

Exercise in Futility

by Morag Galloway



Duration: Approximately 20 minutes

For Ian

Exercise in Futility was first performed as part of Ad Hoc's *Repeated Patterns* concert on 17th May 2008, at the Synergy Centre, Camberwell, London.

It had the following cast:

ACTOR 1

Ian MacDonald

ACTOR 2

Morag Galloway

The second performance was as part of SENSORIUM, on the 6th January 2010, at the Guildhall, York. It had the same cast.

Production Note

For ease of explanation throughout the score 'He' is used for ACTOR 1 and 'She' for ACTOR 2.

The actors wear workwear, which can be a combination of absurd and semi-clad.

A set of steps is needed and can be placed on the stage/concert hall floor area, where ever works best for the production. In the London premiere two sets were used and spaced out on stage; this gave physical distance between the actors and effected their relationship as a result. In York there was only room for one set of steps. The performers held hands whilst stepping, changing the dynamic of the relationship entirely. It is worth considering the impact the steps have on the performance.

The five tracks in the piece are included on the DVD at the back of the score. They are: Track 1 – *Ablutions*; Track 2 – *Travelling*; Track 3 – *Working*; Track 4 – *Drinking*; Track 5 – *Fighting*.

A CD player was used in the premiere to trigger the five backing tracks; the actors did this at the indicated places in the score. In the York performance the lighting technician triggered the sound using visual cues from the actors. Feel free to make your own choices as to how the backing track is triggered.

Note on the miming

Each act represents a time in the working day. When it is the actor's turn to mime in each act he/she must choose three associated gestures. For example: in *Ablutions* the actor could mime going to the toilet, cleaning teeth and brushing hair. These movements form a sequence that is performed three times in total. The first performance is very literal, the second less so and faster, the final performance fluid, dance-like and least recognisable. The same process is applied in the next three acts: *Travelling*; *Working*; *Drinking*. *Fighting* has a different process/set of actions explained in the relevant place in the score.

Note on the music

The pitch relations within the sung parts are important and must be maintained, however the range and starting notes can be changed to suit the performers. Tempi and dynamics can be altered/decided by the performers in relation to the speed and mood of their chosen mimes and their vocal capabilities. Once the singing has started in any given act, consistency in each repetition must be maintained. The Drinking Music is an exception: it can 'deteriorate' throughout the repetitions, as if the singer is becoming inebriated. This will set up the transition into the Fighting Music effectively.

The film of the York performance is included in the DVD at the end of the score. It can be watched to aid understanding, but should be treated as a guide rather than a definitive performance.

ACT ONE - Ablutions

A blank, lit stage, with steps on it.

CD Track 1 – 'Ablutions' starts playing.

The ACTORS rush on and bow ostentatiously, blowing kisses and beaming at the audience and each other.

Sound cue 1 at 0.08 – Their movements become robotic as the music becomes stilted.

Sound cue 2 at 0.16 – When children's voices say 'awww' ACTORS fall into an embrace and hold for a moment; then break away and walk, without character, to the steps, backs to the audience, and start stepping up and down them.

It is important that the stepping is irregular and not in unison.

This continues throughout the track until:

Sound cue 3 at 1.12 – Alarm sound makes ACTOR 1 turn around and look at the audience and freeze.

Sound cue 4 at 1.14 – Second alarm sound, after the word 'Assagioli' unfreezes ACTOR 1 and he goes to the CD player, looks at it and freezes again.

Sound cue 5 at 1.40 – After the 'laughter' ACTOR 1 stops the CD player. ACTOR 2 turns round on the steps and faces ACTOR 1.

They stare angrily at each other for two seconds, with an accompanying physical gesture (hands on hips/arms folded, for example).

Then ACTOR 2, from the steps, starts to sing Ablutions Music whilst ACTOR 1 begins to mime his three associated movements from the position he is in on the stage.

Ablutions Music

The phrase may be sung with breaths taken at any point.

When ACTOR 1 has finished his set of three mimes he joins in with the Ablutions Music. After a couple of repetitions of this with ACTOR 2 he turns to ACTOR 2 and they swap places whilst still singing.

When ACTOR 2 is in position at the front of the stage she stops singing and starts her set of mimes.

ACTOR 1 is now in place on the steps, singing Ablutions Music.

Yawning, stretching, waking.

♩ = 53



Ah

When ACTOR 2 has finished her mimes she turns to ACTOR 1, who stops singing, and they look at each other angrily, with accompanying physical gesture. ACTOR 2 goes over to the CD player and starts **CD Track 2 – 'Travelling'** on the CD and returns to the steps to join ACTOR 1.

Their angry postures and facial expressions stay until both are at the steps.

They then become neutral and begin to step up and down, as before.

ACT TWO – Travelling

CD Track 2 – 'Travelling' is playing.

The ACTORS are stepping up and down on their steps.

Sound cue 6 at 0.41 – The 'boing' sound alerts ACTOR 2, who turns to the audience, looking anxious, and then runs to the CD player and freezes over it.

Sound cue 7 at 0.46 – The next 'boing' sound is the cue for ACTOR 2 to stop the CD player. ACTOR 1 turns round on the steps and faces ACTOR 2.

They stare angrily at each other for two seconds, with their accompanying physical gesture.

Then ACTOR 1, from the steps, starts to sing Travelling Music whilst ACTOR 2 begins to mime her three associated movements from the position she is in on the stage.

Travelling Music

ACTOR 1 sings the upper line only. Gaps longer than a crotchet rest may be taken in between repetitions.

When ACTOR 2 joins in after finishing her mimes she must sing the lower part with the upper part as shown. This should be repeated at least three times before ACTOR 1 drops out to establish the harmonies.

When ACTOR 2 has finished her set of three mimes she starts singing the lower part of Travelling Music.

After at least three repetitions of this with ACTOR 1 she turns to ACTOR 1 and they swap places whilst still singing.

When ACTOR 1 is in position at the front of stage he stops singing and starts his set of mimes. ACTOR 2 is now in place on the steps, singing the lower part of Travelling Music.

Insistent and punchy.

♩ = 100

Da da da da da da da da da da da da da da Da da da da da da da da da da da da da da!

The musical notation is written on a single staff in treble clef. It begins in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of ♩ = 100. The melody consists of eighth notes in a rhythmic pattern: quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter, quarter, eighth, eighth, quarter. After the first four measures, there is a key signature change to D major (indicated by a sharp sign on the F line) and a time signature change to 4/4. The melody continues in 4/4 time with the same rhythmic pattern. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

When ACTOR 1 has finished his mimes he goes over to the CD player and stops. ACTOR 2 stops singing and they look at each other angrily, with accompanying physical gesture.

ACTOR 1 starts **CD Track 3 – 'Working'** on the CD and returns to the steps to join ACTOR 2.

Their angry postures and facial expressions stay until both are at the steps.

They then become neutral and begin to step up and down, as before.

ACT THREE – Working

CD Track 3 – 'Working' is playing.

The ACTORS are stepping up and down on their steps.

Sound cue 8 at 1.28 – The telephone ringing alerts ACTOR 1, who turns to the audience, looking anxious, and then runs to the CD player and freezes over it.

Sound cue 9 at 1.38 – The 'hello' is the cue for ACTOR 1 to make a phone with his hand and hold it to his ear.

Sound cue 10 at 1.41 – The 'sigh' is the cue for ACTOR 1 to put the phone down.

Sound cue 11 at 1.45 – The end of this laughter cues ACTOR 1 to stop the CD. ACTOR 2 turns round on the steps and faces ACTOR 1.

They stare angrily at each other for two seconds, with their accompanying physical gesture.

Then ACTOR 2, from the steps, starts to sing Working Music whilst ACTOR 1 begins to mime his three associated movements from the position he is in on the stage.

Working Music

ACTOR 2 sings the upper line only. Gaps longer than a minim rest may be taken in between repetitions.

When ACTOR 1 joins in after finishing his mimes he must sing the lower part with the upper part as shown. This should be repeated at least three times before ACTOR 2 drops out to establish the harmonies.

When ACTOR 1 has finished his set of three mimes he starts singing the lower part of Working Music.

After at least three repetitions of this with ACTOR 2 he turns to ACTOR 2 and they swap places whilst still singing.

When ACTOR 2 is in position at the front of stage she stops singing and starts her set of mimes. ACTOR 1 is now in place on the steps, singing the lower part of Working Music.

Slow, beautiful and smooth.

♩ = 42

When ACTOR 2 has finished her mimes she goes over to the CD player and stops. ACTOR 1 stops singing and they look at each other angrily, with accompanying physical gesture.

ACTOR 2 starts **CD Track 4 – 'Drinking'** on the CD and returns to the steps to join ACTOR 1.

Their angry postures and facial expressions stay until both are at the steps.

They then become neutral and begin to step up and down, as before.

ACT FOUR – Drinking

CD Track 4 – 'Drinking' is playing.

The ACTORS are stepping up and down on their steps.

Sound cue 12 at 2.28 – The drum and cymbal sounds alert ACTOR 2, who turns to the audience, looking anxious, and then runs to the CD player and freezes over it.

Sound cue 13 at 2.37 – The 'boing' is the cue for ACTOR 2 to stop the CD. ACTOR 1 turns round on the steps and faces ACTOR 2.

They stare angrily at each other for two seconds, with their accompanying physical gesture.

Then ACTOR 1, from the steps, starts to sing Drinking Music whilst ACTOR 2 begins to mime her three associated movements from the position they are in on the stage.

Drinking Music

Both ACTORS sing the same line. Breaths should be taken within the music so that the repetitions are continuous (within reason).

When ACTOR 2 has finished her set of three mimes she joins in with the Drinking Music. After at least three repetitions of this with ACTOR 1 she turns to ACTOR 1 and they swap places whilst still singing.

When ACTOR 1 is in position at the front of stage he stops singing and starts his set of mimes. ACTOR 2 is now in place on the steps, singing Drinking Music.

Cheeky, coarse and nasal.

♩ = 80



When ACTOR 1 has finished his set of three mimes he stays in position and flops forward, bending at the hips, his back to ACTOR 2.

This is the cue for ACTOR 2 to finish the repetition of the music and to slow down during it, in a grotesque manner.

A breath should be taken between the last two notes so the final 'A' can be held on for a long time.

When ACTOR 2 sings this note she starts to move towards the front of the stage and ACTOR 1.

At the same time ACTOR 1 starts singing a held 'D' below the 'A' in a similarly grotesque manner. (Maintain perfect fifth relationship if other pitches are being used).

When ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 are side by side at the front of the stage they both stop singing and ACTOR 1 stands up straight.

There is a pause for them to eyeball the audience and take a breath and then they launch into three unison repetitions of Fighting Music.

ACT FIVE - Fighting

Fighting Music

ACTOR 1 sings the lower part and ACTOR 2 the higher (thus starting on the same notes they finished with in the previous ACT).

Angry, biting and ugly.

♩ = 160

Da da da da Da da da da Da da Da da Da da DA DA DA DA

After singing three repetitions of the music, whilst standing still and facing the audience, the ACTORS start miming their Fighting gestures whilst continuing to sing the Fighting Music.

The fighting is directed at the audience and is in the form of one movement each executed in the rest at the end of each musical phrase.

ACTOR 1 starts with an attacking movement whilst ACTOR 2 mimes a defensive one. They then alternate so each actor mimes two attacking and two defensive gestures.

After this they stop singing and miming and glare at each other furiously.

They then look at the CD player in terror, look at each other again, look at the CD player, look at each other slyly, and sprint to the CD player.

They jostle each other in front of it and one of them presses play (without the audience seeing which one it is).

CD Track 5 – 'Fighting' starts playing.

ACTORS then sprint back towards the steps, separating to Stage Left and Stage Right as they go and then face each other, on opposite sides of the stage, with fists raised, ready to fight.

CD Track 5 – 'Fighting' is playing.

The ACTORS begin a mime where they are facing each other, in a fighting position.

They strain in this position until ACTOR 1 gasps and relaxes, spinning towards the audience and dropping his hands at the same time.

Seeing this ACTOR 2 runs across to ACTOR 1 and re-positions him in the fighting stance. ACTOR 2 runs back to her initial position.

Both ACTORS look at each other, nod, raise their fists together, nod and jump one step toward each other before starting the process again.

This time ACTOR 2 releases the position and swings towards the audience and ACTOR 1 'fixes' them again.

The size of the jump towards each other may need to be measured to suit the space available.

This process continues until:

Sound cue 14 at 1.45 – The ACTORS stop their mime (they should be very close to each other by now) and listen to the 'alarm' sound, looking towards the audience with terrified expressions.

Sound cue 15 at 1.50 – When the voices return on the CD the ACTORS turn back to face each other.

Sound cue 16 at 1.56 – On the 'zapping' sound the ACTORS start to fight using choreographed repetitive moves.

They don't touch each other, but the movements should look violent.

Sound cue 17 at 2.14 – When the alarm is heard on its own the ACTORS become 'locked' and repeat their final fighting movement over and over again, as if they are repeating a single frame of film, or twitching.

This continues until:

Sound cue 18 at 2.24 – There is silence and the ACTORS stop their twitching, look at each other and run to the steps.

They raise their outside legs, as if to start stepping as before, but freeze in that position.

Sound cue 19 at 2.30 – On the children's 'awww' sound the ACTORS collapse towards each other into an embrace.

This is held until:

Sound cue 20 at 2.41- When slow clapping starts the ACTORS break from the embrace, face the audience and bow, smile, and blow kisses ostentatiously.

They do this until the applause becomes free and random at which point they exit the stage.