

# 2016 VCE Drama solo performance examination report

## General comments

The Drama Solo performance is, first and foremost, an acting task. Students need to remember that narrating a storyline is not acting ‘in the moment’, but describing to the audience what they are seeing, and therefore does not address the requirements of the examination. Marks are not awarded for standing in front of the assessors and telling them a story.

In the development of the character from the prescribed structure, each student takes on the roles of researcher, playwright, editor, designer and actor. The structures require considerable information to be distilled, refined and communicated, but it should not be forgotten that what students are required to bring to the examination is a dramatic acting performance in a non-naturalistic performance style, not a speech or a narration. Some work contained too much talking, and this had a direct impact on Criterion 4, Use of performance style(s), including the performance style prescribed in the structure.

Assessors look for the quality of references to the prescribed stimulus and how the prescribed stimulus is used throughout the performance. Too often, this year, the prescribed stimulus was not visible or only referred to fleetingly in performance. There were also many examples of the performance focus being poorly referenced, dot points being missed and key dramatic action words in the performance stem being ignored. This had a direct impact on the scoring of Criterion 1, Requirements of the prescribed structure, as well as Criterion 2, Development of a performance from the prescribed structure.

While there is no requirement to evenly distribute performance time to each dot point, students should ensure that they have addressed the dot points in sufficient detail to demonstrate the quality of their research. This year, poor choices were noted in the balance of performance time and content between the dot points, resulting in impact on Criterion 3, Research, scripting and editing.

When constructing the solo performance, students need to remember that the named character in the prescribed structure must clearly be the central character and must occupy more of the solo performance time than any other character.

Another aspect of performance that requires consideration is the use of conventions. Higher-scoring work integrated conventions well, and throughout the performance, whereas other students seemed to randomly and briefly touch on a particular convention and then move on. This requirement is linked to Criterion 5, Use of convention, including use of the convention prescribed in the structure.

Some work demonstrated an uncontrolled use of space. This had a potential impact on the scoring of Criterion 7, Timing, Criterion 8, Use of expressive skills, and Criterion 9, Use of performance skills. Careful use of space allows for considered engagement with the assessors, which is an important aspect of the actor–audience relationship. Students need to remember to face the assessors in order to fully convey meaning, particularly through facial expression and especially if volume or articulation lacks strength and clarity.

When choosing a prop to demonstrate transformation of object, students need to ensure that the prop enhances the performance and does not detract from it. Higher-scoring work demonstrated skilful use of props that contained a symbolic value and were from 'the world' of the character.

Some performances were undermined by technical issues with equipment. The use of soundtracks can have its pitfalls if it is not well managed and extensively rehearsed. This directly impacts on the scoring of Criterion 7, Criterion 9 and Criterion 10, Application of stagecraft.

Teachers and students also need to be wary of the potential for social media misinformation in relation to this examination. It is important that all enquiries be directed to the VCAA for clarification.

## Specific information

### The characters

#### Arachne

High-scoring performances established a strong, consistent sense of classical mythology and created a language style to suit. Language was imbued with references to the poem's metre and rhythms. Students skilfully manipulated and integrated both heightened use of language and movement at the same time (Criterion 5). Another characteristic of work at this level was the richly symbolic and highly controlled physicality. The prescribed dramatic element of conflict was explored very effectively through internal rather than external conflict.

Low-scoring performances tended to interpret 'battle' to mean 'conflict' and simply presented a physical confrontation between Minerva and Arachne (Criterion 6, Use of dramatic elements, including use of the dramatic element prescribed in the structure). There was little understanding of 'hubris', and caricatured figures were used simplistically to address dot-point three, often being presented in a humorous way rather than more deeply exploring the parallel between the characters. There was also no sense of 'remorse' in Arachne.

#### Louis de Rougement (aka Henri Louis Grin)

High-scoring performances used the performance style to shape the structure of the work, utilising song, tricks and dance to build rhythm to a climax, as well as develop mood (Criterion 4). Performances at this level recognised the ridiculousness of the character and his perceptions, rather than the world we know he was exploring. Here we saw funny, energetic and very physical work with powerful moments of pathos. Louis was larger than life, yet still likeable.

Low-scoring performances demonstrated limited changes in rhythm. Work at this level showed little understanding of the conventions of vaudeville, relying heavily on narration or a 'talking head' approach. Often the character of the 'sceptical journalist' was only present by a brief acknowledgment at the beginning of the performance. A lack of coherence was also a characteristic of work at this level (Criterion 3).

#### Pa Ubu or Ma Ubu

High-scoring performances demonstrated a sophisticated use of language and clever sound effects created through voice to explore the performance style and to develop the character. Performances at this level effectively employed strong political satire and exaggerated movement to examine corruption. The skilful use of puppetry was highly symbolic. The actor, at times, became the puppet and physicalised the ideas of control and manipulation. Excellent transformations of character and object were also noted in work at this level (Criterion 5).

Low-scoring performances lacked coherence, made poor use of sound and tended to rely on puppetry to retell the story of the play rather than contribute to the surrealism required as part of

the performance style. Work at this level focused more on gaining 'cheap laughs' through vulgarity. Also, while reference was made to a 'real political leader' as required in dot-point three, there was little understanding of 'parallel' and how to dramatically demonstrate this (Criterion 2).

### **Oiwa (The Onryō or Vengeful Ghost)**

High-scoring performances effectively used the performance style to create very suspenseful work. This was enhanced by strong, exaggerated movement, often incorporated into contorted and highly symbolic actions and gestures (Criterion 4). Work at this level demonstrated exceptional focus and a powerful actor–audience relationship through eye contact and use of space (Criterion 9). The highest-scoring performances successfully explored the dichotomy between Oiwa being a victim and becoming an avenger.

Low-scoring performances tended to have an over-reliance on recorded soundtracks, often to the detriment of the work. Pitfalls such as equipment failure, incorrect volume levels and timing issues contributed to undermining performer confidence (Criteria 7 and 10). Work at this level concentrated more time on dot-point three, often focusing on the Western horror movie genre with lots of screaming and bloodied attacks, rather than looking at possible wider world ramifications such as the plague, the Salem witch trials, cyber safety, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and so on.

### **The Board Game Character**

High-scoring performances skilfully manipulated not just actor as chorus and direct address, but also additional conventions of Epic Theatre such as the use of placards and symbolic costume to effectively communicate and enhance meaning (Criterion 4). High-scoring work investigated how the idea of chorus – to warn, comment on the action, pass judgment and argue with other characters – could be incorporated to develop the political and social message regarding monopolies (Criterion 5). Work at this level cleverly used space to create the 'board' through which the character moved.

Low-scoring performances relied heavily on narration, describing the action rather than commenting on it in a chorus role. There was no sense of Epic Theatre and the invitation to create a vision for a game in the future was often limited to representations of use of mobile phones and other solitary, screen-based games. Seldom was there a vision for the game itself. Space was often poorly used. Work at this level showed a lack of research (Criterion 3).

### **The Thief**

High-scoring performances demonstrated a clearly defined and highly effective use of space, often employing exaggerated movement to help create transformation of place. Tension was cleverly established and built through the skilful use of mime as well as the exploration of the main character's inner conflict. Work at this level showed a well-researched knowledge of the history of the theft, as well as the eras of 1907 and 1957, seamlessly inserting the prescribed character into the story.

Low-scoring performances lacked an understanding of mime, often containing sound effects or narrated action during the mime (Criterion 5). Work at this level was under-rehearsed, demonstrating limited focus and very little tension. Incorrect facts relating to the 'heist' highlighted a lack of research. Also, there was no sense of the different eras or of the reluctance on the part of the Thief. Students struggled to dramatically create the 'parallel' required in dot-point three, making only a passing reference by name to a 'famous fictional thief' (Criterion 2).

### **Nadia (Nadezhda) Popova**

High-scoring performances were noticeable for their excellent use of physical theatre, employing tableaux to present the convention 'stillness and silence', and to help create an effective and appropriate mood (Criteria 4 and 5). Work at this level demonstrated thorough research that

allowed an exploration of the unusual and dangerous nature of being a female pilot in the USSR, juxtaposed against other roles women played during the War. The highest-scoring performances conveyed a clear sense of the cost and long-term effects of stress – nightmares, exhaustion, grief – rather than an idealised view of war.

Low-scoring performances lacked any sense of the era and tended more towards melodrama. Work at this level failed to address the implications of dot-point three, with limited reference to the contribution ‘to post-war reconstruction’. Also, students struggled to demonstrate the prescribed convention that requires ‘stillness and silence’ to be shown at the same time, not separately. This had a direct impact on the scoring for Criterion 7.

### **Arbiter Maven**

High-scoring performances were genuinely funny and demonstrated thorough research. They understood the particular type of humour in the stimulus and made judicious selections regarding re-enactments as well as the development of the relationships between Arbiter and the other characters. Fast transformations were seamless and effortless. Stagecraft choices such as homemade musical instruments, and original songs with ridiculous lyrics and absurd comedy contributed to the success of these performances (Criteria 4 and 10).

Low-scoring performances failed to demonstrate the requirements of the comedic style and were often not compliant in addressing all of the prescribed structure (Criterion 1). Key dramatic words in the performance focus were ignored, one example was provided where plural examples were required and the ‘television advertisement’ in dot-point two had no sense of Maven’s self-promotion (Criterion 2).

### **The Matchmaker**

High-scoring performances demonstrated thorough research into the history of the matchmaker and developed characters that went well beyond the character from the musical (Criteria 2 and 3). Clever use of satire and social commentary that explored love, the loveless, lovers and society, both past and present, was evident in work at this level. Highly effective climax was shown through unexpected twists in the plot and also with a final revelation at the end of the performance (Criterion 6).

Low-scoring performances finished with an anticlimax and misunderstood the nature of satire. Many failed to show any reference to the stimulus, thereby affecting the scoring of Criteria 1 and 2. Work at this level often referred to TV shows like *The Bachelor* and dating apps like Tinder rather than taking inspiration from the lyrics in the stimulus and researching the history of matchmaking. Also, work was often rushed, which affected the scoring of Criterion 7.

### **Liberty**

High-scoring performances were thoughtful, sensitive and well researched. They successfully grappled with the abstract concept of liberty while finding dramatic ways of presenting touching and, in some cases, disturbingly truthful examples to address dot-point three. Work at this level effectively demonstrated symbol (Criterion 6) using a combination of expressive skills (Criterion 8) and clever manipulation of object (Criteria 5 and 10).

Low-scoring performances were characterised by little understanding of the concept of ‘liberty’. They were text-driven and often presented as a ‘talking head’ rather than through dramatic action (Criterion 4). Work at this level had poor choices in both costume and object and this led to clumsy transformations. Pathos was simplistically referenced, if at all, and often demonstrated through moments of crying or screaming (Criterion 5).