*Pippa Cuthbert*

Explain how the performers used vocal and physical skills to entertain or to thrill the audience on one live production that you have seen and assess the effectiveness of their performances a particular moments.

I saw John, performed by DV8 Physical Theatre, at the National Theatre on 18th November 2014. The play follows John through his troublesome life, from his abusive childhood and his drug and alcohol abuse, through to his eventual redemption and realisations of his homosexuality. This verbatim play was created using interviews of men in a gay sauna. The actors used dancelike movements throughout the play, using their bodies to tell the story in a surreal, abstract way.

A scene in the play which particularly impressed me was a the scene in which John, played by Hannes Langolf, tells us about his relationship with Bianca, her addiction and death, and his own problems with alcohol abuse. During the scene he uses bottles to represent his addiction. The scene is thrilling to watch because it clearly shows John’s reliance on alcohol in an interesting and captivating way. As he was talking about his grief over Bianca’s death his face was strained, his mouth pulled into a grimace, and his brow furrowed. His eyes were always focussed on the bottles on the ground, as if engrossed by them and desperate to keep them in his sight. In addition to the constant eye focus on the bottles, he also kept constant physical contact with the bottles. At the beginning of the scene he held them close to his chest, and when one started to slip or fall out of his arms he would hurriedly pick it back up, wrapping his arms tight around them. Later in the scene he held one in each hand, gripping the neck of the bottle tight as if he couldn’t let go. He used them for support, leaning on them instead of putting his hand directly onto the floor, which showed how he saw alcohol as his support system. He showed that the addiction was forcing him into a painful and unnatural situation by physically contorting his body into unnatural positions with complete loss of control. His body moved freely and indirectly, but his hands and arms always remained rigid, holding onto the bottles. Occasionally Langolf would quickly and directly move a bottle away from him, following it with his body as if the bottle was pulling him down. This representation of his alcohol addiction having complete control over him was thrilling to watch, and the vivid display of John’s feelings, along with the impressive physical ability in the performance, meant that I couldn’t look away.

An especially entertaining scene was set in the gay sauna, and the receptionist, played by Garth Johnson, was giving a man a tour of the sauna. Johnson walked in a flowing, dance-like way, taking controlled steps from the heel to the ball of his foot, creating a graceful stride. When he had to change direction he wouldn’t stop moving, but instead gracefully span on one foot and continued moving. He moved very indirectly, almost as if floating, and this made the scene entertaining to watch the other visitor desperately trying to keep track of what he was being shown. The contrast between the two characters on stage was also entertaining, as the visitor’s movements were very different to the receptionists – he fell heavily on flat feet and kept his arms hanging straight by his sides as he moved, which made the character seem very bumbly. On the other hand, as the receptionist moved he swung his arms extravagantly, swishing them to and fro, and when he pointed at a feature of the spa he elongated his lower arm and wrist in an effeminate, flamboyant way. As he explained what the spa was like he spoke with a loud, effeminate voice and this, combined with his exaggerated movements, helped Johnson play the stereotypical gay man. This made the scene entertaining to watch because of how hyperbolic it was, and because it provided a much needed humorous contrast to what we had scene in the play so far.

The scene involving John and his brother’s heroin usage is also thrilling to watch, as the movement is very stylised and draws the audience in. In the scene the actors use slow, flowing movements as they knock their heads together, showing the effects that the drugs have had on them. After they slowly come together their upper body recoils back, and the difference between the slow, fluid movement and the more sudden jerking movements makes the scene interesting and thrilling to watch. The actors’ heads never actually touch, so the synchronisation between them and how realistic the hit looks is also very impressive. After moving apart their torso collapses forwards again, again using free-flowing, indirect movements. This time when they recoil they break from their positions and stagger indirectly across the stage, where they briefly become more aggressive towards each other. This is effectively shown through their facial expressions, which before were blank, but were now pulled into a snarl, which bared teeth and furrowed brows. We then see John swaying as he watches his brother fall heavily to the ground. Langolf then indirectly stumbles backwards, tripping over his own feet, and grabs hold of the set for support, showing how another aspect of his life has been taken from him. Watching John’s brother collapsing, and his reaction, is thrilling because it pulls the audience into the turmoil of his life.

AO2- 14/17 AO4- 25/33 39/50

A very vivid explanation of the movement of the actors, it is well focused on the question and I particularly like how you appreciate the acting both for what it shows about the character but also the impressive physical control of the actors performing it.

You would have scored even higher if you’d have covered voice in more detail or if this question had only asked about movement.

Task- go back through the essay and add some more explanation of how voice was used. Quote lines (you can make them up, approximate what was said) as there is no script for us to use to get them from.

Really well done though, this is an excellent essay- really well written and clear to read.