Appreciation: Ochres

This sample is intended to inform the design of assessment instruments in the senior phase of learning. It highlights the qualities of student work and the match to the syllabus standards.

Dimensions assessed

- Appreciation

Assessment instrument

The response presented in this sample is in response to an assessment task.

Context

You have watched ‘Red’ from Bangarra Dance Theatre’s production Ochres. The program notes describe the interpretation of ‘Red’ as:

Custom, Law and Values placed on the relationships between women and men who have been on a path of change since time began. In each of these relationships, the youth, the obsession, the poison, the pain, there is struggle.


Task

As a dance critic, you have been asked to view ‘Red’ from Bangarra Dance Theatre’s production Ochres.

Through analysis and interpretation of both movement and non-movement components, you are to evaluate how effectively choreographer Stephen Page has communicated his choreographic intent.

Conditions

Time allowed: 3 weeks of own time/4 classes

Presentation: Individual

Word limit: 600–1000 words

Task guidelines

1. Consider the choreographic intent
2. Choose two relationships only to analyse, e.g. youth and passion
3. Dance components include:
   - movement components (spatial elements, dynamic elements and form)
   - non-movement components of visual setting (stage set, lighting, use of props), musical accompaniment and costume.
**Instrument-specific standards matrix**

Student responses have been matched to instrument-specific criteria and standards; those which best describe the student work in this sample are shown below. For more information about the syllabus dimensions and standards descriptors, see [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/10700-assessment.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/10700-assessment.html).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard A</th>
<th>Standard C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
<td>The student work has the following characteristics:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• discerning use of dance terminology, accurate referencing and sustained</td>
<td>• use of dance terminology, referencing and language conventions</td>
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<td>control of language conventions demonstrating sophisticated knowledge</td>
<td>demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the dance</td>
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<td>and understanding of the dance components and skills relevant to the</td>
<td>components and skills relevant to the excerpt of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em></td>
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<td>excerpt of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em></td>
<td>• analysis and interpretation of the interrelationships between dance</td>
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<td>components and skills relevant to the excerpt of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• discerning evaluation with well-reasoned justification of conclusions</td>
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<td>relevant to the excerpt of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em>.</td>
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<td>• discerning analysis and insightful interpretation of the complex and</td>
<td>• evaluation with justification of conclusions relevant to the excerpt</td>
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<tr>
<td>subtle interrelationships between dance components and skills relevant to</td>
<td>of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em>.</td>
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<td>the excerpt of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>• discerning evaluation with well-reasoned justification of conclusions</td>
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<td>relevant to the excerpt of <em>Ochres, ‘Red’</em>.</td>
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</table>
The annotations show the match to the instrument-specific standards.

### Comments

- **sustained language conventions demonstrated through controlled sequencing of introductory paragraph**

- **discerning use of dance terminology**

- **sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the dance components and skills relevant to ‘Red’ section of Ochres**

- **discerning analysis and evaluation, and insightful interpretation of literal and abstract movement**

- **insightful interpretation of the complex and subtle interrelationships between dance components relevant to the context, e.g. youth**

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### Ochres: Red - Analytical Essay

Bangarra Dance Theatre uses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and customs to create theatre which encompasses the spirit, energy and inspiration of indigenous Australians. (Bangarra, 2008) Ochres, choreographed by the company’s artistic director, Stephen Page, explores the significance of ochres in the aboriginal traditions and culture. Ochres, is a work in four sections, Yellow, Black, White and the section that will be focused on in this essay, Red. Pages’ choreographic intent for the Red section communicates, “Custom, law & values placed on the relationships between men and women who have been on the path of change since time began. In each of these relationships: the youth, the obsession, the poison, the pain- there is struggle” (Australia Dancing, 2010). For the purpose of this analysis, the communication of ‘Youth’ and ‘Obsession’ will be analysed to evaluate how successfully Pages’ intent was conveyed. Stephen Page has effectively communicated his choreographic intent for the Red section of Ochres, through the use of both movement and non-movement components.

In his choreography, Page has effectively utilised movement components to establish and communicate the aspect of ‘Youth’ explained in his choreographic intent. Page made use of both literal and abstracted movements to present child-like characters which move in a carefree and energetic manner. One example of a literal movement Page utilised to effectively represent ‘Youth’ was the dancers lying on their sides and rolling down the hill set. This activity is one the audience would associate with child-play. By incorporating this movement Page accomplished conveying youthfulness and also the depicted friendship between dancers to his audience. An abstracted movement incorporated by Page to successfully communicate Youth was the dancer jumping off the rock with legs raised high under body, landing heavy and low on ground. The dancer then walks low with their hand raised to their head with the thumb press between the eyebrows. This effectively communicates the dancers teasing or being sneaky as the hand on the forehead is abstracted from the mocking hand gestures of children. The movements are also low to ground to assist with the communication of children sneaking up to scare someone which overall effectively expresses the youthfulness of the characters. Page also incorporated a variety of levels and utilised the entire stage as dancers run, jump and slide around the whole stage throughout this section. This assists in successfully communicating youth as children are recognised for running around from place to place and having high energy therefore these formations illustrate these characteristics of youth. Another movement that successfully communicates youth is where a dancer performs a turn in attitude with a tilt like action, arms flung backwards and relaxed behind her, then falls slightly and regains balance. This communicates child-like behaviour as the dancers are carefree with their arms and they are not on balance which illustrates the light-hearted blissful qualities of youth. The movement components utilised by Page which successfully communicated youth in the Red section are supported by a variety of non-movement components.

In his choreography, Page has also employed non-movement components, especially prop and costume, to effectively establish and communicate his choreographic intent. The main prop used throughout the whole of Ochres was a red shirt. To successfully communicate youth, dancers use the shirt during the Red section in an innocent and playful way to support the child-like characters. The shirt in the start is
Comments

control of language conventions demonstrated through sophisticated knowledge and understanding of dance components relevant to ‘Red’

discerning evaluation with well-reasoned justification of conclusions relevant to ‘Red’

discerning analysis

placed around the male dancer’s shoulders before being stolen by the female to create a game. This demonstrates child-like behaviour as the girls are teasing the boy by stealing the shirt—common amusement for children. This assists in the successful communication of youth. The shirt is also used in a variety of other child games like tug-a-war, elastics and skipping. This creates a fun and childish atmosphere to the piece therefore helps to illustrate Pages intent for the youth section of Red. The costume, a red singlet dress cut above the knee for the women and red pant for the man communicate the idea of ‘youth’ as the costumes look innocent and reflect clothes which a child would wear. The soundscape/accompaniment for the piece is upbeat and exciting and also includes the sound of children’s laughter and voices telling stories, ‘they’d chase me around all day’. This effectively establishes youth as the music and aural accompaniment encompasses the qualities of a child, energetic and fun loving and as well as including the voices of youth and their laughter. Through utilising both the movement and non-movement components, Page has successfully communicated the element of ‘youth’ in his choreographic intent.

To successfully communicate the aspect of ‘Obsession’ in his choreographic intent, Page utilised movement components, specifically abstracted movements which were often suggestive. A combination of sensual, smooth, contact work was used to successfully create the relationship of obsession between two lovers. Movements were mostly performed next to or touching one another to effectively produce a romantic connection or fixation between the two people. A specific movement that successfully communicates obsession is the dancers both holding the shirt pulling away from one another leaning backward, before falling back toward each other, forced together by the tension of the shirt. This effectively portrays ‘obsession’ as the two dancers, although they try to pull apart, are pull back together like magnets, in turn showing their obsession with each other. Another movement that further communicates obsession is when the female dancer hinges backwards with her head towards the male. The male dancer supports the female creating an arch shape with the female’s body. The male dancer is holding the shirt above the female then she un-arches her back pushing her chest forward as she reaches for the shirt with both hands before falling back into the arch again. This communicates the theme of obsession, successfully as the dancer’s movements are centred around the prop, and the reaching movements with a longing quality made by the body, depict being obsessed. Another example where movement is successfully used to establish obsession is when the female grabs the male by the arms and runs backward pulling and dragging him back with her. This clearly demonstrates obsession as the female needs the male and she cannot let him be disconnected with her. The movements in this section combined with the assistance of non-movement components such as props and costume successfully communicate the Obsession section of Page’s choreography.

The use of props and costumes in this section successfully establish more romantic, adult characters due to the style of costume and the use of the prop to connect two people. The preposed in the Red section is a red shirt, which effectively communicates obsession through establishing a connection between the dancers. Dancers at the start of the routine never let go of the shirt and all movements centre around displaying this connection. This directly demonstrates ‘obsession’ successfully as it communicates to the audience that the dancers cannot be apart, and they are linked together in a deep way. When dancers do let go of the shirt, one dancer holds it and the other is reaching for it. This
Communicates their obsession or fixation with the object and demonstrates the intent throughout the section. The feeling of obsession is also developed through the use of costumes in the dance. The male, at the start of the dance wears an open red shirt to effectively illustrate his manhood while the female wears a ¾ length night dress with slits up the sides to show her legs. This creates a suggestive and more sensual adult vibe. The costume colour of red, successfully communicates the passion or obsession the dancers are feeling towards one another in this piece as red is often associated with these emotions. The prop and costume alongside the movement choreographed by Page, explicitly communicates the feeling of obsession written in his choreographic intent.

Bangarra Dance Theatre aims to create works that encompass the spirit, energy and culture of Indigenous Australians. In Ochres, Page establishes and produces dances which embody these qualities. In the Red section of Ochres, the qualities of ‘youth’ were successfully portrayed through the use of child-like innocent movement in conjunction with the use of the red shirt and a toy whereas ‘obsession’ was effectively conveyed through sensual passionate movements with the dancers always touching. Page’s intent for the piece was to communicate the relationships between men and women and how they evolve throughout a lifetime particularly focusing on the areas, ‘Youth’, ‘Obsession’, ‘Poison’ and ‘Pain’. By the use of movement and non-movement components, specifically the use of prop and costume, Page successfully communicates his choreographic intent for the Red section of Ochres.

Bibliography


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