

GCSE Drama - Performance and Production

Ciaran Russell

Section 1: Response to Stimulus

The overall stimulus we were presented with was Youth Culture. We looked at specific eras, for example, the 50's, 60's and all the way up to the 00's. My favourite stimuli was the song Blackbird by The Beatles which we used for the 60's. I interpreted the song as being about racism, which was a big problem in the 60's, and black people fighting for more freedom and rights. I thought this because of the repeated line "Blackbird fly" the "blackbird" representing black people "flying" or raising their social standing, Wings or flying symbolise freedom. In the line "All your life you've waited for this moment" may represent how black people have been mistreated for too long. For the 50's, one stimulus I really liked was the song Rock Around The Clock by James E. Myers. Rock Around The Clock is one of the first rock songs and was made in 1954. Teenagers during the 50's would often go to dance halls and dance to rock songs like this one. The song really encapsulates the idea of a teenager, being rebellious and just wanting to dance. Another stimuli I found very interesting was a poem called Pay As You Go by Mike Garry about a teenager killing herself because her nudes were leaked. This stimulus too was the most relatable as it is a problem that happens today. It had a very powerful message, how our generation has become "sex-obsessed" and how brutal people can be online, and thought it would make a great abstract piece. One stimulus I disliked were the scenes from the movie Breakfast Club which we used for the 80's. Although I like the movie, I found it hard to use the stimulus without falling into the trap of copying it. However, I did like the idea of stereotypical characters and we carried that idea over to our devising piece. For the 50's we used the stimulus of the Jive dance. I believe the quick and lively dance reflects people's attitudes during the time. People seemed happier and more lively which is reflected through the quick steps of the jive. We used pictures of teens at dance halls, which were a popular hangout for teens, to inspire a short-improvised piece about 50's teens trying to get a girl to dance with them. One image I particularly liked was a picture of teenagers gathered around a jukebox. This picture showed me how teenagers socialised back then. Nowadays, people are a lot less personal in how they interact which is very different to the bustling gathering shown in the picture.

For our devising piece we will use Brechtian techniques with naturalistic acting. Some of the techniques we may use are: split staging, hot-seating and freeze framing to mark the moment. Our chosen genre is comedy as we felt it played towards the strength of our group. We want to make a light-hearted coming of age story. The 50's is when the term "teenager" was coined after young people began acting differently from both a child and an adult. We also want to highlight more serious topics that still happen today. For example, the "toxic" relationship between Wendy and Brian. We felt that Brechtian techniques would help us display serious topics whilst keeping the comedy. We want to show how difficult life can be as a teenager whether it's in the 50's or 00's. Throughout the play we demonstrate some of the difficulties teenagers face, like, toxic relationships. Naturalistic acting fit our group better and worked best with the stimulus (various pictures from the 50's which inspired many of the characters personalities and the Jive which inspired a dance scene).

In our devising piece I am playing the role of Wendy. She is a rich, teachers-pet who is co-dependent in the beginning of the play. Throughout the play she becomes independent. Because I am playing the role of a girl I will need to completely change my gait and voice. To show my co-dependency, and lack of confidence, I will always walk behind someone to show that I am following them. Towards the end of the play, I will walk in front with lots of confidence, for example I will hold my head high and stride to show I am walking with purpose. I will walk tentatively and hesitantly and speak in a soft voice to show my lack of confidence.

Our group aims to show the independence of teens and the social challenges they face. In the 1st scene we use a split stage to show the social differences between Wendy and Brian, and Digby and Tom. Showing this early on is effective as it shows the challenge the four characters must face as they get to know each other more and breakdown the “walls” between them. The 50’s had a massive social divide which is shown through the class system. T We want to show the social challenges teenagers faced and still face today to shed some light on how difficult life can be as a teenager.

Devising Section 2: Development and Collaboration

The scene we developed the most was scene 3. In scene 3, Digby is asking Wendy to the dance. The 1st version of the scene begins with me and Brian doing our homework in silence. Meanwhile, Digby and Tom are spying on us. Tom is trying to convince Digby to ask out Wendy. Mr Ben Dover, then takes Brian away to detention because he didn’t do his homework in an earlier scene. Digby sees this as an opportunity and tries to ask me out. He is very nervous and Wendy is uncomfortable, this results in a very awkward exchange between Digby and Wendy. We wanted to do this to further establish the relationship our characters have with each other and make the relationships clear to the audience. Wendy and Brian are doing their work in silence to show they dislike each other and are not a good couple. The conversation Digby and Tom have whilst spying shows they are good friends and are very close. The awkward exchange Wendy and Digby have shows the two don’t know each other well at all and are not comfortable with each other. This creates a clear problem for Digby’s character to overcome through the piece if he wants to date Wendy.

We developed this scene further so it would better fit the chosen style and genre. We wanted to work around the props we had to make the scene more comical. Because the prop was a door we thought it would be funny if all 3 characters poked the head round the door when spying on Wendy and Brian. We also added narration, a Brechtian technique, to the scene. We got this idea from David Attenborough who was very popular in the 50’s, thus reinforcing the chosen decade. The narration exaggerated what Digby was doing and made it funnier.

The scene mainly made use of cringe comedy so the narration enhanced the awkwardness and made it even funnier, it gave the scene a faster pace because in the 1st draft of the scene there was lots of silence.

One scene we received lots of feedback on was Scene 2, the classroom scene. In this scene all the characters are in lesson being taught by Mr Ben Dover. In the initial scene Brian makes fun of Mr Ben Dover whilst Digby and Tom try to ask Wendy out. They throw a paper ball at Wendy that says “Would you go to the dance with me Wendy” but it misses. Mr Ben Dover reads out the message and embarrass Wendy. In order to show my embarrassment I put my hand over my face and “hide” to show that I don’t want to deal with the situation. This further shows that Wendy is very timid in the beginning. My embarrassment quickly changes to anger and I yell at Mr Dover “No sir, I WON’T go to the dance with you.” I emphasised the word “won’t” and said it very harshly to show I definitely did not want to go to the dance with MR Dover. I prolonged the word “sir” to emphasise how wrong it was that a teacher was asking me out. This shows that Wendy can be more confident and stand up for herself. Brian takes credit for the note and asks Wendy out to the dance. To show that I was very happy I made eye contact with Brian to show I was focused on only him. The feedback we received was that we needed to change the set. Because we wanted to do a clean transition from scene 1 to scene 2 we had the classroom scene in the back corner (upper stage right). This meant it was harder for the audience to see and hear us. The door we used to transition from scenes was blocking some of the audience's view. To change this we moved the set closer to centre stage right and positioned the door at an angle so the audience's view wasn’t obstructed. Another piece of feedback we received for the scene was for when Brian asks me out to the dance. In the original scene, Wendy was not very excited and didn’t exaggerate my emotions enough. I exaggerated this scene more and tried to seem much more excited.

During rehearsal I focused on developing my mannerisms and gait to be more like a girl. I found this difficult because I have never tried to play a girl before. I had to change my tone of voice to be softer so I would come off as shy. I found it difficult to maintain a softer tone of voice whilst also projecting my voice but I did get better at this the more I rehearsed. I focused on crossing my legs when I sat down and tried to fidget a lot to show I am bored around Brian. I would often fidget by playing and twiddling with my hair. I played with my pens to show that I am in school. I wanted the audience to know that Wendy and Brian don't like each other and showing a lack of interest in him seemed like a good way to do that. I found arguing scenes to be very difficult. I found it difficult to try and be angry at Brian without losing my shyness.

In the final piece I wanted to display to the audience the toxic relationship Brian and Wendy are in. I believe by becoming more confident after leaving Brian I showed the audience that toxic relationships only hold you back. I tried to act easily annoyed and argumentative around Brian to show I dislike him. I found trying to act an argument to be really hard as I couldn't take myself or the actor playing Brian seriously. However, after practicing a lot and watching myself on video I improved.

Section 3: Analysis and Evaluation

One scene that we really improved on in the final piece was scene 5. In this scene Wendy and Digby are debating whether or not they should go to the dance. Wendy just saw Brian talking to another girl and doesn't know whether she should go and have to confront Brian. Wendy is feeling very insecure and doesn't feel good enough. I tried to show this doubtfulness by talking in a soft, unconfident tone of voice. Meanwhile, Digby doesn't know if Wendy even likes him and doesn't know whether or not to go and ask her out. We used the Brechtian technique split staging to show the audience that Wendy and Brian are very similar; however, there is still this divide between them. In this scene I had to do a monologue which at first I found difficult to do as I had no one to react to and I didn't feel confident enough to do it. However, in the final piece I think I portrayed Wendy's conflicting emotions well.

One of my favourite scenes in terms of my own performance was the final dance scene. This scene is the climax of the play and you see a new side to Wendy. Throughout the play Wendy is a shy girl (with some confidence shining through) but in the last scene she has essentially had enough and takes her anger out on Brian. She gains lots of confidence and becomes rather quick tempered, for example, when she was talking to Mr Dover. Digby finally asks out Wendy and the two leave together happily, creating a fulfilling ending for the audience as Digby has wanted to ask out Wendy the whole play. My aims were to show Wendy's new found confidence and anger at Brian. I think I achieved this very well and made it quite comical by exaggerating various lines both when talking to Mr Dover and to Digby. This created a funny and satisfying end to the play and left the audience feeling fulfilled.

The scene in which I showed my group's intentions the best was definitely scene 3. In this scene, not only do we further establish that Wendy and Brian don't like each other but Digby also tries and fails at asking out Wendy to the dance. This scene does a great job at establishing the different relationships all the characters have early on and shows the audience the barrier Digby must overcome if he wants to date Wendy, this barrier of course being Brian. By establishing the relationships and problems the characters have to overcome early on, the audience can feel like they are part of the journey, in scene 3 we wanted to show the audience how difficult it can be socially for teens both in the 50's and present day. We conveyed this through the awkward exchange between Wendy and Brian as he tried to ask her out only to be rejected. Furthermore, the scene used various Brechtian techniques, including spit staging and narration, and was very comical so it reinforced both the style and genre.

Overall, I think we accomplished our aims for the piece and successfully showed how hard it can be for a teenager socially. By using Brechtian techniques we pushed the whole group out of their comfort zone, and we now have more knowledge on the style and are more rounded as actors. I really improved my range as an actor by playing a girl as this is something I had never done before and is in stark contrast to all the other roles I have performed up to now. I had to use various techniques to get

into the role and become Wendy and these techniques are easily transferable to other roles. The piece was a big success because we clearly showed the genre and style along with the time period as well as clearly displaying our goals throughout every scene.