Pilot Theatre presents

A SONG FOR ELLA GREY

RESOURCE PACK C

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A SONG FOR ELLA GREY

By David Almond
Adapted for the stage by Zoe Cooper
Directed by Esther Richardson
Pilot Theatre in association with Northern Stage and York Theatre Royal

"A darkly romantic tale that sings of the madness of youth, the ache of love, and the near-impossibility of grasping death"

This new production, from the company that brought you *Noughts & Crosses*, is a magical retelling of the Orpheus myth, full of music, sound and storytelling.

Claire and her best friend, Ella Grey, are ordinary kids from ordinary families in an ordinary world. They and their friends fall in and out of love, play music and dance, stare at the stars, yearn for excitement, and have parties on the beautiful beaches of Northumberland. One day a stranger, a musician called Orpheus, appears on the beach, and entrances them all but particularly Ella. Where has Orpheus come from and what path will Ella follow? A tale of modern teenagers and ancient forces, a tale told since the dawn of time and told again today.

"After our success with our recent adaptations of young adult fiction for mid-scale, it is an honour to be working with David Almond and Zoe Cooper on a new version of David's masterpiece, A Song for Ella Grey. *After the huge upheaval and change of the last few years there isn't a more apposite moment for Pilot to present this mighty story of teenage love and loss, set in the extraordinary landscapes of Northern England. As always this work will introduce audiences to thrilling new talent and open rich conversations and reflections about what it means to come of age in 2024."* Esther Richardson, Artistic Director

Age suitability 13+

TOUR DATES

Northern Stage, Newcastle
1 – 15 February 2024

York Theatre Royal
20 – 24 February 2024

Theatre Peckham
27 February – 2 March 2024

Hull Truck Theatre
5 – 9 March 2024

Liverpool Playhouse
13 - 16 March 2024

ABOUT THIS PACK

Resource pack by Carolyn Bradley
Edited by Oliver O'Shea
Designed by Sam Johnson
Filming by Ed Sunman
Audio Description Script and Recording by Alice Gilmour
Audio Description Voice Artist - Jennifer Carss
British Sign Language Interpretation by Jay Thomas-Morton, of CommPlus
Rehearsal and Production Photographs by Topher McGrillis

This resource pack accompanies the touring theatre production of *A Song for Ella Grey* and is aimed at teachers and educators supporting GCSE and A level Drama students in preparation for the Live Theatre section of their exams.

This is designed to be used after watching the production, to provide key details on moments from the live production that students may want to explore.

Photosensitivity Warning - The videos in this pack may contain some flashing lights and images.

Resource Pack Part A is also available, which is aimed at those who are exploring the novel by David Almond, and supports reading-groups, literacy programmes, and library services.

Resource Pack Part B also contains further information about the creation of the production.

We are not responsible for the content of external links, and we strongly recommend checking the suitability of external content before sharing with your students.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

It is useful to have a general discussion about what students thought about the production as soon as possible after watching. In Part B we provided a notes template for students to use to record their notes – it may be useful to ask students to complete this for homework and bring it with them to the first lesson after you watched the play.

You could start with a general class discussion about the show, using lots of broad and open questions, such as:

- What was your overall impression of the production?
- Which moments stood out to you?
- Why did you think that?
- How did the production make you feel?
- Which moments of acting particularly stood out to you? Why?
- What can you remember about the design elements used in the production?
- How did you feel at the end of the production?

It is important to try and engage all students in this discussion, so you could also try putting students in small groups and giving them one question each, or pairing students up for this discussion and then feeding back. If your students would be comfortable, you could try cold-calling and using no-hands up questioning.

Initial responses – thoughts and feelings

Before zooming in on specific elements of the production, which you will do in future lessons, at this stage it is useful to focus on what student thought and how students felt during the production – by remembering these responses now they can use them as part of their evaluative comments in the exam.

You could focus on the following responses to start with:

- Which moments made you laugh?
- Which moments made you smile?
- Which moments made you jump?
- Which moments made you feel sad?
- Which moments made you feel angry?
- Which characters did you feel you identified with?

Students could also come up with their own wide range of valid responses to certain moments.

Zooming in on aspects of the production

When you have generated some initial responses, you may want to ask students to now focus in on what they can remember about specific aspects of the production, such as the acting and design. This could be your next lesson, after one lesson spent on the first impressions exercises.

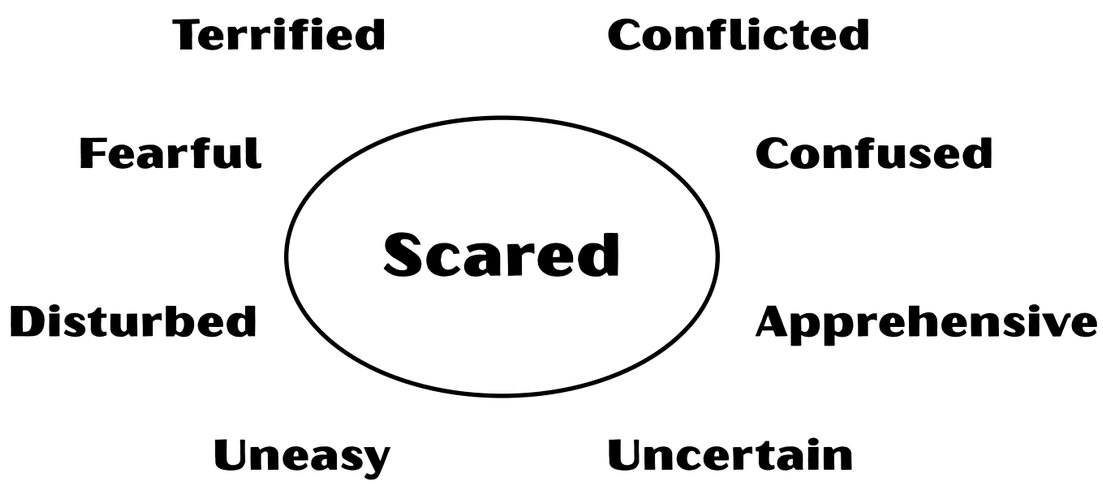
- Using large pieces of paper, write categories on each one, and then spread them out around the room: acting, lighting, sound, music, set, costume (including hair and make-up), video projection. Ask students to rotate around each piece of paper, adding notes to each one as they go around. To keep this pacey, set a timer of 3 minutes at each 'station'.
- Alternatively, put students in groups with one category as their focus, and give them 15 minutes to prepare a mini presentation, and 5 minutes for each group to feed back to the class.

KS5 – Developing a vocabulary for a personal response

As students are expected to give a more developed personal response at Key stage 5, you could do an exercise to develop students' vocabulary. It is useful for them to extend their bank of responses, so they do not rely on over-using words such as "sad" or "happy" and can use more precise words.

You could start with writing the word "scared" on a large piece of paper and ask students to mind map alternative words in the same 'category' – which might not mean the same thing, but could be grouped into the same category of emotional response.

Here is an example:



KS5 - Advanced analysis

As you work through this pack and analyse the elements of the production, older students could look out for the following themes and how they are represented in the production:

Liminality – A liminal space is a space in between, at a boundary or threshold. This can be physical, emotional or metaphorical. The play explores the liminal spaces of being between childhood and adulthood, between life and death, and between friendship and love. Students could discuss the liminal spaces the characters find themselves in, and how this is expressed in design.

Binaries – the play explores binaries, and non-binaries, in interesting ways. The set design is made up of just two colours – white and black, which convey the binaries of life and death. But the binary of life and death is also blurred as Ella is "dead, but not really, not yet." Sexuality and gender outside of binary boundaries is also explored in the play, as Orpheus' gender is fluid, and the characters are exploring their sexualities as they mature into adults.

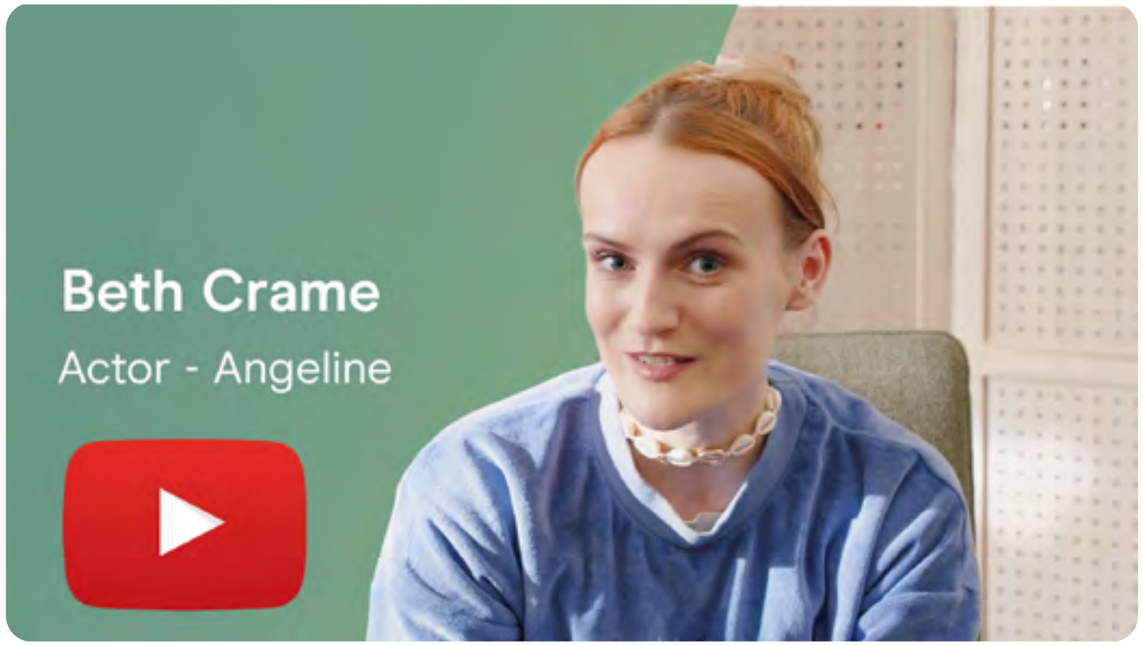
Geography and importance of place – students could read the text and pick out all the references to geography and place, which are represented in different ways. Jay makes interesting comments about the continent of Europe previously being Pangea, and the characters describe themselves as being a Pangea in Act 1, which is also reflected in the set design. In Act 2, the characters are more isolated, and the set conveys the distance between them. The story is firmly rooted in the North East, but at times feels like it exists nowhere in place or time, and travels between a physical location we recognise, to the abstract location of the Underworld.

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA ONYEHARA, ACTOR

Audio Described version of the interview
BSL version of the interview

1. Could you describe Claire's personality?
2. Can you describe Claire"s relationship with the other characters in the play?
3. Why is it important for Claire to tell this story?
4. Can you talk about Claire's journey through the play?
5. How does Claire feel about Orpheus?
6. What's your process for developing this character?

INTERVIEW WITH BETH CRAME, ACTOR



Audio Described version of the interview
BSL version of the interview

1. Could you describe Angeline's personality?
2. Can you describe Angeline's relationship with the other characters in the play?
3. How does Ella's death affect Angeline?
4. How does Angeline feel about Orpheus?
5. Could you tell us about the other characters that you play?
6. How do you approach playing different characters?

INTERVIEW WITH THE DESIGNER

Audio Described version of the interview
British Sign Language version of the interview

1. What were the challenges of designing this show?
2. What atmosphere did you want to create with this production?
3. What were your initial aims for the design?
4. How do you collaborate with other members of the creative team?
5. How does the set create different locations and time periods?
6. What is the significance of the different materials, shapes and levels?
7. What influenced and inspired your costume design?
8: What is the process for costume design?
9: How do the costumes help convey the characters to the audience?

INTERVIEW WITH THE COMPOSER

Audio Described version of the interview
British Sign Language version of the interview

1. What is the process for a composer in a theatre production?
2. What research did you do before composing the music?
3. How were you inspired by the original Orpheus myth?
4. How have you used music to create mood or atmosphere?
5. How does music and sound design contribute to the telling of the story?
6. How would you describe the style of music and what instruments are used?

INTERVIEW WITH THE LIGHTING DESIGNER

Audio Described version of the interview
British Sign Language version of the interview

1. What is the role of a lighting designer?
2: How do you work with the other members of the creative team?
3. How does the lighting help to create the world of the play?
4: How does the lighting change to convey different locations and spaces?
5: What colours are you using in the production?
6: What lighting equipment is being used in the production?
7: Can you talk about the sustainability of modern lighting technology?
8: How does the lighting contribute to the design of Orpheus?

NOTES

FILMED SCENE EXTRACTS

Photosensitivity Warning - The videos in this section may contain some flashing lights and images.

Audio described version of the scene
BSL version of the scene

1 When the characters first hear Orpheus' sound

Commentary: *In this extract, we get to know the characters of Claire, Ella, Angeline, Jay and Sam as they are hanging out together on a "bone cold" January night, near the river outpipe. Ella then hears a strange sound, which the others (except for Jay) all hear afterwards, and the sound is Orpheus. They search for the sound around the area, and describe what they can see, but they don't find Orpheus.*

Questions for students to consider:

- How do the actors use space and proxemics in this extract to convey their relationships?
- What do you learn about the characters and their relationships in this extract?
- How is the geographical setting established in this extract?
- How does the video projection contribute to the storytelling in this scene?

- How does the lighting change when Ella first hears Orpheus' sound?
- How do the characters all react to hearing (or not hearing) the sounds?
- How do the actors use the space to convey they are moving around and searching for the sound?

Analysis:

The white boucle covered platforms and the muslin drapes create a soft, greyscale palette at the start of the extract which is comforting and familiar. The actors are all sat closely together, maintaining physical contact with loose, relaxed body language to suggest they are close friends. When Ella first hears the music, she sits more upright and her body language changes, and when the others hear it too and search for the music, they become proxemically further away from each other, suggesting that the music changes them.
The lighting is a dim, warm white to begin with, but at the moment when Ella hears the sound, it is marked with the addition of blue LEDs. As they search through the city and go towards the quayside, amber lights symbolize street lights and lights from buildings.

The video projection provides a background of trees and clouds, which is static, until Ella hears the sound, and then it becomes animated, again suggesting that Orpheus' sound creates a change in the environment, and even the natural environment reacts to them. This is further supported by the projection of the skein of swans flying overhead, which is animated on the projection, and adds a dramatic moment to the extract. There is a complex layered soundscape which develops throughout the extract, from solo notes, to snippets of lyrics, the sound of the town, horses neighing; the dialogue is audible over the soundscape, and their voices have added reverb to indicate they are passing through a tunnel. The effect is disorientating, creating intrigue as we don't know where the sound is coming from and what it means. After the swans fly by, the sounds stop, and we just hear the dripping of water at the outpipe again.

Audio Described version of the scene
BSL version of this scene

2 Seeing Orpheus for the first time

Commentary: *In this extract, Claire, Sam, Jay and Angeline wake up after their night on Bamburgh beach, and hear Orpheus' sound again, and then see Orpheus for the first time. Jay hears the music for the first time, having not heard it before. They are entranced by the sound, and Claire phones Ella so she can hear the song as well. Orpheus speaks to Ella over the phone, and performs 'a song for Ella Grey'.*

Questions for students to consider:

- Listen to how the different characters describe Orpheus, do you think they all see something different?
- What is the effect of using shadow puppetry to create the character of Orpheus?
- What is your personal response to the music?
- What do you think is the significance of the lyrics in this extract?
- There are several references to nature in this extract, what do you think this suggests?
- How do the characters physically respond to Orpheus, and what does this tell you?
- How are music, lighting and video projection used together in this extract?

Analysis:

In this scene, we see the brocken spectre effect (halo-like rings of rainbow-coloured light) before Orpheus emerges through shadow puppetry, creating a sense of disorientation and illusion. The gentle movement of the muslin drapes means the shadow moves slightly, adding a mysterious fluidity to the character. Never seeing Orpheus fully creates mystery and intrigue throughout. The actors all speak the lines of Orpheus, using the technique of collective character. This also means we are only seeing their memories of Orpheus, their version, not Orpheus themselves.

When the song "Step into the light" starts, the guitar chords are slow, and the singing is hesitant, growing in confidence as the scene progresses. As the singing starts, a video projection of birds is used across the white drapes. This is a repeated motif throughout the production, suggesting that Orpheus is connected to nature, and their music has an impact on nature and the environment around them. The actors gently sway their bodies to the music, in loose, slow and fluid movements which suggest they do not have control over their bodies, like 'marionettes'. Claire says they were 'lost in the music.' The actors are lit from below, creating large disembodied shadows on the white drapes, further creating a supernatural and mysterious atmosphere in this scene. Claire describes the birds flying, seals coming on to the land, snakes, and dolphins jumping, suggesting that everything in the natural world is enthralled by Orpheus' sound.

We hear three short beeps as Claire's phone loses signal, and simultaneously the music and projections stop and the actors are still. Orpheus has suddenly gone, and it is as if a spell or trance has suddenly been broken and the characters come back to themselves.

Audio Described version of the scene
BSL version of this scene

3. The Wedding Scene

Commentary: *In this extract, we see Orpheus arrive on the beach and the wedding between Ella and Orpheus. The friends celebrate with music and dancing, which is cut suddenly short by a scream, and Claire sees that Ella has been bitten by a snake and is dead.*

Questions for students to consider:

- How would you describe the lighting at the start of this extract? What does it convey to you?
- How are the actors using physical space throughout this extract to convey meaning?
- When Orpheus arrives, we see a projection of birds again - what does this repeated motif mean to you?
- How does the music and lighting change after the wedding ceremony, and how does this change the atmosphere on stage?
- How do the actors' physical movements suggest how they are feeling after the wedding ceremony?
- What is your personal reaction to the moment of Ella's death, and how did the design elements work together to create this moment?

Analysis:

At the start of the extract, the four characters are stood separately downstage, lit in blue light, creating a sense of isolation between them, and a sense of separation between them and Ella, who is stood upstage, lit in warm, amber light. When Orpheus arrives, the projection of the birds suggests they have power over nature, and even the birds are moved by them. The arrival of Orpheus creates a change in atmosphere, the group move and the music changes to an upbeat acoustic song which continues throughout the extract. The wedding scene takes place through choral speaking, with the actors speaking Orpheus' lines collectively. Ella wears a headdress of twigs similar to Orpheus, binding them together. Ella is illuminated in white with a side light, and haze gives this light texture. The platforms are used effectively as Ella stands on the highest level, raising her status in the scene as the other characters look on.

After the ceremony, the lighting changes to red for the party scene, as the music intensifies in tempo. The red lighting could convey love, lust and passion, as well as foreshadowing blood, danger and Ella's death. The characters dance with loose, free movements, saying they feel the music flowing through them. It is as if the love and passion of the wedding, plus Orpheus' music, has intoxicated them all. The friends talk about being one 'mass' and 'Pangea' – and this creates a bittersweet contrast to Act Two, where they are all separated and alone after Ella's death.

We hear a scream, and the music is stopped suddenly, with the lighting changing from red to a cold white. A fast moving projection of white snakes is briefly seen moving up the muslin drapes. The muslin drapes fall suddenly (known as a 'kabuki drop'), revealing a cut out aperture (opening) at the back of stage, where Ella is now stood, dead. The aperture resembles the shape of the outpipe, which is the entrance to the Underworld, and the liminal space between life and death. Visually for the audience it frames Ella, as being still there but not there, alive and also dead. The back projection cloth behind the aperture is backlit, giving Ella an ethereal glow. The stage goes to blackout, with just two floor level blue LEDs shining out into the audience, and a loud police siren, creating a shocking end to the first act.

Audio Described version of the scene
BSL version of this scene

4. A level results day

Commentary*: In this extract, the characters get their A level results. There is some comic relief as Crystal and Bianca get their results, but also sadness as Claire holds both hers and Ella's results in her hand, and both seem meaningless, "two futures unlived, enveloped inside". Angeline and Jay have got the results they needed for University, and Sam says his results do not matter as much to him, he will work with his dad. Angeline confesses she has seen Orpheus, now with some strange, fish-like people "half scaled like fish and their eyes, some of them had eyes with no pupils". Claire reacts angrily to hearing this, saying that she is unable to move on, and she exits upset.*

Questions for students to consider:

- How do Jonathan Iceton, Beth Crame and Amonik Melaco use their performance skills to multi-role in this scene?
- How do each of the characters react differently to their results?
- How do you think Claire is feeling in this scene, and how does Olivia Onyehara use her performance skills to convey this?
- Why do you think Orpheus is now associating with the sailors? What do you interpret this tale to mean?
- Why do you think Claire reacts the way she does to Angeline's story?

Analysis:

There is a bitter irony in this scene as the results mean the characters can all move forward with their lives, but Claire feels stuck in the past, and feels unable to move on from Ella's death, despite having good results. It is suggested that Sam is relieved by his results, meaning he will not have to decide if he should have gone to university, which would not have been for him. Claire keeps her distance from the other characters, looking isolated on the black platform, her body language closed and her voice low and flat. She is clearly struggling with grief after Ella's death. Now the white boucle has been removed from the platforms, the characters all look smaller, and lost in the vast black space. The white provided comfort and a warmth, which has now gone after Ella's death.

Angeline tells the story of seeing Orpheus, a little hesitantly at first, not sure how the others will react. The slow pace of her dialogue conveys the confusing nature of this story, which is strange, and she struggles to describe who or what she saw. This odd story suggests that Orpheus is now wandering, lost and struggling with grief as well, but this is open for interpretation. It adds to the mystery of the character, suggesting they are not human and are associating with other non-human creatures. Claire rips her results up in anger, and speaks in broken sentences with gasps in between, conveying her distress at hearing about Orpheus, and pours out her grief and anger to the rest of the group.

Audio Described version of the scene
BSL version of this scene

5. The characters transform into Orpheus and go into the Underworld

Commentary*: In this extract, the characters apply make-up and headdresses to transform themselves into Orpheus. They use collective character to all portray Orpheus at first, then Claire takes the lead. The characters alternate between narrating as themselves, and also being Orpheus. Once in the Underworld they encounter the Creature, but Orpheus manages to put the Creature to sleep with their music.*

Questions for students to consider:

- What do the actors' choral movements symbolise at the start of this extract?
- What does the use of the duvet suggest at the start of this extract?
- How is the layering of music and sound used effectively in this extract?
- How does lighting help to create the world of the Underworld?
- How does Amonik Melaco as Sam use his performance skills to convey the Creature?
- How is the Creature conveyed through design, and what do these design choices suggest?

Analysis:

The characters use choral movement and breath to transform into Orpheus, and use the duvet as a 'threshold' between life and death which they jump through, marking the distinction between being themselves and being Orpheus. This is an effective device in the storytelling but also has the quality of a child's game, in keeping with their intentions 'to tell it like a child would'.

After a blackout, the characters emerge as Orpheus in the Underworld. The sound effects of dripping water help to create an eerie atmosphere. Pulsing electronic music starts, quietly at first, with a low rumble to add to the eerie, tense atmosphere. The choral elements in unison and breathing continue, as the characters twist and turn through the Underworld. They use contact work to convey they are collectively one character, narrating as they go. There is a reverb effect added to their microphones to create the effect of an echoey underground chamber. The beats per minute in the electronic dance music picks up in tempo, adding to the tension and conveying a sense of a fast-beating heart. The beat of the music pauses as Orpheus sings "darkness deepens…" – Orpheus sings to give themselves strength to carry on. In this extract we really get the sense of how music is important to Orpheus and the power the music has. The actors use choral movement effectively, standing on different platforms one behind the other, and moving their arms and torsos from side to side to create the effect of one writhing body.

From the aperture at the back of the stage, Sam appears as the Creature, in a costume of duvets with grotesque, larger-than-life hands. The Creature being made of duvets is again in keeping with the style choice of the design, representing how a child would create a monster, and is purposefully non-naturalistic, but still manages to be threatening. The exaggerated Geordie accent and dialect, plus the effects on the microphone make this a disturbing character. Behind the Creature, video projections of snakes can be seen writhing on the back projection screen, conveying a sense of threat and linking Ella's death to the creatures of the Underworld. A gobo is used in the lighting design to create a shadowy effect, casting jagged, rock-like shadows across the stage, suggesting they are going through underground caves. Claire, Jay and Angeline all sing collectively as Orpheus, getting louder and more confident in order to beat the Creature. The repeated refrain of "all of them, and all of us, and all of you" is powerful and its optimism, and feeling of togetherness and love seems to defeat the Creature.

SET DESIGN

Task: Ask students to sketch the sets from Act One and Act Two from memory, labelling with the details they can remember, and considering the differences between the first and second halves of the play. Encourage students to be as detailed as possible with their annotations, considering size, shape, scale, texture, and material. Students could also list all of the different locations created on stage by the set.

Understanding the process of set design

In her video interview, designer Verity Quinn explains how she starts with a model box which she shares with the creative team. In these images you can see Verity's model of the set design – students could think about how these images developed into the final set design they saw in the production.

SET DESIGN PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOPHER McGRILLIS

Students can use these images to revise the set design and conduct deeper analysis of the use of set at particular moments.

Questions for students to consider:

- The set was non-natualistic; what did the set symbolise or represent in your opinion?
- The use of monochrome was significant in the set design; how were the colours of white and black used effectively?
- Did the set design create certain emotional responses for you? When?
- What did you notice about the differences in the design between the scenes taking place in the land of the living, and those in the Underworld?
- Can you think of examples when the actors interacted with the set or props to create specific effects?
- How were the duvets used to create a variety of different effects in the production?
- Can you think of examples when the set and the lighting worked together to create specific effects?
- Can you think of examples when the set and video projection worked together to create specific effects?

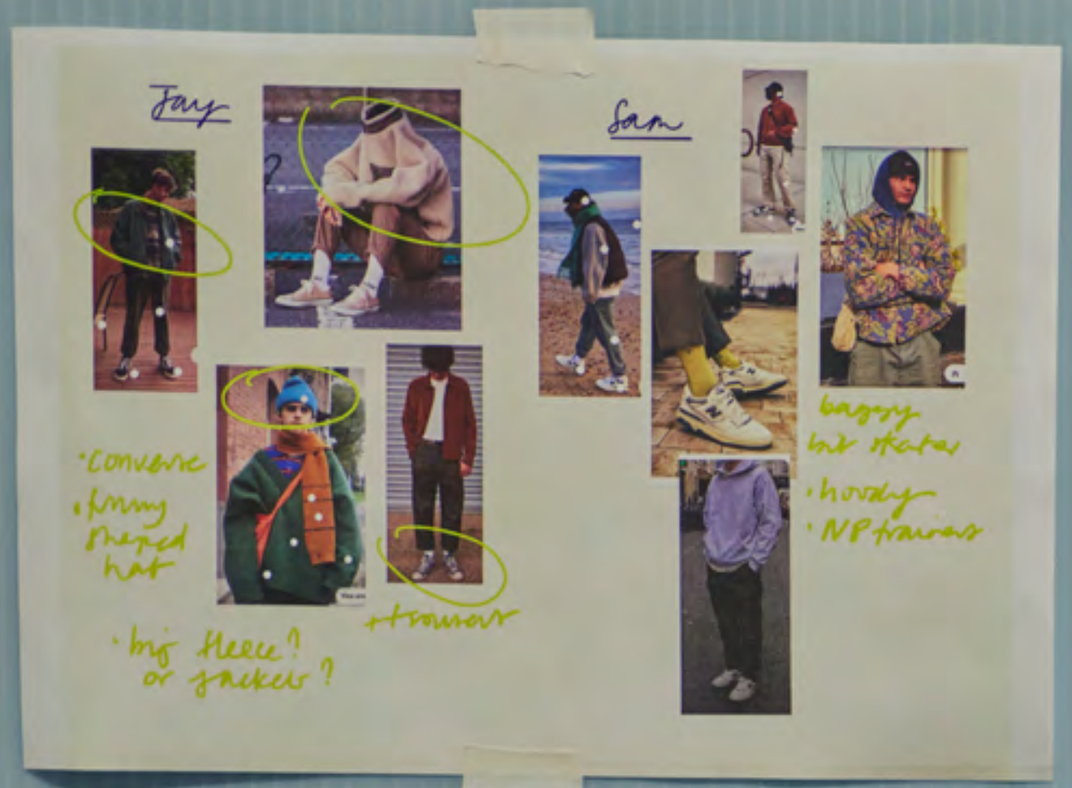
NOTES

COSTUME DESIGN

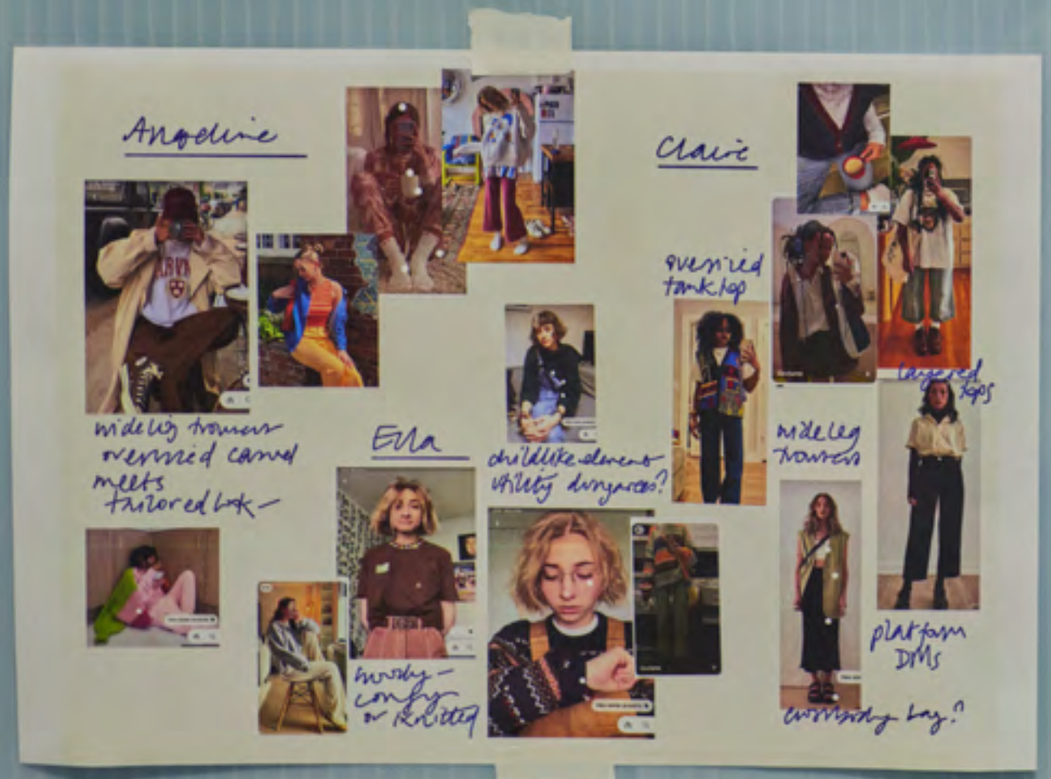
Task: Ask students to sketch the costumes that they can remember from the production; they could do this in pairs or small groups, and you could assign them one character each. Remind students that detail is important, and ask them to label with colour, length, shape, fit, fabric, and pattern, if they can remember. You could then ask them to label the costume with analysis, suggesting what was significant about the different aspects of the costume and what it communicated about the character.

Costume sketches and designs

Show students the images below which are Verity's initial designs and ideas for the costume design. Students could discuss how the final designs developed from these images, and could discuss what the images tell us about the ideas Verity had for each character, including Orpheus.


Jay
Sam
·converse
·funny shaped hat
+trousers
·big fleece? or jacket?
baggy but skater
·hoody
·NP trainers

ELLA


Angeline
Claire
Ella
widelig trousers
oversized casual
meets
tailored look
childlike element
utility dungarees?
oversized tank top
widelig trousers
layered tops
platform DMs
hoody-
comfy
or knitted
cross body bag?

ORPHEUS

Ella - wedding

Orpheus

long jacket

born 1405 headdress look related

bird motifs

CREATURE

CREATURE IDEAS

SCARE - big hand emerging through aperture

PAGAN RITUAL SKULL

Recycled 'trash'

strips — tarpaulin? seaweed?

COSTUME DESIGN PHOTOGRAPHS

Students can use these images to revise the costume design and conduct deeper analysis of the use of costume at particular moments.

Questions for students to consider:

- Do the costumes reflect contemporary young adults in your experience?
- How do aspects of the costume communicate the differences between the characters, and their individual personalities?
- How are costume, make up and headdresses used to create the character of Orpheus in the Underworld?
- How is costume used for the multi-roling in the play?
- How would you describe Ella's wedding dress and how does the design communicate her character?

Deeper analysis of costume design:

The points below may be used to deepen students' analysis of the costume design in the production, especially for key stage 5:

- Ella wore her wedding dress throughout the story, with a grey jumper over the top in earlier scenes. This could suggest that on some level she knew her fate was sealed, and it was inevitable. Or it could refer to the fact that Ella has already died at the start of the play, with the characters then telling us her story.
- Ella's grey jumper, white dress and grey socks helped her to blend into the background throughout the production, suggesting she wasn't really there and was a memory. The greyscale colours gave her a faded aesthetic, suggesting she represented the past. Could there also be a connection in her surname, Grey?
- Sam and Jay's clothes were very contrasting, suggesting differing versions of masculinity – Sam's style was sporty, and Jay's was more alternative with a vintage aesthetic.
- Claire and Angeline's clothes had contrasting colour palettes and style, again representing their different personalities. Angeline wore bright and bold colours suggestive of her strong personality and exploration of feminist politics, whereas Claire's clothes were all khaki neutrals, perhaps suggesting a shyness or uncertainty, not wanting to be noticed. Her alternative style could suggest her artistic nature. Her style and colour palette could also signify wanting to break away from traditional feminine stereotypes, perhaps suggestive of her exploring her sexuality.
- The characters wear headdresses made of twigs and birds to transform into Orpheus. The headdresses connote that Orpheus is connected to nature. In the Orpheus myth, his music is so powerful the birds, animals and trees move in response to him, so this could be a reference to this, and it also ties in with the bird motif that runs throughout the production. There is also a handmade element to the headdress design, as if it could have been made by children acting out a story, which connects to the storytelling style of the production.

LIGHTING DESIGN

Questions for students to consider:

- Was the lighting naturalistic, or symbolic, or both?
- Haze is a lighting effect; can you think of examples of when haze was used for particular effect?
- How was lighting used to create the location of the Underworld on stage?
- Can you think of examples of when the lighting helped the audience to focus on a particular area of action on stage?
- Can you think of examples when the lighting helped to create or change the atmosphere on stage?
- How was colour used in the lighting design to denote and connote meaning?

Lighting Photographs

Using these production photographs, students could try to label the lighting effects used, and comment on the effectiveness in these particular moments of the play. To extend this exercise, students could take one moment each and could create a mini group presentation, or could write an exam-style response based on their moment from the play.

Specific lighting techniques used in the productions:

Parcans: Chris uses fixed bright white parcans to create a full wash of warm light in the earlier beach scenes in the play.

Shadow puppetry: In Act One, Orpheus is seen through the use of shadow puppetry. This is when the white muslin drapes are lit from behind, highlighting an actor stood behind, creating a shadow to appear on the material. The image can be distorted in size if the actor moves closer or further away from the light source. At times, two light sources from different angles are used to distort the image and show it as shifting.

Backlighting: At the play's conclusion, a flood light situated at the back of the stage illuminates the audience with a bright, amber light, temporarily blinding us to what is on the stage and plunging the actors into shadow, which allows Ella Grey to disappear through the aperture at the back of the stage, at the moment of her never returning from the Underworld.

Crosslighting: Chris uses side lights, which cross the stage to light the actors in profile. This effect highlights and sculpts the body, and is used effectively in Ella's wedding scene to highlight her as she marries Orpheus.

Uplighting: Lights situated on the floor light an actor from below and therefore create shadow on the screen behind, and this is used throughout the production.

Gobo: A gobo on an LED moving light is used to create a rocky, shadowy effect across the stage in the Underworld. The gobo is a stencil creating shadow across a light, in whatever shape the designer creates. For this, Chris created a gobo which would create jagged shapes across the stage, to suggest the Underworld was dark and cave like. The shadow also crossed the actors faces further creating the dark, murky atmosphere in the Underworld.

Coloured LED movers: Colour is used sparingly in the production but shades of red and blue highlight specific moments, such as when the characters hear Orpheus' music which is marked with a blue light, or the wedding scene which has an intense wash of red.

Extension task: As a practical task, students could experiment with shadow, using a large sheet and a torch to create shadow puppetry versions of Orpheus. They could experiment with using costume, or creating their own puppets for this.

VIDEO PROJECTION

Video projection was designed by Si Cole for the production, and worked with the lighting and set to create a sense of location. The projector is located on a lighting rig in the audience, and projects on to the muslin cloth in Act One, and the back screen through the aperture in Act Two.

Questions for students to consider:

- How did the video projection work together with the lighting and set design?
- How did the video projection contribute to the telling of the story?
- How did the video projection help to create a sense of location at different moments?
- Birds are a reccurring motif in the design; what do you think they symbolise?
- A brocken spectre effect (see below) is created when Orpheus appears; why do you think this was?

Task: Ask students to recall all the moments of video projection they can remember from the production and make notes on this. Ask students to consider the colours used in the projection and to analyse the significance of this.

Extension task: As a creative task, students could design their own video projection presentation on Powerpoint or similar software, which they would use for their production of *A Song for Ella Grey*.

VIDEO PROJECTION PHOTOGRAPHY

Key moments of video projection:

- **Bamburgh Beach:** A sourced aerial shot of waves lapping onto a shore is used to create the location of Bamburgh Beach. A colour treatment has been used to create a greyscale effect. During the beach scenes, video projection of birds is also used, often to mark the appearance of Orpheus. A skein of swans flies overhead and video projection is used along with sound to create the shadow of the swans flying.
- **The brocken spectre and glory rings:** When Orpheus appears for the first time, bright, rainbow-coloured rings are projected on to the white drapes, in concentric rings around the centre of the stage. This is designed to recreate the effect of a brocken spectre – a rare optical illusion where a shadow is magnified when a person blocks a strong light source. When a brocken spectre phenomenon happens, the shadow is often hugely magnified and rainbow-coloured light appears around the top of the shadow, in a halo-like effect (also called a heiligenshein or glory).
- **Snakes in the Underworld:** In Act Two, when the drapes are pulled back and the aperture into the underworld is created, a video projection of white, slowly moving snakes is projected onto the BP (back projection) material.

MUSIC

A Song for Ella Grey contains original music composed by Emily Levy with lyrics by Zoe Cooper and performed by Zak Younger Banks. Adam McCready designed the sound.

The role of a composer

Students could watch the video interview with Emily Levy and consider the following questions:

- What does a composer do?
- Who does a composer collaborate with in the creative process?
- What is the function of music and sound in a production?
- What examples does Emily give of using sound to create specific effects?
- What has influenced Emily' s composition for this production?
- What instruments were used to create the music?

Key moments for music and sound in the production:

1. Orpheus' music: Orpheus can only seem to communicate through their music. Though Ella recounts their deep conversations, the other characters only seem to hear their song, and all seem to hear it differently. When Ella first hears the music, it is distorted sounds of police sirens, people laughing, snippets of lyrics and echoes. Effects such as reverb and surround sound were used to make this more effective. When the characters first meet Orpheus, the music is gentle, warm acoustic guitar. When Orpheus plays their 'song for Ella Grey' the lyrics "step into the light now" are romantic and inviting, and seem to intoxicate the characters.
2. Use of folk songs: When they are on Bamburgh Beach, the friends sing various traditional folk songs from the North East, such as "When the Boat Comes In" and "Bobby Shafto's Gone to Sea." Folk music is passed on through the oral tradition, much like myths and legends, and often tells a story about a person, with strong associations to place. The production makes the connection between folk songs and myths both as ways of passing on stories. Orpheus also told stories through his music.
3. When Orpheus plays at Claire's parents' house: When Orpheus first begins to play, and Jay is narrating, the sound is gentle, acoustic guitar. But when Claire takes over narrating, the sound changes to harsh, discordant electric guitar, with clashing chords and no tune. This suggests that Claire's opinion of Orpheus has now changed, and what she hears is linked to how she feels about them.
4. The Wedding: During the ceremony, the actors sing "I am her, and she is us, and we are they" symbolising the union between Orpheus and Ella. The music is optimistic, upbeat folk guitar. After the wedding ceremony, the up-tempo guitar music increases in tempo and with joyful optimistic tone, and getting louder in crescendo as the party gets wilder, and the group drink shots. It gets louder and faster until Ella's scream, when it stops suddenly and is replaced by a repeated drone effect of two plucked notes on the guitar, creating immediate tension.
5. Journey into the Underworld: When Orpheus (played by Claire, Jay and Angeline) first enters the Underworld, there is silence. Then, we hear the slow dripping of water, as they have entered via the river outpipe. The dripping creates a spooky, eerie effect. Electronic music starts, as a low pulsing of one or two notes, quietly at first. A beat is added and the EDM music gets louder, pulsing more quickly to create a frantic, tense atmosphere as Orpheus crawls and twists through the Underworld. This is later layered with the contrasting, haunting singing of "darkness deepens" and "I am her, and she is us, and we are they" – which is sung to beat the creature. An echo reverb effect is heard over the EDM music.

Music task:

Students could analyse the following sets of lyrics, and present their ideas back about what they think the significance of the lyrics is:

The Magpie: Sung by Claire on Bamburgh Beach

The magpie brings us tidings
Of news both fair and foul;
She's more cunning than the raven,
More wise than any owl.
She brings us news of the harvest
Of barley, wheat, and corn.
She knows when we'll go to our graves
How we shall be born.

Step into the Light: Sung by Orpheus on the beach when the characters first meet them

Step into the light now
Shining wild and free
We are standing on the edge of belonging

I am Her: Sung by Orpheus (played by Jay, Angeline and Claire) as they descend into the Underworld to retrieve Ella

I am her
And she is us
And we are they

Pull Me Back: Sung by Orpheus and Ella as Orpheus turns and Ella finally dies

Pull me back to the future of us
Pull me back to the start

Extension task:

Music students could write their own version of a folk song, using the characteristics of the genre, and using the Orpheus story as inspiration. Drama students could take one of the songs from the production and use the lyrics as the stimulus for a devised performance.

NOTES

SCRIPT EXTRACTS

1. When the characters first hear Orpheus' music (pp.15-16)

Angeline: That was when we first heard/it...

Claire: When she heard it first:

Ella: 'What the hell is that?'

Sam: 'Is what?'

Ella: 'Is that.'

Jay: 'I can't hear anything.'

Ella: '*That*. Listen.'

Claire: We listened.

Angeline: We heard something…

Sam: And then we didn't.

Claire: 'There is something.'

Sam: 'Aye, mebbe.'

Claire: 'It's canny quiet though…'

Sam: 'Mebbe there is something.'

Angeline: You jumping to agree with Claire, as usual, even though I am pretty sure you could hear nowt. But I was beginning to make something out: 'That kind of singing or something?'

ELLA removes her hand from CLAIRE's, moves away. CLAIRE watches her.

A song becomes a voice, but still no words.

Ella: '*Like* singing.'

They all try to listen for a few moments as the voice gets a little clearer. Maybe there are snatches of words now, but nothing more.

The song starts to shift as it is described.

Claire: But also like a mix-up of the water sounds...

Sam: The drunks...

Angeline: The air on our faces, bits of birdsong and traffic...

Claire: Like all of those familiar things, but with a new note in them…

Angeline: And so that was why we did get up then and started searching for its source.

Sam: Inside the Stepney Stables, tethered horses stomping ice-slushed puddles.

Angeline: Down on the quayside, a busker bundled up, 'The Blaydon Races' on penny whistle rising to join the sound of it as two women with orange legs danced under a streetlight.

2. When the characters see Orpheus for the first time (pp.29-30)

Jay: And there they were.

Claire: At last.

Angeline: This person we realised we had all been waiting for our whole lives.

Sam: Who we had been willing to come for years.

Angeline: Singing that song.

Claire: And as we listened…

Jay: I remember thinking it was hard to tell how old they were.

Sam: Like us?

Jay: Maybe a bit older.

Claire: Or maybe younger, or maybe ancient.

Angeline: Maybe no age at all.

Claire: And then they spoke.

The music stops.

Jay, Angeline, Claire and Sam: (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'I heard the noise you made…'

Angeline: Their voice...

Jay: Like ours...

Sam: A northern voice.

Claire: But also like no voice I had ever heard.

Claire and Jay: (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'By the outpipe...'

Angeline: (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'Around the city.'

Sam: And smirking added - (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'And in ye beds.'

Angeline: (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'I heard it on the beach last night and in your tents this morning and so I came.'

Sam: And as they licked their lips each time to speak...

They all lick their lips. It is loud.

Angeline: As if they weren't used to having words spoken on them.

Jay: This person who was male and female and everything…

Angeline: Everything in between that first time we all met them.

Claire: (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'Me name's Orpheus.'

Jay, Claire and Sam: (*As ORPHEUS*:) 'Aye. Orpheus.'

3. Ella and Orpheus have dinner at Claire's house, and Ella asks Claire to give her away pp.53-54)

Ella: 'And Claire, as my oldest friend… I want you to give me away.'

Claire: 'Give you away?'

Ella: 'I want you to put my hand in Orpheus' ''.

Jay: (*As RALPH*) 'Of course we give our permission don't we darling.'

Angeline: (*As LIZZY*) 'Ralph…'

Jay: (*As RALPH*) 'And my God, giving her away, how wonderfully queer Claire. Will you wear a tux? I think you'd fit into mine.'

Angeline: (*As LIZZY, stopping RALPH from refilling his glass*) 'I think you've had enough…'

Jay: (*As RALPH, ignoring his wife*) 'We can fetch it down from the loft to see. This just gets better and better.'

Ella: 'Please say you'll do it.'

Jay: (*As RALPH*) 'You must!'

Ella: 'Because. You have been: You were everything to me.'

Claire: She said.

Ella: 'Ever since the first day we met in primary school. I was wearing that red dress and little rucksacks on our backs. Remember.'

Claire: 'Of course I remember, Ella.'

Pause.

CLAIRE nods, mutely.

Jay: And, Claire's assent mutely given, Orpheus played again...

A song starts up again, but CLAIRE cuts it off almost impatiently...

Claire: He played again and it was just the same as ever. Everyone leaned towards him, all began to lose themselves, they disappeared, felt that music come out of them. Time was nothing. Time was everything. Time was gone. And when it was done, he or she or they or whatever they are simply stopped singing, stopped plucking on their guitar or lyre or lute or whatever you want to say it was. And we came out of our dreamless dreams and he was already putting his coat back on, he already had his hand on her shoulder and she turned.

And they.

And they were already opening the door and the two of them were already disappearing into the dark.

4. Ella and Orpheus' wedding and Ella's death (pp.62-64)

Claire: And now she was saying it.

Sam, Angeline and Jay: (*quoting ELLA*). '…ask us….ask me…tell us…tell me…'

Ella: '…bless us…bless me…'

Claire: (*quoting ELLA*) "…promise to always keep us safe…"

Ella: And I was saying to have and to hold from this day forward…

Angeline and Jay: In the presence of the gods...

Ella: 'Hold us two safe in your hearts and love us, Claire.'

All: 'Always and forever.'

Angeline: And the music moved our bodies all over again and we danced.

Claire: We felt it thrumming on our chests and in our throats...

Jay: Even me!

Sam: We felt it flowing in and out with breath.

Ella: I saw it hanging in the air...

Angeline: We felt it running in our blood...

Sam: We felt it scattering our thoughts.

Claire: We felt it annihilating us.

Angeline: Turning us...

Sam: As it had so many times before...

Angeline: When we danced...

Jay: From so many separate islands...

Claire: Back into this one thing.

Ella: One mass moving as one.

Jay: And as we danced, we only gathered more and more mass.

Angeline: Because soon it was not just us,

Jay: Was everyone, all of us, all of them and all of you, the friends and the parents and the hangers-on.

Ella: All of us.

Sam: And we were Pangea.

Ella: One last time.

Sam: '…We are bliddy Pangea!'

The music is rising to a crescendo, we can't see ELLA anymore, she is obscured by the others as they dance, but then…

Claire: Aaaaaaaghhhhhhh….

The music and the dancing has stopped.
They all pull back, separate, and shocked.
ELLA lies lifeless on the ground.

Claire: No no no no no…

CLAIRE has run towards ELLA and is kneeling by her side, she is trying to suck the venom out.

Sam: Her lifeless body.

Angeline: The slither of a thousand snakes as they disappeared back into the sea and the sands.

Jay: Our friend trying to suck the poison out.

SAM walks quickly towards CLAIRE and picks her up round the waist, carries her back away from the body. CLAIRE kicks the air in frustration.

ANGELINE is on the phone to the emergency services.

And there are blue lights and sirens as:

Jay: And Orpheus had disappeared back into the hot shimmering air.

Ella: And I *was* dead. Only not really. Not yet.

5. Orpheus has turned around and Ella has finally gone (pp.93-94)

Jay: And in this moment each of us remember.

Claire: Hearing that song at the outpipe.

Angeline: Around city.

Sam: Seeing Orpheus on that beach.

Claire: And holding up that phone for you to hear.

Jay: We remember the poetry and the dresses and the birdwatching and the baked aubergine on raffia mats.

Sam: And we remember the snakes.

Angeline: And the scream.

Claire: And the funeral.

Angeline: And that long hot summer with it...

Jay: Where we did not go to Greece...

Sam: And where we did not know how to fill each long hot day...

Claire: The day it turned.

Angeline: Those thunderstorms.

Sam: And we remember that results day has already passed...

Jay: Angeline's daft story.

Claire: We recall all of it.

Jay: And in the exact same moment we remember how each of us has already gone forward into the next part of our stories.

Claire: Even me.

Jay: And how Ella is stuck back here.

Claire: Back here before we went on.

Angeline: And in this exact same moment each of us realises that we will never go to Greece.

Ella: And I will never feel the grains of sand on that other beach...

Claire: Under a burning sun.

Jay: The tingle of it on her skin.

Angeline: You two will never kiss in that other sea.

It becomes so bright it is hard to see…

Claire: Never never never…

Ella: Never.

The lights go out. The sudden gloom makes it hard to make it out at first, but then we realise...

Angeline: And Ella is gone.

Sam: Finally, actually, completely gone.

Claire: And Orpheus is gone with her.

USING A SONG FOR ELLA GREY AS A DEVISING STIMULUS

The following exercises focus on creating and performing skills (AO1 and AO2), and use the plot and themes of A Song for Ella Grey *as a stimulus for devising. Students could use the Orpheus myth or A Song for Ella Grey as the stimulus for a performance which can be used for the devised component of the GCSE, BTEC or A level. The exercises focus on initial exploration and development, and then your students could have a period of rehearsing and refining their work. These exercises would also be a great way of revising the play and making your students even more confident about writing about it for the Live Theatre exam. Exercises can all be done independently or you could use them together to make a longer workshop.*

Warm ups and starter exercises:

1. Walk the Space – play some evocative music, and ask students to walk round the space, in neutral, paying attention to their natural, tempo, pace, gait, rhythm, breathing, and placement of their feet. Then, call out character names from the play – Claire, Ella, Angeline, Sam, Jay and Orpheus. Ask students to walk the space as this character, thinking about how their physicality changes. You could extend this by thinking about different points in the play, and add in thought tracking (see below) to delve deeper into the characters' feelings.
2. Hot seating – Choose one of the characters from the play and hot seat them: asking probing questions to find out more about their thoughts and feelings about the events in the play and the other characters. To make this most effective, set a particular point in the story when the hot seating takes place.
3. Still images – In groups, ask students to make a bullet point list of the plot points of the play, and then boil this down to five to ten key moments. Then, ask students to create still images of each of these key moments. This is an excellent tool for recall, as well as encouraging students to discover elements of the plot they want to focus on for devising.
4. Thought tracking – using one of the script extracts in this pack, ask students to rehearse and perform the scene in groups. Then, either in groups or as a whole class, use thought tracking to stop the action, tap one actor on the shoulder and ask them to speak their character's thoughts at this particular moment.

Devising stimuli

1. The life of Orpheus

Using the following script extract and descriptions of Orpheus as a starting point, ask students to devise a scene about the life Orpheus has had. Students could base this on the character from *A Song for Ella Grey,* or also incorporate elements of the character from the Greek myths. Students could start with a research task, then mind-map and use other exercises, such as hot seating, to develop a character.

"ANGELINE: If it's anything it's just that she has shown me a different way to be. Because they are just so free. They told me they'd wandered all over. Loved and lived so widely."

2. Orpheus' influence

The characters all describe feeling differently and acting differently after Orpheus has come into their lives. Students could explore the effect of meeting Orpheus on all the different characters, such as Claire, Angeline, or Sam, or how it affected Jay, who did not respond to Orpheus in the same way and could not hear the song at first. Students could devise a monologue from one of the characters' perspectives, set after the play has ended, and then these monologues could be cut together to form a group performance.

JAY: Because the way you all talked to each other after they entered our story. But it wasn't Orpheus' fault. It's who you all were when you started to hear their song. 'Since you have started hearing it, I don't recognise you.'

3. Experimenting with music

Music is a key part of the story, as Orpheus is a musician and their music affects the characters in a variety of ways. The characters hear Orpheus before they see them, and their song is what draws Ella to Orpheus. Students could experiment with using music and movement to devise a piece of performance. Start with playing emotive music as a warm-up and asking students to physically respond to this. Older students could use influences from a practitioner such as Laban or Pina Bausch. Then, give students the below extract of text, and ask them to devise a response to this using music and physical theatre or movement.

CLAIRE : He played again and it was just the same as ever. Everyone leaned towards him, all began to lose themselves, they disappeared, felt that music come out of them. Time was nothing. Time was everything. Time was gone. And when it was done, he or she or they or whatever they are simply stopped singing, stopped plucking on their guitar or lyre or lute or whatever you want to say it was. And we came out of our dreamless dreams and he was already putting his coat back on, he already had his hand on her shoulder and she turned.

4. Ella In the Underworld

Using the script extracts below as a starting point, students could devise a piece of performance about Ella's life and experiences in the Underworld. This could feature the Creature and Death from the play, or could be a world of their own creation. What happens to Ella down there? Students could research different classical interpretations of the Underworld and potentially include other classical references – such as the River Styx, Persephone, and Hades. KS5 students could also explore design elements and use the description below to create the Underworld through set, costume, lighting, sound, masks or puppetry.

- *The tunnel twisted, and climbed, and dived, and curved and darkness darkened, darkened, darkened.*
- *Nowt grew down there of course.*
- *No birds, no spiders, no beetles, no flies.*
- *Walls dripping, moving heavy feet through half frozen squelching mud*
- *Caverns where water ran down rock and dripped from rock*
- *We pass the snoring shape of the beast. That creature that still lies, stunned by the beauty of our song. We walk against the endless flow of subservient shades of the dead. We pass the reluctant ones, the ones who haven't yet accepted the inevitability of their fate. And the music that guides our feet in easy regular rhythms towards the light. We pass a group of little children, no older than we were when we washed our dolls at the entrance of the tunnel.*

NOTES

FURTHER RESOURCES

RESOURCE PACKS

Resource Pack – Part A: available to download from the Pilot Theatre website
This resource introduces students to the Orpheus myth, along with exploring the themes of David Almond's novel. It also outlines creative exercises inspired by the story, which could be used alongside reading the novel in lessons, for whole school literacy programmes, or to support extra-curricular book clubs.

Resource Pack – Part B: available to download from the Pilot Theatre website

This resource introduces students to the characters in the performance, and key members of the creative team, including insights into rehearsals.

WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

A practical creative session exploring the play, production, characters, and themes delivered by a Pilot artist. The workshop can be tailored to using *A Song for Ella Grey* as a creative stimulus for theatre devising, exploring issues related to the play, or to focus on aspects of the production, such as music.

All workshops are bespoke and tailored to the needs of your students, and can be scheduled pre- or post-performance at your school, college or university. To arrange a workshop, please email us directly: education@pilot-theatre.com

For state schools: 2 sessions or a full day: £325 + VAT
1 session (up to 2 hours): £250 + VAT

For private schools: 2 sessions or a full day: £475 + VAT
1 session (up to 2 hours): £400 + VAT

PLAYTEXT

A Song for Ella Grey playtexts by Zoe Cooper: £8 (published price £10.99)

To purchase email education@pilot-theatre.com

MAILING LIST

If you would like to join Pilot Theatre's mailing list to hear about our future projects, please sign-up here.

FEEDBACK

If you have any feedback about this resource, please do share it with us!
We would love to hear your thoughts:
education@pilot-theatre.com

Rehearsals for *A Song for Ella Grey*. Photo by Topher McGrillis.

TOUR DATES

Northern Stage, Newcastle
1 – 15 February 2024

York Theatre Royal
20 – 24 February 2024

Theatre Peckham
27 February – 2 March 2024

Hull Truck Theatre
5 – 9 March 2024

Liverpool Playhouse
13-16 March 2024

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YORK THEATRE ROYAL
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