

# Performance Workshop

Gail Deal

## BTEC – QCF Performing Arts Unit 1

# BTEC

### Introduction

This scheme covers 12 weeks with 4 lessons per week. Each lesson is an hour long. Learners will have time to work on research, Log Books and evaluation during private study periods. You will find the specification for this QCF unit on the Pearson website (see margin box opposite for link). Share the assessment grading criteria and the learning outcomes with the learners at the outset as they will need to address these in their Log Books.

### Week 1: Stimuli and groups

#### Learning outcome 1 – Be able to interpret ideas for performance material

##### Lesson 1: Using stimuli and initial discussions/mind maps – visual stimuli

The stimuli for the performance piece may take a range of forms. They may be based on themes, media, texts, visual or aural sources.

Divide the class into small groups and give each one a postcard, a painting or an illustration. Websites of art galleries and photographic exhibitions are good places to find lots of images; see links to examples opposite.

Give each group a sheet of A3 and some marker pens to produce a mind map of their initial reactions to the stimulus.

A set of questions can be used to spark discussion as a response to the stimulus:

- ▶ What is your eye drawn to first?
- ▶ Are there any significant contrasts in the image? What effect do they have on you?
- ▶ Which colours do you see and what do they depict?
- ▶ Comment on any figures in the image and relationships between them.
- ▶ Can you imagine what might have just happened and what the characters are saying to each other? Name the characters and write down the dialogue.
- ▶ What mood does the image create?
- ▶ Write down 3 to 5 actions/gestures that you associate with the image.
- ▶ Write down three sentences to describe the image or phrases inspired by the image and set these to a melody on the piano. Add a rhythm. Use Stomp for ideas. (Go to [www.stomp.co.uk](http://www.stomp.co.uk).)

Using the same method but perhaps swapping the groups, provide a range of visual artefacts to discuss to see which one has the potential to be a starting point for a devised piece. You could include sculptures and photographs.

Learners do not need to restrict themselves to the questions. They should note down their answers on paper or record the discussion so they can go back to it. If a structure for a piece starts to emerge, they should jot that down. It might be linear, non-linear or collage.

**Log Book:** Explain the task and choose which visual artefact could be used for a performance piece starting point and why. Learners may choose to use a *blog* or *vlog* instead of a Log Book throughout this unit.

##### Lesson 2: Aural stimuli

Play some audio clips and ask learners to write down a personal response – it might be in the form of words, images or movements. The clips can cover a range of aural stimuli such as music, song, sound effects, weather, found sounds, dialogue and spoken verse. The questions below should be given to the learners to help them focus.

After each learner has listened to the clips (each one twice), they should share their ideas with the group.

Use a template with the questions below at the top followed by the name

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[https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/BTEC-Nationals/Performing-Arts/2010/Specification/Unit\\_1\\_Performance\\_Workshop.pdf](https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/BTEC-Nationals/Performing-Arts/2010/Specification/Unit_1_Performance_Workshop.pdf)



- ▶ [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)
- ▶ [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)
- ▶ Example of an image – 'Why Are You Angry?' 2017, a film still by Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer
- ▶ 'No Man's Sky', 2016 as seen in *Videogames: Design/Play/Disrupt – Hello Games* from an exhibition at the V & A.

of each audio clip and a short explanation of what it is. Learners complete the template by answering the questions on each clip. This can be written up in the Log Book.

- How does the clip make you feel?
- What type of mood does this piece create?
- Does the aural piece inspire a setting in time and space? Can you sketch it? Describe it?
- What structure does the piece have?
- How could this be reflected in your devised piece?
- Does the piece indicate different relationships? E.g. solo, duet, trio, quartet, ensemble?
- How long is the piece? Does it have obvious sections? Could these be used to structure your piece?
- Does the piece inspire a theme? E.g. love, war, conflict, power, family relationships, hope, despair?

**Log Book:** Write up the task and evaluate each audio clip as a possible starting point for a devised piece.

### Lesson 3: Text-based stimuli

Working in pairs, the learners consider a range of texts covering autobiographical material, fiction and non-fiction, poetry, journalism and scores. You should choose 5 texts, e.g. a section of *Boy* by Roald Dahl, a description of a natural disaster from a newspaper, an article about plastic clogging up the ocean, a poem about robots taking over the world.

- Briefly summarise the texts – no more than 5 sentences:
- From whose point of view is the piece?
- Whose point/s of view could you show in the devised piece?
- Devise a tableau to show a significant moment in the piece and photograph it.
- Write a short section of dialogue based on a section in the text which might be in reported speech. Or imagine what might be said at the scene.
- Create a short movement section based on a section in the text or ideas derived from it.
- Compose a piece of music based on the ideas in the text.

**Log Book:** Write up the task and the ideas for a potential devised piece. Include photographs of your work where possible, e.g. the tableau and recordings on a memory stick of the composed music.

### Lesson 4: Selection and rejection

In small groups of between 3 and 5, or as a class, depending on numbers, the learners discuss the stimuli they have worked with during the last three lessons. They reject the stimuli that they consider has little performance potential for them and select those that they think can be the starting points for performance. Decide how to split the class into groups for the performance and each group chooses the stimulus for the piece.

Each group produces a mind map of ideas for the performance piece including:

- ▶ List of scenes – maximum 7
- ▶ A tableau to start each scene and end the last one
- ▶ Duration of piece – 20 to 30 minutes
- ▶ Main theme and message to audience
- ▶ List of characters - casting if possible – dramatis personae
- ▶ Diagram showing relationships between characters
- ▶ Music opportunities
- ▶ Dance/movement sections
- ▶ Chosen style – Brechtian, musical theatre, physical theatre, etc.

Each group presents their ideas to the class and receives feedback.

**Log Book:** Explain which stimulus was chosen and why. Discuss how the piece will be structured and which style will be used. Use the mind map to show details of plot, character and theme.

Give a title to your devised piece.

#### Useful websites:

[www.theguardian.co.uk](http://www.theguardian.co.uk)  
[www.thepoetrysociety.co.uk](http://www.thepoetrysociety.co.uk)

## Week 2: Improvisation

During these four lessons the learners experiment with ideas for their piece. Make sure that they warm-up and cool down for each session. Focus each lesson on one aspect of performing, e.g. drama, music and dance/movement/mime. In each lesson show some video clips as examples of performance work and ask the class to evaluate their success.

American musicals on film are a great source of inspiration. Try dance sections by Busby Berkeley, Agnes de Mille, Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse.

1. Dance/movement. See websites opposite for clips of movement.
2. You might use the theme of money/greed as a starting point for this lesson. Show 'We're in the Money' and 'Money (makes the World Go Around)'. Ask the learners to define what money is and the forms it can take. They could discuss the prospect of a cashless society and how it might affect people. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the women are disempowered when the money from their bank accounts is reduced to zero. Learners should work on improvisations based on the idea of a cashless society and its advantages and dangers. A range of characters can be given and each has a set of given circumstances.
3. Using an abstract painting, photographic image or setting from a video game, ask the class to create a soundscape. Give them a range of percussive instruments and a piano and a guitar. If they have their own instruments they wish to use, that is fine. They can use song, but should not use words. They can record the result on their phones and play them to each of the other groups for feedback or perform live. Discuss the moods and atmospheres created and how they link to the images chosen.
4. Using drama, dance and music, learners should create a musical theatre improvisation based on their chosen stimulus. Start each scene with a tableau and work these out first. Consider how they relate to the stimulus. Each improvisation should include a slow motion section, a mime section and a section performed at double speed.

<https://new-adventures.net/shows> – for works by Matthew Bourne eg *Swan lake*, *Nutcracker!*, *Romeo and Juliet*. *The Red Shoes*, *Cinderella*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Dorian Grey*, *The Car Man* and *Lord of the Flies*.

[www.sadlerswells.com](http://www.sadlerswells.com)

[www.roh.org.uk](http://www.roh.org.uk)

[www.nscd.ac.uk](http://www.nscd.ac.uk)

[www.motionhouse.co.uk](http://www.motionhouse.co.uk)

## Week 3: Shaping and refining

Lessons 1, 2 and 3 for improvising and creating material.

Lesson 4 is for performing what has been created to the camera. Learners watch the recording and evaluate the success of what they have created.

## Week 4: Rehearsal

1. Technical Rehearsal – teacher completes an observation report for each learner.
2. Feedback – teacher gives notes to each group. Each learner responds to the feedback.
3. Dress rehearsal – repeat the above process.
4. Feedback.

## Week 5: Performance

1. Performance 1
2. Feedback – teacher gives notes and learners respond
3. Performance 2 – teacher completes a second observation report
4. Feedback – teacher gives final notes and learners prepare notes to write a 500 word evaluation of the piece.

## Week 6: Evaluation of performance and process

1. Watching the film of the performances
2. Discussion about the success of the performances
3. How to write an evaluation/ questions for a viva
4. Deadline for the work on the devised piece.

## Week 7: Scripts and groups

Learners are encouraged to work on pieces of repertoire using the three skills of acting, dancing and singing, although they may perform using one of these rather than all three.

It would therefore seem like a good idea to use musical theatre as a style for the repertoire pieces. Stage shows or film versions can be used for initial research to discover which repertoire is appropriate for the learners. Choose a range of films and ask learners to complete research into the plot, characters, themes and numbers. You could give the following as an example:

### **Example: Singin' in the Rain(1952) directed by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly**

This film is a musical-romantic comedy set in the late 1920s in Hollywood at a time when silent movies were giving way to talkies.

It was directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen and produced by Arthur Freed.

The screen play was written by Betty Comden and Adolph Green and the original score was by Lennie Hayton.

The songs were written by Nacio Herb Brown (music) and Arthur Freed (lyrics).

The production company was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM).

Release date 27 March 1952.

Running time – 103 minutes.

### **CAST:**

**Gene Kelly** as Don Lockwood who is friend and vaudeville partner to Cosmo, silent movie romantic icon with Lina Lamont, and who later falls in love with Kathy Selden.

**Donald O'Connor** as Cosmo Brown, Don's vaudeville partner and life-long friend. He becomes Head of Music at Monumental Pictures.

**Jean Hagen** as Lina Lamont, silent movie star with Don Lockwood.

**Debbie Reynolds** as Kathy Selden, dancer and singer who falls in love with Don Lockwood.

**Millard Mitchell** as R. F. Simpson, fictional head of Monumental Pictures.

**Cyd Charisse**, dancer in 'Broadway Melody' in the green sequined dress.

**Jimmy Thompson** as the singer in 'Beautiful Girl'.

**Douglas Fowley** as Roscoe Dexter, the director of Don and Lina's films.

**Rita Moreno** as Zelda Flanders, the 'Zip Girl' and Lina's friend.

### **Smaller roles are played by:**

▶ **Madge Blake** as Dora Bailey, a Hollywood gossip columnist based on Louella Parsons.

▶ **Kathleen Freeman** as Phoebe Dinsmore, Lina's diction coach.

▶ **Bobby Watson** as Lockwood's diction coast in 'Moses Supposes'.

▶ **Julius Tannen** as the man demonstrating the technology of talking pictures.

(Cast list info taken from Wikipedia)

### **DANCE NUMBERS:**

▶ 'Fit As a Fiddle'

▶ 'All I Do Is Dream of You'

▶ 'Make 'Em Laugh'

▶ 'Beautiful Girl'

▶ 'You Were Meant For Me'

▶ 'Good Morning'

▶ 'Singin' in the Rain'

▶ 'Broadway Ballet'

For each number, learners can discuss the context of the song/dance; the characters/dancers/singers; the function of the number within the whole work, the dancers/singers; the dance style and the character of the dance; the musical style; the key features; aspects of physical and aural setting and the subject matter.

The lyrics can be given to the learners and they can annotate each line with movement and vocal delivery. Colour can be used to show different singing parts.

This is an example of research and preparation of 'Fit as a Fiddle' which occurs near the beginning of the film and introduces the audience to the relationship and work of Don Lockwood and Donald O'Connor.

**'Fit as a Fiddle'****Dancers:**

A fast tempo duet starring Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) and Cosmo Brown (Donald O'Connor)

**Dance style/s**

Vaudeville, tap, song and dance, comedy, clowning, Cossack

**Key features**

Unison work, partner work, travelling steps across the stage from stage right to stage left and back again along the front of the stage while swapping position or Lockwood carrying Brown in a piggyback position. Small jumps are used as well as the floor level. High energy and precise comic timing add to the success of this number.

**Context**

This number is placed near the beginning of the film to introduce the audience to the relationship between Don Lockwood and Cosmo Brown. It shows that they have always stuck together through all adversities. It happens in a flashback and is delivered by Lockwood as he is interviewed on the red carpet outside the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood before the film premiere of *The Royal Rascal*. Lockwood is standing with Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen), his co-star who believes all the celebrity gossip that the two are romantically linked.

**Physical setting:**

Various performance stages throughout the comedy duo's early performing days from childhood through to adulthood.

Costume: Matching green plaid suits – find an image from the internet.

Lighting: Changes depending on the performance space, but it is theatrical to highlight the dancers, their props and their feet when tapping. It shows the run-down nature of the venues.

Film: dancers are shown in long shot so the audience can appreciate the dance. Scenes merge into one another using fades. Establishing shots show the different performance venues as Lockwood talks about them. The juxtaposition between what is said in the voice over and what is seen on the screen leads to comedy.

Props: Fiddles used for comedy purposes, walking canes to pull the dancers away from each other and off stage. Piano, which Cosmo plays.

**Aural setting:**

Fast-paced number with a band playing in the background, seen live in one gig venue. Violins heard throughout as Don and Cosmo end up playing them on stage.

Various sound effects used for comic effect to match the actions on stage, e.g. the flowers appearing at the end of the number.

Don and Cosmo singing.

Voice over which humorously contrasts with what is being seen: 'Dignity, always dignity'.

**Subject matter:**

This number introduces the audience to the two friends - see context above. It shows Don Lockwood as a singer and dancer at the start of his career. Cosmo sings, dances and plays the piano. 'Fit as a Fiddle' links to the dream ballet, 'Broadway Melody', at the end of the film where Lockwood plays the part of a young hooper arriving at the doors of three agents in New York, trying to find work as a dancer in the section entitled 'Gotta Dance'. It highlights how Lockwood started as a dancer, became a stunt man in silent movies and then an actor. He can make the transition into the talkies because he has a good voice for both acting and singing and he can dance so the new film will not only be a talkie, it will be a musical. Silent movie stars like Lina Lamont will disappear from the silver screen or have to mime as their voices are not appropriate.

The themes established in 'Fit as a Fiddle' are life as a dancer/singer, silent movie stars and celebrity.

**Character of the dance:**

Vaudeville, comedic, entertaining, fast tempo, high energy, visual gags, shows the talent of the two performers and their close onstage relationship, strong chemistry between them, excellent timing, entertaining, catchy tune and repetition used in the movement to match repetition in the lyrics and the strong structure.

To revise the dance, go over your annotation from your notes. Watch the clip again. Learn some of the movement details alongside the lyric. These are like quotations for your essay.

Note that Cosmo is in all the comedy numbers ('Make 'Em Laugh', 'Moses', 'Good Morning'). He is usually seen playing the piano and is made musical director of the new film at one point. He is an upbeat character who is loyal to Don Lockwood. He does not like Lina and knows that Kathy is the right choice of girlfriend material for Don. He makes Don laugh when he is down when he cannot find Kathy and he helps Don locate her. In 'Good Morning' Cosmo, Don and Kathy stay up all night working on ideas for the new film. Cosmo is instrumental in turning it into a musical. Look at the four numbers together and think about Cosmo's eclectic dance style.

See 'Fit as a Fiddle' lyrics online, e.g. <https://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/singintherain/fitasafiddle.htm>

**Lessons 1 and 2**

Introduce and watch the film.

**Lesson 3**

Discussion of which scenes/numbers to perform.

**Lesson 4**

Characterisation/hot seating/profiling/research.

Discussing which character is in which number and which part of the plot they play a role in. Follow the main characters, e.g. Don Lockwood, Cosmo Brown, Lina Lamont and Kathy Selden, as well as Cyd Charisse. Consider which members of the class/group have the skills for which role.

## Week 8

**Lesson 1**

Look at other films and selections of numbers/scenes from these films, e.g. *An American in Paris* (1951). 'I Got Rhythm' is an excellent number for a tap dancer. The music is by George Gershwin and the lyrics are by his brother Ira Gershwin. Gene Kelly was the choreographer and the film was directed by Vincent Minnelli. An excellent book for researching American musicals is *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year* by Stanley Green and revised and updated by Barry Monush, published by APPLAUSE Theatre and Cinema Books, New York. It starts with *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 and the third edition goes up to 2009.

**Lesson 2**

Choice of films might depend on the skills of the learners. Tap dance musical comedy numbers such as *Moses Supposes* are ideal for tap dancers who can sing. Use of props can be introduced using several numbers from *Singin' in the Rain*, e.g. the umbrella in the song 'Singin' in the Rain', the fiddles in 'Fit as a Fiddle', a mannequin in 'Make 'Em Laugh'.

**Lesson 3**

Bob Fosse likes to use hats, canes and chairs. Show 'Steam Heat' from *The Pajama Game* as an example of how to use a hat while dancing. Other Fosse shows are *Chicago*, *Cabaret*, *Damn Yankees*, *Sweet Charity* and *All That Jazz*. There are plenty of ensemble numbers led by a solo singer and lots of solos and duets. Learners could work on a tribute to Fosse as a piece.

**Lesson 4**

Look at other musicals such as *A Chorus Line*, *Rent*, *Mary Poppins*, *The Sound of Music*, *Dreamgirls*, *School of Rock*, *Hamilton*, *Miss Saigon*.

Remember to check performing rights for the musical whose songs you choose to perform. You can choose scenes which allow for some drama and dance as well as singing. You might choose songs from one musical or try to base songs from different musicals around a theme.

## Weeks 9, 10 and 11

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Having chosen the musical/s, choose the songs carefully making sure there is a range of solos, duets and trios as well as ensemble numbers so that every learner has equal exposure. You might need to audition for some solos and duets, but allow the learners a degree of collaboration and choice.

### Week 9

Rehearse the numbers/scenes and work on transitions.

### Week 10

- ▶ Lessons 1 and 2: Rehearsal
- ▶ Lessons 3 and 4: Rehearsal recorded on film.

### Week 11: Performance

Lesson 1: Watch the recorded performance

Lesson 2: Feedback and teacher's notes

Lesson 3: Response to feedback and further refinements

Lesson 4: Performance of the piece recorded in film

## Week 12: Evaluation of performance and process

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Lesson 1: Watch the performance once and discuss feedback. Learners write an evaluation of the performance and process in their Log Books. Learners have access to the film through a student video portal.

Lessons 2, 3 and 4: Hold vivas with individual learners to ask them about the success of the process and the final performance.

# Resources

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## Bibliography

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*Jerome Robbins: That Broadway Man, That Ballet Man* by Christine Conrad, published in 2000 by Booth-Clibborn.com

*Jerome Robbins, His Life, His Theater, His Dance* by Deborah Jowitt, published by Simon and Schuster 2004, New York

*Something's Coming, Something Good: West Side Story and the American Imagination* by Misha Berson, published in 2011 by Applause Theatre and Cinema Books

*Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly in the Golden Era of Hollywood's Musical Legends* by Charles River Editors

*All His Jazz: The Life and Death of Bob Fosse* by Martin Gottfried, published by Bantam Books 1990

*Guide to the Musicals* by Rexton S. Burnett, Michael Patrick Kennedy and John Muir, published by HarperCollins Publishers 2001