


Company	Pump House CYT	 <p>National Theatre connections</p> <p>show report</p>
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Assessed Play	DeoxyriboNucleic Acid
Assessment Date	29 th March 2007
Partnership Theatre	LONDON Hampstead Theatre
Assessor	Helen Anderson-Lee

The Venue

This production was held in a large, well equipped studio theatre. Seating in the auditorium is raked and accommodates approximately 150 people. The stage, which was raised from the first row of seats, was a large playing space. Entrances and exits were both upstage right and upstage left of the playing space. This production formed part of a double-bill, with the Children's Theatre performing Scary Play earlier on in the evening. Therefore, the posters and programmes, which had images depicting each play, served both productions. On entering the foyer, photographs from both productions were on display.

The Administration

All administration with regards to my assessment of this production was very friendly and helpful. I was made to feel very welcome at all times throughout the assessment and the post-show chat was very well organised and efficient. The posters and programmes referred to the 'Shell Connections'.

The Production

This was a strong production with a good sense of pace and respect for the text. The production was punctuated by moments of physical theatre which illustrated both the bullying of Adam and the characters' inner emotions during the play. Towards the beginning of the play, the image of the characters throwing stones at Adam was suggested as a performer stepped behind the gauze (placed upstage) and threw a handful of white feathers in slow motion. This motion was then echoed by the entire cast; following the scene in which Mark and Jan explain what has happened, the ensemble faced the audience and threw imaginary stones in slow motion. This was a simple but effective technique. The freeze moments were also effective; as the characters, (facing out front), froze in various positions, and the lights snapped on and off, the audience were given a series of disturbing snap shots, as if they, themselves, were the victim.

The production had a strong pace; scenes moved swiftly in and out of each other and frequently characters remained on stage while other scenes took place, frozen and unlit, to aid in efficient scene transitions. Within the scenes, the actors had obviously worked hard at keeping the energy high and the pace flowing, particularly during the scenes in which the characters have single-word lines. A lot of thought had clearly gone into the staging of the larger scenes, to avoid blocking. When Mark and Jan were describing the 'stoning of Adam' to the rest of the group, a stylistic decision to have them all freeze, as the lights changed, worked very well. There were a few moments, particularly in the

larger scenes, when the focus was slightly confused due to movement or noise from characters who were not talking; it may be beneficial to re-visit these moments, so that the actors can discover ways of 'internalising' the high levels of tension their characters are feeling. It may also be worth looking at the timing of a couple of the entrances and exits during which more than one character was entering or leaving the playing space, to ensure that the focus of the audience is always with the main action. (This was also the case in the film sequences -see below- as a couple of the actors entered and placed themselves in the light of the projector, drawing the audience's attention away from the film.) The individual performances in this production were thoughtful and honest. I was impressed by the vocal support of this group (this is an area that they had worked on in rehearsals). On occasion, there was a tendency to rush lines, and some of the clarity of the text was slightly missed. However, this came from the very positive fact that the energy of the actors was high and they committed themselves 100% to their performances.

The physical theatre illustration of the moment of Adam's murder deserves a special mention; Cathy, Brian and Adam stood behind the gauze as the rest of the cast, dimly lit, stood on either side of it, holding it taut and looking at the audience. Adam's body was hidden behind Brian, apart from his arms, which grappled with Cathy as she smothered him. The whole sequence was extremely powerful and the audience was noticeably shocked by its effect.

Set & Costumes

Downstage right was a wooden garden bench, on which Mark and Jan performed their scenes. Upstage Right there were two posts with a pole in between. Centre stage was scattered with small logs, supermarket crates and a supermarket trolley which the cast used to sit on throughout the production. There was a large box stage left which Lea and Phil sat on for most of their scenes. All over the stage were scattered dried leaves. (These looked very effective, but the noise as the actors walked on them was occasionally distracting if not coming from the actor who was talking.) The overall impression was one of a woodland area which had also been used as a rubbish dump; an appropriate 'hang-out' place for these characters. Large gauze hung upstage, enabling the actors to perform moments of physical theatre behind it.

The actors were all wearing casual clothes appropriate to their characters. Adam's stage blood was very effective.

Lighting

The lighting (designed by a lighting designer) served the play very well. Frequently, different lighting states were used to represent various atmospheres depending on the action. For example, as Jan and Mark were explaining what had happened to Adam, a purple filter was used. During the moments of physical theatre, as the entire cast mimed throwing stones towards the audience in slow motion, a UV light was used. This lighting state was also used when actors stood behind the gauze and threw white feathers. A green lighting state was used to depict the scenes in the forest. The 'camera flash' moments, as the actors froze in different positions to illustrate their inner emotions, were particularly effective.

Sound & Special Effects

The production made use of a silent film sequence which was projected onto the gauze at the back of the stage. This showed the characters laughing and jeering, and even throwing stones at Adam. It was used both at the beginning and throughout the production, cleverly personifying the horror of the bullying. This was underscored by music which increased the emotive power of this sequence. Music cues punctuated the scenes and underscored some of the action. (For example, as Phil illustrates to Cathy the 'game with the bag', music was playing to increase the tension.) One of the recurring pieces of music, which was slow piano music, was composed especially for this production; it was both eerie and atmospheric. The music formed an eclectic mixture, from classical strings, to electronica, to the Verve. The cast told me afterwards that they had enjoyed choosing the music themselves.

Health & Safety

There were no particular health and safety concerns in this production.

The Company Themselves

This company were enthusiastic and had clearly formed a strong bond through the experience of producing this play together; this is the first time this group had worked together (they are part of a youth theatre of 60 members and auditioned to be in this show) and there was a strong sense of ensemble in the post show discussion. They clearly have a very good relationship with their directors who have allowed them to be fully involved in all aspects of the production, as well as guiding them towards making decisions. They had taken ownership of this production and had been allowed to explore and experiment with their characters during rehearsals; they told me that they had spent a lot of time doing background work and improvising the scenes that the audience do not see to 'fill in' the journey for their characters. They had found the experience of filming the 'bullying sequence' an extremely powerful way of learning more about their characters. They were clearly very dedicated to performing their best and had discovered how remaining focused and 'in character' when they were offstage had helped them do so.

The cast had spent a lot of time discussing the issues around the production and had even gone on a group trip to see the National's 'Therese Raquin' to explore further the psychology of murder.

Level of Support for the Company

This youth theatre is very well supported, both from family and friends, an active Board and a large group of volunteers. They had enjoyed good audiences, particularly on the second night, which was nearly full.

Performance Number	Total Number of Performances	MA Programme?	Number of Sessions
2	2	No	20

Total number of...

Young People Performing	Other Young People Involved	Adults Involved	Audience (over entire run)
11	5	10	150