

Theatre performance analysis

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Theatre Performance Analysis Last week, I attended a stage performance of Shakespeare's timeless and tragic play Romeo ; Juliet at Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide. It was an adaptation by Geordie Brookman (also the director) and Nicki Bloom.

The cast had only six performers and they were required to occasionally switch characters. The run-time was 140 minutes. The purpose of this paper is to conduct a performance analysis on the use of body and voice of individual performers and overall group work among performers. The scope is limited to salient features of the performance only which precludes any etailed analysis on individual performances.

The use of body is analyzed on the basis of viewpoints of time and space proposed by Landau (2000). To differentiate the principal characters, Romeo was wearing a black beanie and Juliet was wearing a head scarf at all times.

The overall tempo of the play was very fast as the director tried to compress the original five acts in a single play of 140 minutes. The individual sequences typically lasted from two minutes to over ten minutes in the case of final sequence. Since the performers were required to play different roles, their characters in a sequence were present for even esser times.

However, it often resulted in repetition of certain body movements even if the same character was playing different roles. One of the characters Josephine Were kept repeating her body movements no matter if she was playing nurse or Juliet.

A positive feature of the play was the strong angles and sharp edges that the actors were creating during the play. Even though the performers were inexperienced in their profession, they showed proficient utilization of available space while creating unique shapes such as circles or triangles during the sequences.

The lead actors relied on expressive gestures (facial expressions and body language) to communicate different feelings of love, anger, sorrow, remorse etc. Their portrayal of their characters was believable. The physical environment included “ walls of scaffolding covered in Hessian and an articulated section of wall at the rear” (Lenny, 2010) which can be considered grand. The source of lighting were the flashlights on stage and it was adequate for highlighting the attention grabbing sequences especially the climax part.

The use of sound has been analyzed on the basis of Berry’s theory of Vocal Development (1973). The director erred on the side of aution as the overall volume of the play was kept a bit louder than what one would expect from a tragic play. The actors were trying to pass too much energy to the audience which robbed the play of its subtlety. The tone of voice varied from sorrow (during tragic sequences) to lively (during passionate and happier sequences). In some sequences, the actors seemed to have “ an overbalance of head resonance”.

There was a tension among the voices of actors particularly Conroy.

According to Berry, this tension results from an actor’s lack of belief in himself or an actor trying too hard to portray an image which is not

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convincing. In Conroy's case, the plausible reason is the latter. As the actors had to constantly switch roles, it is possible the actors were trying too hard to "sound like" their new characters even though their minds might have been set on previous ones. The limited cast necessitated actors to caused an overbalance of head resonance in the voices of some actors.

Another pertinent feature of the voice was the slow pace and over-modulation.

It can be argued that the actors were trying to be very clear especially during transition of sequences so that the audience could identify with the new characters. This caused them to adopt a slower pace of voice. The over emphasis on modulation can be traced back to the same reason which caused an overbalance of head resonance. The overall group work has been analyzed on the basis of Oddeys text on group work among actors (Oddey, 1984).

As the play is supposed to be a tragic tale, the overarching theme was tragic.

The lack of group work was evident in the actors' portrayal of various roles. Due to constant changing of roles, the actors were required to "get into the skin of" the character fairly quickly. However, the actors were seen to stamp their individuality on the roles which resulted in a lack of consistency in haracterization which resulted in utter confusion among the viewers. The lack of chemistry among the actors showed inexperience on part of actors of working together.

Still, there were a few positives in the overall group work.

One of them was the excellent utilization of space and creation of unique shapes and edges on the stage. The actors were aware of the spotlight. The re-acting by actors (facial expressions and bodily movements when they did not have a line) was impressive and it outlined the overall theme of the sequence. For example, the supporting actors had a expressions of sorrow during the end sequence which highlights the tragic heme of the sequence. The play had many limitations, the most prominent being the limited cast.