

Kent Full Length Play Festival 2007

Tips and Hints from the Adjudicator Charles Evans GODA

1 DISCIPLINE

Theatre not anarchic activity (think of calm grace of SWAN above water, busy activity below).

Key requirements: organisation, management, **discipline**.

eg: Bright, brittle chattery exchanges in *Blithe Spirit*
Brilliant timing of Bobchinsky/Dobchinsky double act in *Government Inspector*
Slick set changes in *Blood Brothers*

But: Lovely set scenes in *Habeas Corpus* which lacked fast forward/overlap.

SLACKEN PACE FOR 5 SECS, LOSE 5 MINUTES OF MOMENTUM

2 THICKEN AND ENRICH

Think what characters would be doing (what **stage business**).

People rarely stand still, talking to each other: they **get on with things**.

So: Councillors should give clues to jobs, interests in *Government Inspector*
Children should fidget, play marbles/conkers, pick noses in *Railway Children*
Family should unpack shopping, fondle dog in *Comfort and Joy*

But: Lovely rich gossiping, giggling, busy girls in *Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
Totally credible busy-with-chores Violet in *Winslow Boy*

ENRICH THE STAGE PICTURE WITH NATURAL ACTIVITY

3 BLEND CHARACTER AND MOVEMENT

Find character's being in **movement**, not just words.

Our movement can be as **revelatory** as our speech.

So: Eva needs the skipping, hopping, mercurial nature of child in *Kinder transport*.
The industrious Catherine needs sewing or embroidering in *The Heiress*
Ruth needs assured, flowing movements, familiarity with wine, in *Blithe Spirit*
The insecure Arthur should turn away, force others to address his back, in *Day After Fair*
Martha should prowl, round a stationary Miriam, in *Agnes of God*

But: Honey's wonderful matching of tiny, desperate movements to words in *Who's Afraid of the VW*

HELP CAST TO FIND CHARACTERS WITH BODY LANGUAGE

4 INHABIT THE SILENCES

Don't be afraid of **the eloquence of silence**.

Think of the silence as saying something, not just **an empty pause**.

So: As Julia (finally) admits her affair in *Dead Guilty*, silence should be held to mark turning point
As Brodie & Mackay, in *Prime of*, battle beneath politeness, punctuate thrusts with silences

But: Silent tableaux in *Blood Brothers*, *Road*, *Habeas Corpus* reinforced point of scene.
Brilliant, silent concluding tableau caught whole point of play in *Govt Inspector*.

LET SUB-TEXT WORK ON THE AUDIENCE IN THE SILENCES

5 GIVE WEIGHT TO KEY LINES

Find **the changes of gear** in the play.

Give weight to the line(s) where **the mood** switches.

So: Eva's line ('How lucky I am ...'), with its cruel irony, well weighted in *Kindertransport*
Anna's ('I'm a woman now') played quietly to give audience frisson in *Day After Fair*
Arthur's question, firm but gentle ('Did you steal...?'), electric moment in *Winslow Boy*.
Shirley's quiet, crucial comment ('Not lousy.. not as good as you') in *Night on the Tiles*

But: Miriam's 'Don't ask me those questions, dear' too casual, key moment lost in *Agnes of G*.

HELP CAST FEEL SHIFTS OF GEAR IN THE NARRATIVE

6 FIND A SIGNATURE LINE

Some actors find character through **walk**, others through **signature line**.

One line of dialogue can **define** a character, give the **key** to an accurate portrayal.

So: Charles in *Blithe Spirit* 'Any sight of the advancing hordes?' - authentic note of Coward banter
Sloper in *The Heiress* 'She killed her mother in getting born' - defines attitude to daughter.
Clare in *Road* says, with simplicity, 'I love you so much, Joey' - her love is just as simple.
Violet in *Winslow Boy* talks of 'such a fuss' - she is still, calm unfussy centre.

But: Brodie should show total conviction in line 'I have the gift of claiming girls for my own'
Sarah in *Day After Fair* must find note of love on mention of Bertie.

FIND KEY LINE WHICH REVEALS CHARACTER'S INNER LIFE

7 BE LOVEABLE, OR AT LEAST AMBIGUOUS

Life is grey, **not black or white**.

Don't play heroes as simply good, or villains as simply bad - find the **blend**.

So: Beautifully ambiguous Morris in *The Heiress* (Conman? In love? Weak?)
Mackay in *Jean Brodie* — not the usual martinet, but sensible attempt to control danger
Charming solicitude of Margaret in *Dead Guilty*, 'He was a wonderful husband'

But: Kenneth must show the devilish charm that captivates Shirley in *Night on the Tiles*

HELP CAST FIND THE BAD IN THE HEROES, THE GOOD IN THE VILLAINS

8 CREATE MOOD IN AUDIENCE

Don't just 'warm the curtain', **warm the audience**.

Evoke atmosphere from **first entrance of audience**, continue through Interval.

So: *Jean Brodie* needs strong music: Wagner/La Traviata/swing band (not modern pop)
Govt Inspector needs rustic sound, like off-key balalaika (not martial music)
Night on the Tiles needs Welsh male voice choir as audience settles

But: Lovely Coward miscellany introducing and punctuating *Blithe Spirit*
Perfect choice of Gymnopedie to capture love theme in *Day After Fair*
Atmospheric Kyrie Eleison background to introduce narrative in *Agnes of God*

GET AUDIENCE IN MOOD BEFORE PLAY, AND SUSTAIN THROUGH INTERVAL

9 THINK ABOUT STAGE PICTURE. NOT JUST SET

A good set creates **mood**, not just acting space.

Use **imagination**, not just someone else's plan found in text.

So: Lovely simple set of light, shadow, screen projections (gobo) for *Agnes of God*.
Bonus of sinister shadow on stairs in *The Heiress*.
Versatility of flats in *Habeas Corpus* (but flapping doors needed to create pace)
Versatility of *Kindertransport* set (but beware shoebox effect if not shaded down)
Neat, compact set for *Virginia Woolf* (but no lighting to lead us from night to day)
Grandeur of setting for *Govt Inspector* (but no signs of rustic neglect & deterioration)

USE BLEND OF SET/LIGHT/SOUND/DRESSING FOR STAGE PICTURE

10 BREAK DOWN BARRIERS WITH AUDIENCE

Auditorium can be another **acting space** to use.

Audience area can be **occupied** or **acknowledged**.

- So: Scullery in *Road*, as our guide, entered audience area, talked to us directly.
Martha in *Agnes of God* turned away from action to engage audience.
- But: Eva in *Kindertransport*, reflecting, needed to move downstage, to detach herself.
Children should overflow into audience area in *Railway Children*.
Mayor in *Govt Inspector* should talk to audience for 'You're laughing at yourselves!'
Narrator in *Blood Brothers* should pop up all over stage and auditorium.

FIND WAYS OF ENGAGING AUDIENCE

11 MAKE FREE USE OF YOUR IMAGINATION

Don't be **limited** by Samuel French or any other edition.

Find **your own way** of interpreting a play.

- So: Interesting depiction of Scullery in *Road* as a drop-out.
Imaginative & evocative inclusion of Wheel of Fortune in set of *Blood Brothers*.
Beautiful use of model railway in *Railway Children*.
- But: Lack of invention for characters in *Govt Inspector* (deaf or gammy leg or pregnant)
Habeas Corpus set could, wonderfully, have looked like vast pair of knickers (McGill)

BRING YOUR OWN ORIGINAL IDEAS TO OLD PIECES

12 INTERPRET PLAY & CHARACTERS AS YOU SEE THEM

Don't be afraid of **surprising audience** with new ideas.

Try to take a **fresh look** at interpretation.

- So: Lovely, different, ineffectual Mayor in *Govt Inspector*.
George & Martha quieter than usual, minuet not symphony, in *Virginia Woolf*.
Brodie, in *Prime of*, played differently, more stealthy than storming.
Wonderful sense of family unity evoked in *Comfort and Joy*
Bennett's sad ironies found amid laughter in *Habeas Corpus*.

GET YOUR SHOW TO REFLECT LIFE, NOT A PAST PRODUCTION

13 VARY YOUR REHEARSAL METHODS

Find time to be **inventive** with rehearsals.

Different approaches can **unlock doors** in understanding & interpretation.

- So:
- Try switching roles (to establish each other's needs)
 - Try running play with own improvised words (to establish truth)
 - Try rehearsing seated round table (to find good timing)
 - Try rehearsing movements only (to find good pattern)
 - Try improvising different play outcomes (to understand the writer's dynamic)
 - Try round-table conversations with Cast staying in character (to get to know role)

'THE DIRECTOR'S FIRST DUTY IS TO GIVE THE ACTORS A GOOD TIME'

(Tyrone Guthrie)

CEE

14 June 2007