narrative discussion came from this and it was disappointing that candidates at most referred to overlapping dialogue to show how we all act in normal day life and offered little else.

Examiners felt this could stem from a lack of reading the question thoroughly which prevented many from showing understanding of Churchill's work. Stronger candidates selected a range of techniques and gave supporting textual examples. Linking to songs, multirole, gender swapping and historical/social backgrounds to support character development were key points made.

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Large numbers of candidates focussed only on the ‘uncomfortably familiar’ aspect. They still covered many relevant points (Brechtian devices to deconstruct stereotypes, for example) but didn’t always explore how these worked in practice.

Most candidates discussed Churchill’s use of overlapping dialogue as in ‘Top Girls’ and how this makes the scenes more realistic and the characters more familiar. Some recognised how this device affects pace and increases tension and how the use of the vernacular, taboo language also adds to the overall familiar nature of the drama. Stronger answers discussed how the use of song, verse and the 17<sup>th</sup> century vocabulary/idiolect in ‘Vinegar Tom’ challenged our idea of the familiar.

Disappointingly, many answers were formulaic and became general discussions on Churchill’s feminist /political ideology and ignored the question or focused on long, generalised discussions about Margaret Thatcher’s policies or the difficulties performers may face in performing some of her plays, for example portraying the historical characters in the opening scene of ‘Top Girls’.

**Question No. 9**

The take up of this question was very low. Most of the responses tended towards a narrative account of the Boesman and Lena story, with a contextual overview of Fugard to begin and ignored the main thrust of the question.

Better responses picked up on the ‘agent for change’ aspect and discussed how public attitudes have changed over the decades about race relations and equality of opportunity, poverty and respect and how big a part Fugard might or might not have played in that. Most found the key theme as the role of white people during Apartheid.

**Question No. 10**

Very few candidates responded to this question. While in answering the question it was necessary to use elements of drama and a number of social, cultural and historical contexts, the form and structure that was required was less well treated.

Candidates had seen their chosen play only on DVD and often a sense of describing a live piece of theatre was missing.

**Question No. 11**

The question asked for dramatic elements, so it was surprising to find some responses with no mention of them. The majority took each of Godber’s techniques in turn and demonstrated how these were linked to a minimalist ideology, giving specific examples from the work(s) studied to show why Godber’s work is effective without ‘a fancy set...’.

These elements included: Brechtian conventions (e.g. breaking the ‘fourth wall’ and direct address/narration in ‘Teechers’); using Shakespearian-style poetic language; actors having good comic timing and being comfortable with creating humour through taboo language and improvisation; having excellent concentration and focus to keep the audience engaged, (particularly when multiroling characters and putting across political issues); episodic scenes played at a fast pace; engaging and involving potentially non-theatre audiences through recognition in ‘Teechers’ and ‘Bouncers’; the use of a Greek-style chorus in ‘Bouncers’; Berkoff inspired unison, movement, mime and other ‘Total Theatre’ techniques, poor theatre conditions (small-scale touring which by definition does not/cannot have a ‘fancy set’ and is thus minimalistic with few props or settings).

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Weaker answers focused on elements that are less specific to Godber and can be seen as involved in any theatrical production, for example actors learning lines and needing stamina, having lighting on stage and the need for rehearsals

There was a frequent lack of detailed references from plays – often candidates only remembered the vulgarities or occasional words that characters uttered – ‘knackers’ being sufficient to quantify ‘Northerness’. Godber’s responses suffered from confused context and lack of detailed study with candidates making lots of small factual errors that accrued a sense of underdeveloped work.

Some candidates grasped the idea of keeping the work contemporary and struggled with an 80s’ context therefore often missing the political / social comments. Many over generalised about Thatcherism and were confused about middle class / working class. A minority related Godber’s work to current economic and education issues.

Examiners reported that teachers appear to be guiding candidates to use the same stock examples which shows lack of independent learning and stifles development of responses. However, examiners also welcomed the increased numbers of candidates referencing and comparing/contrasting different pieces from Godber’s repertoire to exemplify points.

A minority answered parts of both Question 11 and 12. Many claimed that Shakespeare was responsible for choral speaking. In one centre he was attributed with the invention of the fourth wall, multi-role and direct address, which suggests a fundamental misunderstanding.

Some candidates made a link between the political style of Godber with Dario Fo without explaining it and some cited stock characters from Commedia dell’Arte, often without understanding it in relation to Godber. Many identified the influence of Berkoff but couldn’t identify what the influence was although some related it to physicality and exaggeration of physicality.

**Question No. 12**

The question was to the point. It was therefore disappointing that some candidates simply wrote all they knew about Godber.

However, most candidates had a good biographical/contextual knowledge of Godber’s influences including drama teaching, Brecht, Classical Theatre (including Shakespeare and his use of soliloquy, prologue and epilogue), writing for TV (particularly soaps), mining, sport, his own family, nightlife, music, Yorkshire, the north of England in general and working class issues, particularly a lack of money. ‘Teechers’, ‘Shakers’ and ‘Bouncers’ were the main works studied and most candidates chose to focus on how Godber’s influences were represented in these plays.

Stronger answers tied in elements of Marxist theory with Godber’s aims and discussed the major influence that Brecht’s didactic theatre had on Godber in practical terms, e.g. direct address, presenting identifiable situations, how government decisions affect ordinary lives, engaging and involving local people in artistic endeavour and widening participation in theatre in general.

Discussions included how Margaret Thatcher’s prime ministerial terms in office had affected Godber and ‘the North’, the miner’s strike of the 1980s, unemployment and poverty of the northern working class, northern culture in general seen as disadvantaged as opposed to the culture of the south and manifesting in scenes in his plays (northern culture defined as - rugby league, differences in nightclub culture, comprehensive schools v public schools), the music in the 1980s, poverty of comprehensive schools in general, northern dialect and slang, taboo language and non-elitist theatre and how these issues were manifested in the plays.

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Weaker candidates provided generalised comments about Godber's background. For example; '...all of the working class are poor...', '...the working class do not understand...', '...the working class never go to the theatre...' In one centre candidates thought Stanislavski was the prime influence. There were inaccuracies of information in some responses, such as Hull being Godber's birthplace.

**Question Nos. 13 and 14**

The take up of these questions was minimal. Both questions required a musical knowledge and ability to describe elements through examples from repertoire that were amply displayed by top candidates but were beyond the scope of weaker candidates. In those cases, focus was on the American themes of the works studied 'Shaker Loops' and 'On the Transmigration of Souls', but little else was offered.

**Question No. 15**

Many responses revealed candidates did not fully understand the question. It was equally valid to interpret it as performing live in the 1960s or today. It focused on performing techniques.

Responding to the first part, most took 'a four piece rock 'n' roll group' to mean any group (not the Beatles), and so launched into a discussion on how bands now cannot play Beatles' songs live, which is almost impossible to justify with available modern technology and the myriad of effects pedals and sophisticated equipment used by modern bands.

Other weaker responses were mainly conjectural, focused largely on drug issues inhibiting the Beatles' ability to play live and often contained sweeping statements such as '...they couldn't play because they were all on drugs' or that the songs '...are all about drugs'.

Better answers documented how the Beatles' music changed over time and how developments in studio recording techniques meant that many of the later songs could not be fully replicated live. These answers had a good analysis of the Beatles' musical techniques resulting from influences from across the world with examples, including 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.

However, the increasingly complex textures and timbres of later songs influenced by the latest recording techniques, such as those on the 'Sergeant Pepper...' album, and how these techniques/sounds were simply not possible to be played live at that time, needed explaining. 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), war (and peace), Rock and Roll, youth rebellion, 'Beatlemania' and the teenage reaction to the 40s & 50s, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, George Martin and Brian Epstein, Spector's 'Wall of Sound', Broadway show tunes and newspaper reports.

Many responses lacked musical detail and/or notation. Some had knowledge of instruments and lyrics. Where musical detail was present it was often not fully understood/exemplified and was poorly expressed. Effective answers included the lack of manipulation of music would make live performance difficult, more performers would be needed than just a 4 piece band, dog whistle used just to annoy pets, lack of equipment from the day (hard to get hold of a Leslie speaker now), lots of synthesised sounds and looping would all make presentation difficult.

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A few candidates used only 2 or 3 songs, and if their analysis was poor, they achieved no higher than Level 2. Where candidates referenced more than 4 songs and often cover versions and songs of others, they fared better. Some candidates were not able to spell the names of the musicians correctly or the names of the instruments and equipment referred to. Some told the story of The Beatles from the start. Many attributed the wrong influence to the wrong Beatle and were confused with who did or wrote what.

**Question No. 16**

Stronger answers discussed in detail how the structure of the Beatles' work changed over time and argued how the melody often reflected these changes - the earlier work less story based and aimed at a young female audience, identified by repetitive lyrics (with examples from songs such as 'She Loves You' and 'Please, Please Me'), simple chord structures and harmonies and popular melodies whilst later songs had increasingly complex narratives (e.g. 'She's Leaving Home'), texture and timbre and the latest recording techniques. These techniques included overdubbing, multi-tracking and reverse tracking.

Drug influences were discussed as resulting in unusual sound effects; as was unusual instrumentation (e.g. 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 (most examples here were from 'Within You, Without You', 'Norwegian Wood', 'I am the Walrus' and 'A Day in the Life'). 'Eleanor Rigby' often produced good responses with the story of loneliness and desperation reflected musically, as did 'When I'm Sixty Four' and how its bitter-sweet story of the ageing process finds a mirror in the music and instrumentation.

However there were a few answers that lacked any musical knowledge and analysis and simply gave a chronological and generalised Beatles' history. Almost all weaker responses focused on drug issues, especially when discussing 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'. Better answers demonstrated how possible drug influences manifested in the later works through sound; the latest recording techniques resulting in unusual sound effects reflecting a drug-induced state of mind and body and thus telling a more disconcerting autobiographical 'story'.

Some candidates discussed melody with examples of lyrics to support ideas. A range of songs were discussed often chronologically. When candidates focused on structure and form some found links to Tin Pan Alley.

**Question No. 17**

The question clearly reminded candidates to consider the songs as performances. The better responses showed evidence of musical knowledge/vocabulary, musical elements and examples of lyrics and/or notation to support their discussions. Some used neither notation nor elements.

Most candidates understood influences from Tin Pan Alley (although some candidates referred to 'Tinpanali'), song plugging, Broadway musicals, the Roaring 20s, the Great Depression, escapism, prohibition and cinema affected Gershwin and resulted in songs requiring a range of performance skills from artists to tell the story of each.

A 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. The 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.

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However, there were a few stronger answers which did discuss a number of different performers' interpretations of various Gershwin works, such as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and more recently Robbie Williams's version of 'They Can't Take That Away From Me' with detail on how these versions varied from the originals musically and in mood and atmosphere.

Detail of performance techniques were varied and often focused on dynamics to portray the quality of the songs. Discussion also took reference to the lyrics and the qualities to display but 'how' was often not discussed. Some examples related to performers being able to articulate the lyrics in performance. Some were able to discuss the theatricality of the lyrics delivery and related to the style of the song. In some stronger candidates work links to rhythmic patterning and intonation placed to accent was discussed.

**Question No. 18**

The question clearly reminded candidates to consider musical elements. The better responses showed evidence of musical knowledge/vocabulary, musical elements and examples of lyrics and/or notation to support their discussions. Some used neither notation nor elements.

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

Weaker answers were often where candidates did not put forward a strong argument about relating the melody to the structure or to the story, but simply tried to justify why some of Gershwin's greatest works had a poor melody. In almost all cases the justifications were at best tenuous, at worst erroneous. For example '...I Got Rhythm is not as good as his other songs because his brother Ira didn't write the melody...', '...the melody of Summertime is a lullaby and it puts you to sleep...'

Better answers showed real enthusiasm for the works studied and discussed how the melody enhanced the lyrics, pace or mood by analysing a range of Gershwin's techniques with examples, to show how the songs provide drama musically and lyrically and identify with universal themes and emotions. Better answers analysed the works studied and gave the distinctive musical differences/similarities in melody and story between each.

In centres where formulaic teaching was adopted, examiners reported rote learning of musical notation examples which led to answers following very similar discussion and range of points.

## G403/01 Performance Contexts 2

### General Comments:

In this session, there was more of a focus on the key words of the question and a more obvious attempt to address the area of study and consequently the responses were a little better than previous sessions. Candidates were considering responses to the questions, rather than merely reproducing pre-learned answers. Those “formulaic” responses have been a regular feature of these reports in the past, and it is most welcome to report a minimal use of that kind of approach, this session. There was still much generality, unsupported assumptions and claims, but at least they were within a framework that had some relevance to the question.

There were only a small number of oddities, such as the candidate who attempted to answer Question 4 having studied the American Musical.

A very broad range of works were studied across the three topic areas – the questions on Performance in the Far East were not answered by any candidates. Very few candidates now offer evidence from the works of a small number of practitioners, and there has been a refreshing increase in new works explored in all topics. Whilst this may seem easier in Postmodern Approaches and Politics and Performance, more adventurous explorations into the American Musical paid dividend for some candidates. For example, evidence drawn from *Pal Joey* and *Babes in Arms* provided worthwhile examples for both questions.

There has also been some interesting crossover work with candidates using American Musicals, *Showboat*, the original un-sanitised version of *Babes in Arms*, *South Pacific* and *As Thousands Cheer* as examples of Politics and Performance.

The area for improvement, based on the range of answers this session, would be the offering of detail in the examples quoted. Many think that giving illustrations and examples from works means merely to mention a scene, a song title, a moment or three words of dialogue, rather than exploring the techniques/contexts within that reference. Generally, detail in the references was thin, and consequently tended to underline the fact that there was knowledge, but little understanding. Discussion of works was more descriptive and narrative in content than has been encouraged in the past and a focus on analysis of the works as both pieces of performance and examples of a type is advised.

More candidates seem to be able to sustain an argument. However, there are some who list the works, often chronologically for the American Musical, and just tell all they know about each work with little heed paid to the question until the conclusion. Strong candidates used the features of the topic and the 15 elements from G401 in their writing and gave good detail in their examples across the three art forms. These candidates can also make comparisons and links across the art forms and the historical period betraying their clear knowledge and understanding of the topic.

Linking and comparing between works to develop a coherently structured response to a question was variable across the three topic areas, but is a skill that can lift an answer from the ordinary to something more accomplished. Making connections that illustrate an understanding of the topic area, such as comparing Jooss' *The Green Table* with Bruce's *Ghost Dances*, the love triangles in *Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story* and *Sweeney Todd*, or the dance work of Akram Khan and composer Nitin Sawhney with Michael Nyman and Shobana Jeyasingh.

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In relation to Politics and Performance, there needs to be more of a focus on context within this genre as it is integral to the topic. Certainly, question four indicated very general and sometimes incorrect knowledge.

In the American Musical, a small number of candidates slipped into reviewing-of-film mode, describing sets, proxemics, the looks between characters and their facial expressions. Whilst it is important for candidates to understand the performance potential of the music, dance and drama of a piece, it should be expressed in that way rather than merely describing what happens in the version they have viewed. What you can do with set on film is far different from what is possible on stage. At least one candidate used material from an Astaire/Rogers film musical of the mid-1930s, most of which were created for film and have stayed on film and therefore are outside of the scope of this specification. However, understanding the context of the rise of Hollywood musicals and their impact on new shows on Broadway is important.

On a more positive note, there was evidence of more candidates avoiding the simple chronological approach and attempting to answer the American Musical questions with more comparisons, drawing links across exemplar works, making a point and then offering examples from across the century resulting in more effective answers.

### Quality of Written Communication

Where the written communication is of top quality it is very good indeed and all examiners reported not only a noticeable increase in length of answers, but also a general improvement in the quality of language. This comes together with an increase in the use of terminology appropriate to the discussion, at this level, of the three art forms and the performing arts, in general. There has been a particularly marked improvement in the attempts to use, explain and discuss music repertoire using relevant terminology correctly.

However, in a number of cases, the handwriting was illegible. Whilst examiners may be forced to give the benefit of the doubt in spelling, if the sense cannot be understood then the written communication is failing. There were some candidates who do not use or appear to understand paragraphs or, indeed, sentences. Whatever, the relevance and quality of the content, if it is contained within a page-long sentence that has lost all sense of clausal construction, then the potential knowledge and understanding displayed, will tend to become counter-productive amidst a never-ending statement.

From the point of view of style, candidates should avoid comments such as “the nine works I have studied” or “The next work I studied..” or “the extracts I studied....”. What they should have studied is the topic, for example Post Modern Approaches or the Twentieth Century American Musical, through those extracts. Similarly, conclusions featured, but weaker candidates simply repeated points that had been raised earlier in the answer and not all of these were directly related to the question.

Moreover, there are still too many candidates even at the higher end who have difficulties with spelling, grammar and expression (Brecht, Ziegfeld, Fosse, Caryl, Cabaret, contemporary, integrated, practitioner, crescendo, staccato). The mis-spelling of relevant vocabulary to the subject and character names often spoils what could be a good paper. *Oklahoma!* seems to suffer in every possible way: Laurey has an ‘e’, Curly doesn’t, Jud has only one ‘d’, but Judd in Godber’s *Bouncers* has two.

Finally, there are still more candidates than one would wish who mis-spell words used on the question paper in front of them and incorrect use of apostrophes is widespread but not yet universal.

**Comments on Individual Questions:****Question No. 1**

Most candidates did not seem to have come prepared to discuss practitioners working together and re-routed the question most frequently into stylistic influences and/or reworking existing material e.g. *Metamorphosis*, *Swan Lake*, followed by 'another interesting approach is...' and thereafter writing about all other Postmodern approaches they knew.

Collaboration, takes place between people, live people. Berkoff did not collaborate with Shakespeare or Kafka. Neither do art forms collaborate, practitioners of art forms collaborate and it has become a feature of works in the last 50 years. As the boundaries between popular culture and "high art" have become blurred there has been an increase of people seeking to work together: Mark Morris and Yo Yo Ma, Cage and Cunningham (and Rauschenberg), Wilson, Glass and Childs, Bowie and Eno, The Beatles & Ravi Shankar/George Martin et al. Practitioners who encourage collaboration with their cast, company or group could also have offered rich material for this question, Churchill, Bourne, Frantic Assembly on *Curious Incident*. There were few answers that genuinely looked at true collaboration between artists. Many answers alluded to a known collaboration rather than discussing the process between them.

This question also yielded some very strong answers that had sufficient depth, breadth, comparison and links across the art forms as well as a strong argument. Most of the answers communicated both sides of the argument.

**Question No. 2**

This was a deliberately provocative question, which in the main produced some thoughtful answers and proved popular with candidates. Many understood the implied elitism and then discussed and argued around the idea using reference back to Modernism from which Postmodernism had latterly emerged. This question gave rise to a wide variety of responses with most stating that the performing arts had not been ruined by Postmodernism, on the contrary Postmodernism had enhanced, improved and developed performance work. The best answers discussed the attitudes evident in high art and popular culture, considered both parts of the discussion implied in the question, adding why both perspectives might be possible and why, drew on a wealth of texts, including discreet and integrated works to back up points rather than discussing one work at a time and trying to make each fit the question in some way. These stronger answers dealt with the techniques first and then used this as a basis for determining whether or not the performing arts had been ruined. For example, intertextual elements seen in the work of Berkoff may ruin the work for Shakespeare lovers but widens the audience for others to appreciate. In dance, the use of parody and pedestrian movement in the work of Lea Anderson may alienate lovers of classical ballet but makes her work accessible to all regardless of expertise and knowledge in dance.

Some candidates used the question to frame an 'all-I-know' response which was top and tailed by a paragraph rephrasing the question.

Candidates from at least one centre still used copious data from the Postmodern theorists, in some cases at the expense of practical details, like techniques used in the performing arts. Theory has a place, especially when discussing techniques, but should not over-ride other practical ones. The focus is on the performance practice not textbook theory.

**Question No. 3**

This was not a popular question and there was sometimes lack of clarity regarding 'stylistic development'. Several interpreted stylistic development in broad terms, which was usually acceptable. It was not necessary to agree with statement, the best candidates often disagreed.

Many candidates were confused as to what issues were the same in the past 100 years and this may be a reason why so few approached the question. Most focused on the issue of war and addressed this with references to Jooss' *The Green Table* and Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War* but failed to link this to stylistic development. Stronger responses were able to discuss the way in which stylistic development has reflected issues in different ways e.g. the role of satire and how it has developed from *The Green Table* to *Swan Song* and didactic instruction from Jooss through to Dylan. Issues such as gender and human rights were discussed and comparisons were drawn as to how practitioners focused on these issues from a wide range of works including the musicals *Hair* and *Show Boat*. Contextual evidence was key to this one, and the best provided it.

The degree of agreement with the statement was ignored in probably half the responses.

**Question No. 4**

This question was the more popular of the two, but often answered simply by citing the context/issue and describing the response: few responses went as far as to analyse. Thus, the weakest element in this question was the response to the command word in the question. Most candidates were able to talk about issues and topics but few were able to fully dissect works so that they could reflect the command word and therefore fully address the question. Issues were addressed more than context and there needed to be more of a focus on the social, cultural and historical aspects to fully appreciate the question. Strong examples included Brecht's use of *gestus* to reflect the issue of corruption, inequality as expressed through the music of Bob Dylan and Ailey's focus on human rights and suffering.

There was occasional use of social, cultural and historical context and there was, in a sense, a 4th context at the heart of this question, the 'political', which was, in many cases, sketchy and at worst, incorrect.

**Question No. 5**

This was a very popular question but many responses highlighted a lack of understanding of the relationship between characters. Most candidates discussed the role of the main protagonists, but they did not see through the whole work and opportunities were often missed to explore sub plots for example, the Ado Annie love triangle in *Oklahoma!* or Angel and Collins in *Rent*. There were some very good answers which commented on Music and Dance foreshadowing what was to come and some interesting discussions of 'anti-romance' – in relation to *Cabaret*, *Sweet Charity*, *Chicago*, *A Chorus Line* and especially *Company*.

Treatment of this theme was often interpreted only through songs, the effect of underscore got a mention, but there was very little reference to dialogue or action. For this question, the Sky-Sarah running metaphor on "chemistry" from *Guys and Dolls* would have been an ideal example and there are many more.

Some showed weak Knowledge of exemplar works in responding to this question and struggled to bend prepared examples to fit: that Joe sings because he loves the river in *Showboat* or that Roxie loves fame and herself in *Chicago*, and the Emcee loves the Kit Kat Club.

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Re-working knowledge and understanding to answer a question is a skill to be admired and encouraged however, these attempts to shoehorn information into an answer became transparent and often irrelevant. For example, with reference to *West Side Story*, “Romance and love don’t feature very much in this musical, it is more about hatred and gang violence”. Thus followed a lengthy discussion of Sharks and Jets and *The Rumble*, without a mention of Tony, Maria, Chico, Bernardo, Anita, or indeed *Romeo and Juliet*.

The best answers to this question saw that the theme was central and could compare across the whole period, could explain the different ways that characters fell in or out of love, could discuss the ways that drama, music and dance created and enhanced romantic situations, or worked against them and offered detailed evidence of the points that they made.

Some answers used material prior to *Showboat* especially operetta explaining that the theme of love and romance was key to the development of the musical. Lehar’s *The Merry Widow* was used extremely well as a comparative and influential source for what followed its Broadway premiere in 1907.

**Question No. 6**

This was also a very popular, but had a rather more mixed response. At least one candidate interpreted the “dramatic content” as anything interesting that happened, rather than discussing the relative contribution the art form of drama brings to the musical. A sizeable number were drawn into a rather general discussion of how the three art forms worked together, or not, with *My Fair Lady* often claimed as the one that almost dispenses with Dance and Music but for a couple of songs. Stronger responses recognised that dramatic content can be carried by other art forms combined, but few possessed sophistication of understanding of the real fundamentals of performing arts qualities.

There were few really good responses where the dramatic elements were discursively debated. This question led many candidates to offer a biographical history lesson, which came straight from the Broadway DVD. Too often there were pages written about Bert Williams, minstrel shows and Fanny Brice, with no connection to the question. This was usually followed by a show-by-show, date-by-date account from *Showboat* through to *Company* and *Sweeney Todd*. Again, resorting to “everything-I-know- about” answers.

Best answers considered how dramatic content was strengthened when the arts were integrated. *Dream Ballet* and *Prologue* from *West Side Story* were used effectively, but also the best candidates discussed the use of underscore, leitmotif and reprises to provide dramatic comment.

Fair responses offered valid points but these were marred by a lack of reference to a specific example and only dealt with facts that were not backed up with evidence e.g. drama is inferior to dance in *Cabaret* because of the stylistic emergence of Bob Fosse as seen in *Mein Herr* but then no detail to determine how the drama is inferior and the dance superior.

Stronger responses offered real detail using appropriate terminology regarding the dream ballet in *Oklahoma!* and how it elevated dance to an equal status and complemented the drama. One response that focused on how the music from *Company* expressed in ‘Being Alive’ mixes the art forms of drama and music subtly building in intensity with the dialogue at first interrupting Bobby and then diminishing as he begins to realise what he has been missing in his life.

Again, the command word was often ignored but stronger candidates did offer a balanced discussion.

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**Question No. 7**

There were no responses to this question.

**Question No. 8**

There were no responses to this question.

## **G404/01 Performance Project**

### **General comments**

#### **Administration**

The examination ran very smoothly. The majority of Centres had no problems in agreeing dates with their visiting examiner, and the Centres' proposed running order were for the most part realistic and workable. Examiners were flexible in cases where a Centre's performance space was dual-purpose, or was adjacent to a refectory and affected by noise spillage at lunchtime. It was pleasing that the examination visits were generally run in a relaxed and professional way with very few technical problems.

#### **Advance documentation**

The majority of Centres provided their final version of the examination schedule and the candidates' notes on their performances well in advance. These were generally sent electronically, which was the most speedy and reliable method of receiving them. Examiners were grateful to the many staff who had gone to considerable effort to contextualise the working process by offering sensitive and detailed comments on candidates' contributions. These were extremely helpful.

A number of Centres were slow in providing their documentation, however, and a few proffered it to the examiner on arrival. This inevitably meant that the fluent running of the examination was disrupted as examiners required additional time to read material between each performance in order to be fully prepared.

There were a surprising number of errors in Centre's documentation, including incorrect information about the pieces to be performed, Centre or candidate numbers, and mis-spellings of the Centre's or the candidates' names. Centres are requested to ensure that the documentation is reviewed for accuracy before being despatched to the examiner.

#### **Audience to watch the performances**

The balance between examination and public performance was well managed, and very few Centres did not provide an audience. Audiences generally consisted of fellow students, although Centres holding the examination on a Saturday or in the evening often invited friends and family. Some showed considerable initiative in planning such an evening by interspersing exam pieces with a variety of activities - raffles, non-examined work, interval food - to keep their audience entertained. Some Centres used the examination as a recruitment tool to showcase the course for students considering potential A Level subjects.

#### **DVD Recordings**

The receipt of DVD recordings following the examination was variable, with several being late to arrive. Equally problematic was the wide range of recording formats in which DVDs were presented, many of which would not play on a standard UK DVD player.

Examiners were grateful to those Centres who had made the effort to create chapters on the DVD, giving the final disc a professional quality and making it easy to select tracks.

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The majority of recordings were recorded in HD and were of very good quality, especially where the Centre had used an external microphone to ensure the soundtrack was of the same standard as the image. Other recordings had a significant mismatch between sound and picture quality, which meant that the disc was of limited value.

**Group size and length of pieces**

This was unproblematic, with only very occasional pieces going beyond the time allowed by the Specification.

**Performance Realisation****Dance Pieces**

Examiners reported that dance performances were often of a very high standard. Candidates had clearly valued the discipline of learning the movement content for their chosen extract, and had worked hard to refine and shape their performance. The choice of repertoire often involved adapting the piece to fit the particular space available to them, or making amendments because of the maximum number of performers allowed by the Specification. Weaker candidates were often supported in ensemble work by more experienced dancers and inexperienced dancers were seldom left to perform alone.

There were some excellent displays of technique, both in solo and ensemble performances. The strongest candidates were able to combine outstanding upper and lower-body strength with an ability to convey characterisation and narrative and were completely at home with the most technically challenging elements of the choreography. Weaker candidates often struggled with timing, use of space, fluidity of movement, and relation to other performers in the ensemble. In some Centres, the same extract was performed by a number of candidates one after the other. Whilst this is not specifically prohibited, it did little to foster a creative environment, and created an environment more akin to a Festival competition, setting candidates against each other rather than presenting them as personal, distinct performances.

The repertoire offered was broadly similar to that offered in previous sessions, and there were many performances of extracts from works by Alvin Ailey, Matthew Bourne, Christopher Bruce, Bob Fosse and Lloyd Newson. This session saw a greater number of performances of works by three other choreographers, David Bintley, Akram Khan, and Jasmin Vardimon, all very significant practitioners whose work is diverse and demanding and presents new challenges and contexts for the study of dance in Britain in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

**Drama Pieces**

Drama accounted for the greatest number of performances, although performance standards were the most variable in this art form, ranging from highly skilled, outstanding presentations to well-rehearsed but wooden or under-played characterisations.

Examiners reported seeing a great many monologues where the candidate demonstrated sufficient skills to be able to recite the lines they had learned, but insufficient understanding of the role to inhabit the character successfully. This was often typified by poor articulation, shallow breathing, inadequate projection, awkward physicality, variable pacing, wandering focus or inappropriate costume. Examiners were concerned that candidates often relied on 'feeling' their way into the role, rather than learning acting skills that would enable them to craft and refine their performance.

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At the other extreme, there were some very truthful performances that captured the detailed nuance of the character through appropriate gesture, facial expression and sensitive variation of vocal tone, as well as the candidate's ability to deliver lines in a credible and authentic manner. The strongest performances drew in their audience, working the performance space through agile and flexible physicality. The most successful actors were highly physical to the point of being playful, maintained a suitable pace and momentum, and demonstrated versatility and energy.

The practitioners studied were similar to previous years, especially Steven Berkoff, Bertolt Brecht, Caryl Churchill, Jim Cartwright, and John Godber. The plays of John Godber proved extremely popular choice again but, as in previous years, not always a successful one. Whilst on the surface, some of Godber's work might seem accessible and 'fun', a great deal of skill was required to portray successfully the various multi-role characters with any degree of differentiation, and good comic timing was essential. Such skills were not always present in the pieces witnessed and characters often tended to merge into one another.

It was encouraging that some Centres had introduced their candidates to less familiar repertoire, challenging them with plays by established playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill and Robin Soanes, and also the most recent generation of dramatists such as Ella Hickson.

### **Music Pieces**

Almost all music performances were from singers, who occasionally accompanied themselves on the guitar. There was a split between those who sang a song by an established songwriter or group, and those who sang songs from American Musicals, which required a much greater sense of dramatic setting, narrative and action.

Candidates who sang a solo song tended to be the weaker. This was for a number of reasons including, inability to sing in tune, attempting to sing at a pitch outside their natural range, poor breath control, under-projection, poor articulation, sloppy physical posture, awkward relationship with the accompanist, embarrassment, or a general lack of engagement with the narrative. Backing tracks were used successfully in some cases though by no means all. Some candidates selected backing tracks that drowned out their singing, resulting in little more than a three-minute sonic contest for aural supremacy.

There was an increase in the number of extracts from Musical theatre this session. The genre, with its opportunities and challenges in singing, dance and character acting, was a favoured art form, and performances were generally better than in previous years, with some impressively mature and confident approaches to singing. The setting of these songs in the context of a music-drama appeared to help candidates to gain a better understanding of the character and the show itself. The most successful candidates were often those who opted for a character-based piece where they could showcase their ability to portray the character's intentions through song, timing and overall staging of the performance. Those who opted for slower, more stationary ballads sometimes found it difficult to sustain the melodic line, leaving themselves exposed and the weaker moments in their performance more audible.

The most commonly chosen songwriters were George and Ira Gershwin and The Beatles, with a smattering of political songwriters ranging from Bob Dylan to Billy Bragg. Candidates who opted for Musical Theatre tended to select from a wider range of repertoire from the early Book musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein to Lerner and Loewe and Kander and Ebb. *Chicago* and *Cabaret* were particular well represented in the session.

## Student-devised Performance

### 1 *The Meeting (1953) by Richard Lindner*

The commission inspired some of the most creative, free-thinking and engaging work seen during the session. Examiners reported that the popularity of *The Meeting* proved may have been because of its immediate visual impact and the variety of narratives that could be created through the characters within the picture.

Many successful pieces explored the idea of the meeting room, its diverse range of characters - their clothes, expressions and placement - and the differing time periods implicit within the picture. Perceptive candidates spotted the potential to create non-narrative performance and playfully worked the historical interactions between the characters in the picture. Characters from the picture were often effectively portrayed through a variety of means including dance, word play, mime and silence as well as narrative drama scenes. There were many examples of stylistic integrity and a celebration of diversity.

Weaker candidates found it easier to respond to content than the style and manner of the paintings and less successful pieces often ended up retelling Lindner's own story or moving wearily through a series of character-based scenes with limited development, at times bordering on cliché.

### 2 *Marriage of the Arnolfini (1434) by Jan van Eyck*

Jan Van Eyck's famous picture caught the imagination of relatively few candidates.

There were, however, some imaginative re-workings of the picture that related to the concept of arranged marriage, society's view of women and the role of marriage within society and tended to capture the symbolism and restrained nature of the picture. The most perceptive candidates discerned symbols, meanings and myths surrounding the picture and related these to contemporary issues. Whilst it was evident in some pieces, detailed research into the picture was not always translated effectively into performance. The weakest pieces became embroiled in contemporary views of pregnancy and relationships that moved very far away from van Eyck's world of 1434.

### 3 *28 June, 1914: Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria is shot*

The centenary of the outbreak of the First World War guaranteed a good level of interest in the cause behind it. The twists and turns surrounding the assassination of the Archduke indeed provided rich pickings for many groups although several did little more than animate the narrative. Most groups focused on the main protagonists on the day of the shooting in the context of the repercussions of the events of that day. The best pieces were able to integrate movement very effectively so that the narrative was embodied rather than related, and there were some highly impressive movement sequences portraying the shooting, inspired in some cases by the choreography of Lea Anderson. Less impressive pieces tried to cram an immense amount of detail into their performances in a manner more akin to a history revision lesson.

#### 4 ***Fifty years since the launch of Pirate Radio***

Examiners reported that this commission generated some very weak work, mainly as a result of lack of historical engagement with the significance of pirate radio in the highly regulated broadcasting world of the early 1960s. Some pieces became trapped in stereotypical caricatures of inappropriate behaviour by radio DJs, others by the bizarre spectacle of broadcasting from a boat. The commission lent itself to singing snippets from songs of the time, and some groups handled this well, whilst others produced a story strung together with series of songs in the style of *The Jersey Boys*. The strongest pieces were a fine balance of singing, political comment, historical reflection, and a glimpse into the similarities between the 'then' of pirate radio and the 'now' of distributed models of broadcasting, often centred on local communities and interests.

#### 5 ***Reading Scheme by Wendy Cope***

This was by far the most popular commission.

Most pieces followed the storyline, but with mixed success. Whilst there were ample opportunities for involving non-narrative performance and physical theatre, the constant danger was a simplistic re-telling of the story. The characters of Peter, Jane, Mommy, Daddy, the Milkman and the dog were nearly always present, as were ensemble repetitions of phrases such as 'we like fun'. The essential elements of the poem were also present in most pieces: mommy is having an affair with the milkman, Daddy finds out and shoots the milkman. Sometimes the story was tweaked and other characters, including Daddy, got shot. Some characters were inevitably more well-developed than others and the milkman often ended up as the most one-dimensional since his only function in the piece was to deliver milk, bed Mommy, and be shot.

Most of the pieces seen achieved a sensitive balance between the comic elements and the more serious connotations of revenge murder. This was conveyed through various methods such as a soundscape, tableaux or lighting, all hinting at the sinister development that was about to take place. There was also a strong sense of irony in much of the dialogue: Mommy baking the bun, the children enjoying fun, Daddy apparently having a firearm concealed about his person.

The commission inspired a number of songs, many of them Brechtian in function, and usually effective in their simplicity, exploring the light and dark - the world of children and the world of adults. The poem's stanzas helped to give structure and there were also interludes from 1950s children's shows, with songs and characters from that era.

#### 6 ***Madras Central by Vijay Nambisan***

Very few groups chose this commission, and even fewer were able to handle the poem with sensitivity. Pieces often focused on themes rather than the nuances of the commission and there was little attempt to address the cultural elements present in the poem or create music or dance that was linked to the style of the poem.

Stronger pieces focused on interpreting the theme of travel and displacement and several stories were invented based on the 'types' of people journeying and their issues as well as focusing on the rhythmic elements and imagery presented in the poem. The poet's concern for truth and his connections with the politics of India served as the basis for some performances, which successfully captured the richness and style of the performing arts of the Indian subcontinent.

## 7 *Cinderella* by Charles Perrault

This was a very popular commission, with the well-known story offering a potential structure for candidates to work within.

There were a number of very creative re-workings of Perrault's version of the story, some making use of technical devices such as a split stage or a fragmented time-line, to intersperse a parallel modern story. The contemporary story tended to focus on current forms of slavery, such as human trafficking, the sex workers' industry, those kept in slavery by drug dealers and so on. Inevitably, some groups got lost in modern tales of such slaves trapped in cellars or used the story of Cinderella as a means of creating a piece about child abuse, simply because of it appeared to be topical. Parallels were also drawn between Cinderella and young women becoming slaves trying to keep up with fashion and health trends. In another piece, candidates' response to the commission offered a playful response to the story of Cinderella, selectively retold, and very much from a feminist perspective.

Several groups appeared wedded to a rather wordy script in a nervous attempt to get all the elements of the story into their piece. Whilst the weakest groups just re-told the story without the pantomime elements, many performed in a sub-pantomime style that resulted in some truly bad performances. When asked why they had chosen this commission, many candidates said that it was because they already knew the story and they could create a fun piece that would be entertaining to an audience. This was a means of allowing carte blanche to make some very simplistic choices; for example, several groups chose to include a waltz because that was what people did at a ball. Since none of the candidates could waltz, however, this did not end well. Some groups claimed to be tweaking the story to view it from a different perspective, such as the Fairy Godmother's, but this was less than apparent in the actual piece.

One examiner reported, 'It is difficult to fully convey the experience of watching five Cinderellas, one after another, all performed by candidates wandering around the stage with no craft or precision, wearing garish make-up and speaking in strident voices. Suffice to say, the pieces would have been improved by candidates taking a more sophisticated and innovative approach to the commission.'

## 8 *The Minotaur*

This commission produced some of the most inventive work, many strong pieces making full use of the provenance of the story to make full use of the conventions of Greek Theatre such as choral speech, reported action, simple but effective set, flesh-toned costumes that simulated nudity, and mask work in a highly integrated way to convey aspects of the story.

A number of very engaging pieces were inspired by Physical Theatre took a less linear approach to the story, however, often creating fluid transitions and contrasting episodes. In such cases, teamwork and the sharing and development of skills in all three disciplines created an essential role for all of the performers whilst leaving room for individuals to demonstrate flair. Whilst the commission was laced with potential for an exploration of contemporary issues in a wide range of styles – the weakest groups descended into a bombardment of shouting and screaming that left nowhere to go in terms of intensity or emotional variance.

The central character was inevitably, and correctly, the Minotaur itself, and there were a number of different interpretations of the beast, some more effective than others. Some took the idea of 'the beast within us all', others created a piece in which all characters were simultaneously one aspect of the Minotaur, which was less successful. More bizarre interpretations focused on how the Minotaur was conceived, and there were occasional comically inspired forays into the *Spamalot*, a few of which were funny.

## 9 *Eartha Kitt*

This was a less popular choice, and creative and engaging pieces were the exception rather than the rule. Eartha Kitt's life offered much potential for performance material through her repeated reinvention of herself in a very post-modern way as a performer, in her performances and in her life. She performed in American musicals and had some forthright political opinions.

Yet little of this wealth of material came out in the performances seen. The famous incident in the White House with Lyndon B Johnson's wife often got a mention, but little else. Instead, groups frequently approached the work as a snapshot of highlights of Kitt's life focusing on early abuse, husbands and children and held together with lines from *Santa Baby*, with a set of common place semi-naturalistic 'soap opera' clichés. Kitt's distinctive vocal delivery and the unique persona she created was seldom noticed in the research undertaken, and there were times when more could have been done to translate research into performance.

Some more effective versions created a parallel story with the same elements as Kitt's life: a girl from a similar, troubled background is selected through audition and then has similar experiences of racism. One very engaging piece focused on key moments from Kitt's life with effective use of movement and gesture in the style of Lea Anderson as well as original and effective choral work.

## 10 *Spike Milligan*

This was a less popular commission, perhaps reflecting the radical change of taste in British humour over the last half-century, with Milligan's zany antics seen as bizarre at best and culturally embarrassing at worst. Few candidates could see why *The Goons* would ever have been funny, and those that did glimpse something of the humour focused on its high energy and physicality rather than its content.

The most successful pieces reflected Milligan's zaniness through high energy, which used both his comedy and physicality on stage to produce an impactful performance. Other pieces, despite the potential for outrageous comedy and variety, chose to focus on his mental health problems and his relationship with women in a rather safe way. Other performers used the structure of Spike Milligan's verse style to good effect in relating aspects of his life through choral speaking, music and movement. Yet others dwelt heavily on his bipolar difficulties, failing to portray him as a fully rounded character in jumping between humour and serious content.

**OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)**  
1 Hills Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2EU

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Facsimile: 01223 552627

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