

Creating Atmosphere through Music/Sound

Choosing just the right music can evoke immediate feelings of a certain era: think of the big band sounds of the 1920s and 1930s, the swinging sounds of the 1960s, or the synth-pop bubble gum sounds of the 1980s.

Similarly, an eerie, dark pipe organ playing in a minor key can put an audience in mind of a haunted house, while medieval harps and flutes immediately bring to mind pastoral fairy tale imagery.

Sound and music can be an effective way to create mood on stage. Music can be used to heighten the mood of a scene, eg the use of sad strings to underscore an emotional monologue. Music can also be contrasted to the action on stage for dramatic effect.

Music is a particularly effective device for conveying a play's historical context. For example, a play set in the 1940s may use a style of music popular in that period, such as swing, to help transport the audience to that era. Sound effects can also reinforce a play's period, eg a horn from a steam train.

Sound effects can be used to help establish the time of day. A scene set in the early morning might feature the sound of birdsong, while a scene at night could use the sound of crickets chirping.

Music and sound can be used to communicate thematic or symbolic ideas. For example, where power is the central theme of a play, strong and dramatic classical music with a heavy brass sound might be used.

Music can influence pace on stage. For example, a fast piece of music with a pulsing drum and bass rhythm will energise a scene.

Some plays use a musical theme or sound effect to represent a character on stage. This can be subtle but at times is very obvious, eg a thunder sound effect and tense music when a villain enters the stage in a pantomime.

Using Symbolism

A symbol is something which stands for or represents something else. Symbols are often used in drama to deepen its meaning and remind the audience of the themes or issues it is discussing. A prop often has a particular significance that an audience will instantly recognise when used symbolically in the work. Using your mini whiteboards - What might the following things symbolise or represent?



1



2



3



4

1. A white coat represents medicine, science, authority
2. A dove represents peace and tranquillity
3. A torn wedding photograph represents divorce or separation
4. A lamb represents new life, spring, innocence or sacrifice

Symbolic Movement

Movement and actions can be symbolic too, particularly if you're using Physical theatre as a form. In Mark Wheeler's play, Too Much Punch for Judy, the keys being thrown are significant in certain important moments in the play. Remember that the meanings behind symbols can sometimes change within the same play.

KEY VOCABULARY

Facial Expressions - A facial expression conveys an emotion that tells us about the character and the way they react to the situation.

Gesture - A gesture is a defined movement which clearly communicates meaning. Gestures are usually made with the arms and hands but can also include the whole body if required.

Body Language - Body language is communication by movement or position, particularly facial expressions, gestures and the relative positions of a speaker.

Exaggeration - The movement is increased almost to the point of being extreme. Audience members can clearly see movement, facial expressions, gesture etc to help them understand the story.

Tableaux - a representation of a dramatic scene by a person or group, posing silently without moving – also known as freeze frame/still image

Cross-Cutting - used to describe two or more scenes which are performed on stage at the same time.

Atmosphere – Creating different moods to help move a performance along

Symbolism – Something that stands for or represents something else

Physical Theatre – Storytelling told primarily through physical movement

Stimulus - is a starting point or trigger to generate ideas.

Physical Theatre

Physical theatre as a form of theatre that puts emphasis on movement rather than dialogue.

Physical theatre is anything that puts the human body at the centre of the storytelling process.

As a result it's often abstract in style, using movement in a stylised and representational way.

With the expression of ideas choreographed through movement, such performers use very little or no dialogue at all.

Frantic Assembly

Created in 1994 by Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett, and Vicki Middleton. Their ambition is that they continue to learn and remain committed to making brave and bold theatre. At times it is physically dynamic and brutal. At others it's proudly tender and fragile. It is about the ethos of collaboration, of empowerment, of that constant desire to improve. It is about telling stories in a voice we don't always hear.



DV8

For a performance to be in the style of DV8 it should be:

- Challenging for an audience with possible taboo subject matter
- Physically demanding movement (performers must take risks too)
- Challenges the conventions and traditional forms of dance
- Reflects real human relationships and desires
- Developed through improvisation and experimentation
- Challenging staging requirements that performers interact with
- Use music, song, dialogue and soundscapes.

