**Drama Supporting Notes 2015- Section One**

Kneehigh Theatre Company are about live theatre. The excitement and energy which radiates from them is a result of their philosophy of ensuring that the audience is living the experience. Their shows are extremely personal, each show begins with “an instinct, an itch and from there the work lives”. The company takes every aspect of a show: music, sets, costumes, props, the actors, and allows it to grow into a piece that means something to everyone.

Kneehigh looks to create “exciting retellings of classic tales”. However, the company does not shy away from the truth of the stories, they want to stimulate the thoughts of the audience; they are “about beautiful, dirty truths”. They want the audience to laugh and cry. The possibility of a piece that can pull an audience in two different directions appeals to me, it is about creating a powerful but spirited piece. This was particularly clear in “The Wooden Frock”; this story weaves between hilarity, the absurd, and a lingering sense of sinister sexual incest. The naivety and innocence of the girl combined with the vulgarity of her father is a cause for much humour as tricks and twists ensue, but adult undercurrents are present too. The unnerving boldness in the way the company approaches these themes has inspired me to create a similarly engaging and challenging piece.

Their physical theatre or “physical poetry” as Rice explains it allows an intimate relationship to be built up on stage which communicates complex emotions without the need of words. However, the dialogue in their scripts is also innovative and unique such as “The Red Shoes”, written entirely in verse. “Everything in this company’s work tells the story” meaning that the music and acting play equal parts in their work as does the script and set design; nothing should hold back the imagination of the cast. It is crucial that the piece is diverse in the techniques it uses to communicate the story, a series of lifts can be used to symbolise the movement of a character from one place to another in an energetic, interesting way as was demonstrated in “The Bacchae”. This is an idea I would be particularly interested in using. Watching “Midnight’s Pumpkin” and “The Red Shoes” showed me the importance the company places on a single prop to lead the show for example boxes or, suitcases. This engages the audience as they have to use their imagination to create their own interpretation of the piece and is something I hope to include.

Kneehigh ideas we would like to use:

* Many different vibrant characters
* Live Music
* Physical poetry
* A clever set, which will aid us in our performance
* Simple, effective pieces of costume
* Leading the audience in as our character
* Puppetry

We have chosen “Metamorphoses” a series of short Greek tales written by Mary Zimmerman. We selected a combination of stories which will allow us to create a piece of theatre with the ability to make the audience encounter a whole spectrum of emotions, just like Kneehigh productions. We have chosen “Erysichton” a highly comic piece involving strange and wonderful creatures such as Hunger, similar to the oddities found in “The Bacchae” performed by Kneehigh in 2004. We have also chosen “Phaeton”, an uproarious tale of a man revealing his ridiculous past to two therapists. Finally, we have chosen to include “Eros and Psyche”, an abstract retelling of their sad love story which works perfectly with Kneehigh’s ethos of discovery. We have chosen these three stories because they will grab the audience, and demand intricate and dramatic ways of being performed. “The Bacchae” is a huge influence as one of their driving principles, which allowed them to bring an old tale into the present, was that the purpose of the line “is to tell your followers what to believe, rather than to convince them”. We hope these pieces will allow the audience to feel *part* of the Greek tale, but not *believe* in it, allowing them to take the morals directly from the tale and into their lives, rather than separating the experience from themselves. The piece will use a variety of action, words and unspoken thoughts just as a Kneehigh production would.

Word Count: 699

Bibliography:

* The Book- Kneehigh The Team- 2010
* The Bacchae Resource Extra- Royal Exchange Theatre-2004
* Kneehigh Review - Catherine Love and Diana Damian in the exeunt magazine- 2012
* AQA Drama and Theatre Studies - Sue Fielder and Pat Friday- published by Nelson Thornes Ltd.-2008
* Metamorphoses- Mary Zimmerman- 2002

Live Theatre seen/ read:

* The Wooden Frock
* Midnight’s Pumpkin
* The Red Shoes
* The Bacchae

Webliography:

* <http://www.kneehigh.co.uk/page/making_a_show.php>
* <http://www.kneehigh.co.uk/page/mike-shepherd-how-kneehigh-work.php>
* <http://www.kneehigh.co.uk/>

Word Count: 700

**Section Two**

My overall aim for my AS level piece is to create a comic, fun and engaging piece of theatre. This is because all Kneehigh’s previous productions have used new, exciting forms of theatre to create thrilling experiences. It is crucial that I am able to make my audience laugh and have an enjoyable experience as this is one of the key principles that Kneehigh work around. The script of Metamorphoses also promotes morals that can be learnt from each story and this fits with Kneehigh’s aim to enlighten their audience for example in “The Bacchae”, with the God’s representing different aspects of humanity.

The script of Metamorphoses was published in 2002 by Mary Zimmerman and is a modernised version of a classic Ovid poem. It’s a collection of Greek tales, which together explore core morals in life, the three I have chosen look at: the need to question, greed, and love. The script demonstrates how stories thousands of years old are still relevant today. The piece uses a non-naturalistic style with a focus on the mythic and fantastical. The style of writing is modernised and comic so is comprehendible to a wide audience. The genre is one of fantasy as well as comedy. We chose our three stories because they are amusing but also contain important messages and showed the potential to be wonderful, weird and exciting. This can be seen in the tale of “Phaeton”, to capture the hilarity and madness of the story, myself and another actor play absurd therapists and a lot of this is shown through our use of the space as we run along the top of the benches and jump from them onto the stage spontaneously and energetically. Also in “Erysichton’’ to create an intense ending stressing his destructive greediness, we all come on stage and crowd round him using instruments to make a sawing sound and then scream at full volume when he holds the severed hand up to create attention grabbing ending. Finally, we have decided that rather than having characters such as the spirit of the tree off stage, it would be more fun to work them into our piece as it would create increased comedy. The atmosphere of our piece is one of high energy and anticipation with sporadic moments of seriousness. The mystic world will be created by transforming standard characters such as the therapist into mad creatures.

Kneehigh uses a lot of high energy movement and to ensure our piece is comic, exciting, and fun, we have chosen to include moments of physical theatre such as lifts. One of the most effective moments of this is when ‘Hunger’ travels through kingdoms to arrive at Erysichton’s palace to control him. We wanted this to be a powerful moment where all of us could work together to show Hunger travelling as she was moving eerily, trampling those below her. In our piece Hunger clmibs over people’s backs, put at different levels, and also uses a back to climb onton someone’s shoulders and look down at Erysichton sleeping, creating a visually gripping image for the audience. We also felt that Kneehigh’s use of puppetry was innovative and interesting so we decided that we would use a marionette. We felt this was ideal for our piece as initially the ‘Mother’ is played by me but then transforms into a little girl, a marionette captures this, as suddenly the mother is smaller and childlike. Also, the movement of the marionette worked perfectly to create a sense of her dancing on the beach. One of the key influences of Kneehigh in our piece was taken from their production of Hansel and Gretel in 2009. After watching clips of the show we saw that their set was made up of many pegs hanging from the ceiling. This allowed the cast to change costumes quickly enabling effective multirolling, we have chosen to include this in our set design and have created various headbands and garments to allow us to multirole in our piece. Finally, we chose to include live music throughout to create an atmosphere of fun and to engage the audience. This fits with Kneehigh’s ethos, “music never ends”.

Word Count: 698

**Section Three**

Once we had the script of Metamorphoses we read through it. As part of the Kneehigh philosophy a large amount of our rehearsal period was dominated by experimentation and improvisation, this is how our opening song evolved for example. We began with an Irish folk song and slowly through trying different ideas and pitches we changed the lyrics and parts of the tune to make it our own thus committing to idea: “Music never ends”. After a run through of our pieces we felt the most important aspects to work on were the transitions and beginning of the piece. This inspired us to create a small framing story with live, upbeat music to ensure our piece would start off with a high level of energy which could be kept up throughout the piece. One of the scenes we experimented with most thoroughly was when Erysichton begins to eat more and more food, Hunger controlling him. We began using a lift where Hunger was slung over his back, but this proved impractical and dull. We decided instead to all be involved as a huge amount of Kneehigh’s work involves the entire cast. We therefore watched several of Kneehigh’s videos and became inspired to try out some of their ensemble sequences. We tried out throwing plates, sliding them and passing them, and decided to pass them with urgent almost sinister movements in a circle around Erysichton ending with him being pushed to the floor by the weight of the plates as we felt one of the ways Kneehigh often uses ensemble work is to create intimidating and intense scenes.

Our piece has hugely developed to become fun, hilarious and effective at engaging the audience similar to Kneehigh productions. One of the most effective parts for me is when, as the Therapist, I am able to stand in the audience and grab their attention. It draws the audience into the story being told, and impresses upon them the strangeness and comedy of the character. The world created for the audience should be one where they can be part of the story but still acknowledge the reality of it, and therefore apply the morals to their own lives.

To ensure I performed the role of ‘Therapist’ to the best of my ability I experimented with the character. I originally played the character as quiet and serious to contrast the piece but, I found that by being eccentric, loud and high in energy it really added to the atmosphere which is key as Kneehigh aims to maintain a buzzing, comedic atmosphere throughout their pieces. One of the smaller roles I took on was in “Erysichton” as a maid called Oread however, I multiroled, so it was it was crucial to make my character clear. I decided this was best achieved by using a direct, low pitch voice with upright and rigid posture, my hands behind my back. We wanted to make sure each moment of our piece would be exciting and engaging which is why for example, we decided I would be lifted up by balancing myself flat on another actor’s feet when “flying” to see Hunger. Although the movement is incredibly energetic and innovative it was also important that I stay in character so that the sense of the story progressing was not lost. I did this by looking around with wonder and fear on my face to convey to the audience the intense experience the maid is encountering.

In terms of health and safety, when practicing the lifts in our piece we made sure to lay cushions on the floor and approach the situation in a serious and sensible manner. Also, we have made sure to block our piece to avoid any audience members being seated too close to the lifts, falls or stage fighting we have included. As well as this any lifts we researched and watched that we felt were beyond our capabilities, were adapted to become suitable to our own strengths and weaknesses. Finally we pay careful attention to where we perform difficult or energetic movements so they are not too close to the edge of the stage which is a raised circle and would be a hazard if we tripped off.

Word Count: 699