

In the Performance Studies course we have been learning about the processes of improvising and rehearsing which has led to three separate performances in each of the three major art forms, Dance, Drama and Music and a final piece integrating the three disciplines. In this essay, I will discuss these processes and look at ways in which each discipline, though discrete, has many similarities. Each piece was developed from an initial idea or motif, often using similar techniques. Indeed, the terminology used in the separate disciplines is often the same, for example motif, canon and dynamics.

In Dance, the improvisation process commenced with a motif taught by the teacher. We broke down the motif into phrases of actions to enable us to memorise it, gradually linking the actions to produce the whole motif. The motif consisted of an action of steps in a circular motion followed by jumping on the spot with swaying arm gestures. Following this were the actions of a tilt and turn combined, finishing in a straight line of steps with a crouching position.

Firstly, each individual selected a different part of the motif which they then repeated. I decided to repeat the jumping and crouching actions, therefore changing the spatial design. We then worked in pairs changing the direction of the motif by altering the stepping sequences so we stepped towards, around and away from each other providing another variation. This is similar to the way in which a musical theme is developed.

We then worked in a group of four changing the direction as in the pair work. We also developed the motif visually and through the use of variations in time. We used sudden time in the action of steps and combined sustained time with canon, so after every two beats, each person carried out a sustained action. Canon is a technique used in music composition too. Stillness was added when a pair continued to dance in unison whilst the other pair remained still, similar to silence in music. By varying the time, the rhythm and tempo of the piece was effected, further developing the original motif.

The final motif structure consisted of our individual motifs, which progressed to the pair work, which in turn culminated in the group work. This process is very similar to the way in which the texture of a piece of music is built up.

Through the use of dynamics we added meaning to our movements. We looked at the speed with which a movement takes place as already

discussed. Also taken into account was the importance of using movement in a different way. This consisted of free flowing movement in jumps (comparable to free-flowing melodies) compared to bound flow in the action of steps. Finer details could then be added. Tension was used in firm movements such as pushing one another into position, and in fine movements such as leaping and jumping. This gave an effective contrast between firm movements involving heaviness and strength, and fine movements involving lightness and delicacy.

Another important aspect to consider was space, in terms of how we moved through it. Most of the time we used direct movements, for example steps, which penetrated the space in a straight line giving a sensation of narrowness and restriction. We also used direct movements in relation to proxemics which created an impression of isolation. These techniques we developed later in the integrated piece. The only flexible movement we used was 'rolling' as this action used the space to the fullest extent, again providing contrast to the direct movements.

Throughout the development of this piece we used all three spatial levels, for example high level in stepping, middle level in crouching and low level in rolling. We also focused on creating effective relationships within the group to improve the dynamics. This incorporated a question and answer, where there is a four step sequence in which we are involved in a two and two combination and where actions include steps answered by arm gestures. The technique of 'question and answer' is an integral part of music composition. Using the dynamics in this way, the motif was enhanced in feeling and mood.

The improvisation and rehearsal processes were very much intertwined. As we developed the individual movements and actions we were practicing and perfecting them at the same time. As individuals we made sure to perfect our own parts initially before integrating them with the pair and group work. The same process of rehearsing was effectively used in the pair and group work, that is we perfected the pair work before progressing to the group. Another technique used to rehearse was for each individual to take turns in watching the rest of the group as they performed so we could look at the performance from the audience point of view. However, we needed to view the whole group in performance so we recorded ourselves on video. This enabled us to analyse not only our individual movements but also the way in which we related to each other.

After listening to a wide variety of music decided on 'Dreams are Made' by 'UCNG.' The music helped us to move rhythmically and to keep in

time with each other as well as reflecting the mood and style of our dance.

In Drama, we started by brainstorming ideas. We listed our ideas, expanding them and finally deciding on one idea, that of a 'shopping mall'. The situation and scene is set straight away with people rushing, very busy, moving around quickly, exchanging quick hurried words. Then the focus is on each character for a slight pause in time before going back to the normal, busy mall.

We decided on contrasting characters of a security man, priest, pregnant woman and tramp to create a typical environment. At the start each character would be rushing around in the background portraying a busy scene. The focus would then be directed on to one character who would talk about their life in general. The other characters would freeze, a technique similar to stillness in Dance. The focus would then shift back to the busy scene before returning to a different character. This sequence would continue with the story gradually unfolding. The change between fast, sudden and slow movement would provide a good contrast whilst creating interest. The use of proxemics in Drama was similar to the dynamics used in Dance, showing how easily these art-forms link.

To make our sketch more effective we used appropriate lighting such as a strobe light for the busy parts, props for the set and background such as bins, shopping sales, clothes for the characters. We used different types of music to accompany the moods of the changing shopping mall. One piece of music we chose was by 'Prodigy' as it reflects the business of the mall.

We then concentrated on developing the positioning and proxemics of the characters. In terms of proxemics, there are two main themes. Firstly there is the busy, hectic movement and secondly there is the isolation of people. The theme of business is shown in the kinesics of the characters. People move around each other quickly and as fast as possible to carry out tasks. This leads onto the next theme. As they are rushing around so fast, they don't have time to invade the others personal space, although they are passing through each other's all the time. Whilst they exchange quick, hurried words, the characters barely turn their heads as they speak, and so all of this reflects the isolation of the scene.

I took on the role of a priest, analysing my character to enhance my understanding and so give a convincing performance. My objective is to get people to follow God's word and follow the church. The strategy I

use is by any means possible for people to listen, for example, speeches. My obstacle is the people around me. The shopping mall is like a foreign place of worship.

To aid our rehearsals in Drama we studied several techniques of Brecht and Boal. We spoke our parts in the third person, using 'he said' and 'she said', which created a distancing effect from our characters. This meant we could continue to think objectively about our characters whilst still being involved in the role. This is distinctly Brechtian in technique.

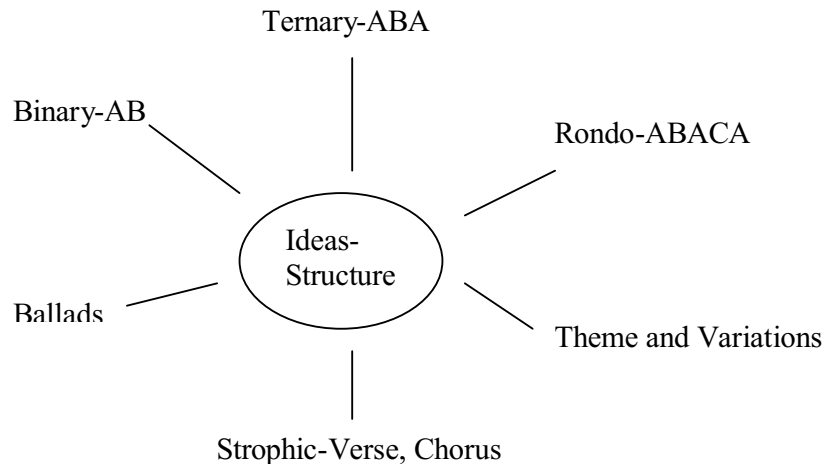
To develop our characters further we used an improvisation technique of Brecht's called 'change in the given circumstances', which included varying the dialogue by adding accents and dialects with actions changing according to reactions. We also focused on voice projection and clarity, varying the tone of voice to show expression. Volume was equally important; loud enough to be heard, but not so loud that contrasts could not be distinguished.

Boal's technique 'Forum theatre' enabled us to interpret our characters in more than one way, when in the situation of the shopping mall. This was carried out by swapping characters, then watching someone else play your role. By seeing how the audience would perceive our characters, we could make improvements on the dialogue, physicality and proxemics. To improve the proxemics we spoke the stage directions aloud making us aware of how we should enter, leave, and appear in a scene. Through these exercises, we improved our physical and vocal stamina, and so maximised our abilities to communicate with the audience, hence improving physicality.

We also carried out technical rehearsals similar to Dance and Music. This included going from the beginning of the pieces right through to the end, checking that each scene linked together smoothly. This involved music, lights, stage management and served to create the atmosphere. Once the routines and responsibilities were understood, artistic flair and final adjustments could develop.

Before starting our musical composition we discussed our individual strengths as musicians. There are two clarinetists, one of whom is also a pianist, a singer and a pianist. One of the group studied GCSE music and two are at present studying AS level music. These latter students are confident in composing techniques and this had a positive effect in the way the composition developed.

On beginning our music piece, we talked about different styles of music, such as jazz, classical, pop and rock. We also discussed how we would organise our composition in terms of structure and were influenced by the more experienced members as to the different options which can be seen in the diagram below. We chose a classical style with an extended rondo structure-ABACAD



We decided to start the piece in a major key as we wanted a bright positive start to the music. We selected a key which would be relatively easy for both C instruments (piano) and B instruments (Clarinets).

The piece started when one of the pianists improvised a progression of chords which the group decided to develop. Section A (Bars 1-8) serves as an introduction, comprising of a sequence of broken chords played as triplets ending in an imperfect cadence. There is no melody line in this first section, which is played solely by the piano. It is written in the key of F major, is in 4/4 time and establishes the mood of the piece.

In Section B there is a contrast in timbre with the two clarinets entering playing the melody. The powerful effect of the clarinets playing in unison is similar to the unison actions in the dance piece. The piano plays an ostinato, repeating the first bar (bar 9) many times but starting on a different note to fit in with the harmonic sequence.

When A returns, the two clarinets are heard playing the melody and harmony whilst the piano plays the same sequence of chords as heard originally but in a quaver flow, rather than triplets. The chords at the end of this section are changed to prepare for a modulation into a new key, the subdominant key B flat major for Section C. The piano continues to accompany the two clarinets, but now in another style, that of chords in

the left hand and groups of four quavers in the right hand. The two clarinets are heard in close harmony, with one playing a third higher than the other. This section ends with a trill in both clarinets after which Section A returns for the final time. There is a repeat of the same melody and harmony as that heard in the last 'A' section. However, the pianist now plays in another style in a type of dialogue between the two hands, with the right hand playing staccato. To conclude, Section A is heard for the final time but now in the dominant key of C major, the clarinets playing the melody and harmony.

To compose the music took longer than expected, because two members did not have any experience in composing, although all members were musical and played an instrument. We rehearsed our composition using similar techniques to those already discussed in Drama and Dance, but there were some additional methods that we applied. Once the music had been composed, individuals perfected their own parts. We then practiced small sections of the piece together, for example, Section A, gradually building up the ensemble by practicing with one or two instrumental parts, then using the whole group. When the separate sections were perfected, we linked them together and modified any problems, for example discordances. When the notes were learnt different elements could be focused on, such as articulation, (playing legato or staccato) and dynamics (piano, forte).

We also improved our ensemble skills by listening to how our parts combined, for example whilst playing a harmony part on the piano I listened to the melody part of the clarinets by playing softer. We then recorded the composition and analysed our playing. This technique was also effective in Drama and Dance where we used a video camera to improve our performances. By rehearsing regularly, individual confidence increased, enabling us to perform musically, with expression. This also meant that any errors in note playing would be less noticeable.

When performing this piece to a class of students the group were nervous before starting, but once playing had commenced our nerves seemed to dissipate. The feedback was positive and although individual errors had been made, they were unnoticed by our audience. On reflection, the pleasure derived from performing to an audience is heightened when each member is fully prepared and rehearsed.

The stimulus for our integrated piece came from an article on domestic violence.

Each person took on the role of a character in a story, which they would portray through the dance and drama. The background story that we

created involved a man and his son coming from a broken family. The man then married his new wife who already had a daughter. The characters we decided to play included a father (the man), his son, the social worker and the abused child (daughter of man's wife). I acted in the role of the father who abused the child.

In terms of character relationships, my character has two sides to it. The one side is very manipulative and charming as I get on well with my wife, son and social worker. My son follows everything that I do because he is scared of me. My relationship with the social worker and wife is very much the same. I manipulate them in believing I am a normal, caring person. The other side is arrogant, powerful and strong which only shows when I am with the child. This is when I give the child physical and mental abuse thus tying in the theme of domestic violence. Only the son and child know both sides to my character but they do not dare speak out for fear of the consequences- both for different reasons.

We decided that the structure of the piece should alternate between scenes of dance and drama, with music at the beginning and end, as well as accompanying the dance sections.

Starting the piece with a dance section, we would use an overhead projector to tell the story whilst the dance took place. The audience could then gain a clearer understanding of the plot. Each character carried out a 32 beat motif as an individual, to show their characterisation, which would link to the drama scenes. We then decided to improvise contact work to build relationships between the characters. We linked several moves together in pairs (child with step brother and social worker with father) but sometimes it did not work, as this was chance choreography. Then we added more aggression, which changed the dynamics. We choreographed the group work so one pair ran in a fast circle around the other pair performing, then changing over roles.

In the drama sections, an improvisation technique that proved to be successful was 'Hot Seating' as this created many ideas and situations. It worked by a character being asked questions about how they felt in relation to the situation. Another exercise was Boal's 'Great Game of Power', which helped us to appreciate the power relationships between the characters. We could then analyse the people in control in the scene i.e. the father, and see how they created power. This enabled us to increase the level of tension within the piece by interaction.

Having thoroughly rehearsed the integrated piece, we then performed the piece to an audience. At the outset I felt nervous, but after a few minutes I settled down into my role and felt more at ease as my confidence improved.

The feedback, in the form of written comments from the audience, was very useful as it helped me to understand the positive and negative aspects of the performance from their perspective.

The general consensus was that the characterisation was convincing. Initially there was some confusion as to the relationship of the characters and their ages. This could have been improved by more effective make-up and costume.

The props helped add interest and produced a framework, which gave the piece structure. However, the use of stagehands to change the props between scenes would have allowed more continuity and fewer interruptions during which the actors could take a freeze position. The performers awareness of proxemics was evident with everyone using the given space to the full.

The audience gave positive feedback concerning the integration of the three disciplines, as one person said, 'the drama and dance were very well integrated and one thing flowed into the next.' However, 'the movements were very dramatic and almost real as if you could imagine this happening,' and, 'the music was very well timed and it really fitted in with the theme of the performance.' The music helped to create the mood as well as helping the dance and drama blend together.

The audience commented that they gained a clearer understanding of the storyline from the PowerPoint presentation.

In conclusion, I have come to a deeper understanding of the process of improvising, rehearsing and performing in the three art forms, and now have a knowledge of how they combine to produce a complete performance. Although they are discrete disciplines in some respect and use techniques specific to each separate area there are many similarities in the ways in which they start and are developed as has been shown throughout this discussion.