**Explain how one or more performers used their vocal and physical skills to multi-role in one live production you have seen and assess the effectiveness of their performance at particular moments.**

On the 14th March 2013 I went to see Patrick Barlow’s adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock’s 1930s film “the 39 steps” at the Criterion Theatre in London. The play is about Richard Hannay – played by Adam Jackson-Smith – who is wrongly accused of murder and takes the audience on a journey to clear his name. In attempting to clear his name he uncovers the air missile secret of the 39 steps. This play is performed by an ensemble of 4 actors who multi-role over 120 characters and it performed in a Brechtian style using poor and Meta theatre. The play touches upon the Hitchcockian themes of the “wrong man”, the “charming criminal” and the maguffin plot, amongst other themes such as British sexual repression and social class. Jennifer Bryden, the only female in the cast, successfully multi-roles as Annabella and Pamela in this production and successfully achieves the playwright’s intention of wanting to create a comedy or a farce.

In the scene where Annabella gets stabbed in the back whilst at Hannay’s apartment, Jennifer Bryden uses physical and vocal skills to portray this character. This is done effectively on the line “Richard, Richard” in which she stumbles out onto the stage from U/S/L and slowly inches her feet forward whilst keeping her body turned to the audience, and one hand behind her back to hide the knife that she has been stabbed with from the audience. Bryden also carries a pained expression shown by squinting her eyes and pursing her lips whilst walking over to Hannay who is sitting in an armchair C/S. Once she is next to Hannay on the chair, Bryden then says the line “there’s no turning back” slowly leaning into Hannay and putting her face next to his. Hannay reacts by pushing himself out of the armchair with his arms so his face meets hers. The audience believe that the pair are going to go in for a kiss however the moment is subverted as Annabella dives over Hannay’s lap and starts thrusting forcefully, revealing the knife in her back to the audience. As Annabella thrusts, Hannay remains still and frozen to highlight not only how uncomfortable he feels but also the theme of British sexual repression as Annabella is supposed to be sexually intimidating to Hannay as she is German, and her representational prop of her efficiently cut black bob wig further shows this. Just before Annabella dies over Hannay’s lap, her last line is “ALT-NA-SHELLACH” which she shouts at the top of her voice, almost screaming in a slow pace to show that she is dying, she also extends the ending of the “ch” of “Shellach” which creates comedy for the audience. On this line she also extends her arm into the air in which she is holding a map, and lifts her head up before her body becomes flaccid, but rigid over Hannay’s lap. Hannay responds by keeping eye contact with the knife and having wide eyes and his mouth slightly agast to show his disbelief, he then looks up to the audience, raises his eyebrows and says “Golly” which is a stereotypical reply of a 1930s man such as Hannay. This also addresses the audience, breaking the fourth wall but also showing that Jackson-Smith is self aware and hinting to the audience that what has just occurred is utterly ridiculous. Bryden effectively portrays her character of Annabella as she successfully achieves Patrick Barlow’s intention of wanting to create a comedy and also highlights Hannay’s British sexual repression.

In contrast, Bryden also plays the role of Pamela, who is selfish and self obsessed, highlighted by her gestus being always fiddling with her hair or her clothes. In the scene where Hannay and Pamela are handcuffed together at the hotel Bryden effedctively shows her character by using vocal and physical skills. On the line “and my stockings” Bryden places her giant sandwich on the plate with Hannay’s and Hannay freezes just as he was going to take a bite out of his sandwich and stares at Pamela. Bryden also says this line with a posh high pitched voice which contrasts from Annabella’s low husky German-accented voice. Pamela then seductively begins to take off her stockings, by slowly stroking down her leg and pouting her mouth, with her eyes focused on her own legs. Hannay then inadvertently places one of his hands on her leg because they are handcuffed together and looks up at the audience with wide eyes and freezes. Although Pamela pretends not to notice a tense atmosphere is created shown by Hannay’s awkward facial expression, and staring at the audience as if pleading for us to help him out of the situation. In turn this creates comedy for the audience as it’s so awkward that we have to laugh to break the tension again achieving Patrick Barlow’s aim of creating a farcical comedy. As Pamela takes her stocking off, Hannay goes to look at Pamela, and they simultaneously look at eachother, Hannay exaggeratedly looks away by looking everywhere except for Pamela whilst Pamela awkwardly places one of her stockings at the end of the bed. Then Pamela begins to take off her other stocking, she at first looks at the audience, with a pouted mouth before touching her hair which is in a tight up do, to connote her British sexual repression but also how self-obsessed she is. As she touches her left leg, Hannay’s hand is placed on her thigh, Pamela reacts by staring at the audience with wide eyes, which contrasts to Annabella who is seen as sexually intimidating to Hannay. Pamela forcefully moves his hand onto his lap, before placing her hand back on to her thigh, as she begins to take her stocking off, Hannay’s hand is again placed onto her leg due to the fact that they are handcuffed together. Pamela however, looks at his hand and raises her eyebrows, but instead of moving it back she pushes his hand down her leg to take her stocking off. Once both of her stockings are taken off they both breathe a sigh of relief.

Bryden effectively multi-roles as both Annabella and Pamela in order to create comedy; which was the playwright’s intention. Bryden also uses her vocal and physical skills to create the differences between these two characters as Annabella is very forward in her actions whereas Pamela is repressed and self-obsessed. Both characters also have very different representational props and gestus – Annabella’s prop is her black wig and her gestus is her German accent where as Pamela’s prop is her hair in a tight up do highlighting her sexual repression whilst her getsus is always fiddling with her clothes or hair to show how self-absorbed she is.

AO2- 11/17 AO4- 20/33 31/50

Too much hannay, you need to focus on Bryden in this question as she is the only one multi-roling. Just be very sure all your points answer the question.

The acting is described clearly and in good detail though, so that is a success- on a different question this may have been a better answer. (not that 31 is bad)