

# LAMDA Examinations

## Mime Matters

**A reference document to support teachers and students of Miming and teachers preparing for the LTCP or LSDE teaching qualifications**

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## **What is Mime?**

At its most basic, mime is mimicry performed by an actor or comedian who specialises in the art of narration, portrayal of character, ideas or moods by bodily movement alone. However, Marcel Marceau says 'mime is not the art of mimicry; it is the art of recreation.' He is referring to mime as the art of creating the illusion of reality by movement and positions of the body plus the art of imagining the world together with an audience.

A mime artist must know their 'instrument', their body and find exact muscular tone to suit their action. They must observe life as they live it and see others live it. They need to develop sensitivity to rhythm and physical phrasing so that they can communicate effectively without words and with drama.

Mime is the 'art of silence'. The reason for this silence is not based on a hatred of words or simply the pleasure of telling a story without words; the mime artist can speak what words cannot say and might proclaim in a gesture what a writer may take pages to tell.

Mime can be defined as the art of silent recreation.

## The Origins of the Art of Mime

Before the evolution of language, the human desire to communicate was very likely executed through mimicry which later developed into mime. People mimicked animals, objects and the needs of the moment. Then natural rhythms and the musicality of imitated sounds inspired dramatic movement.

'From this imagined historical perspective, it is easy to believe that mime is inherent in us all.'<sup>1</sup>

The tradition of mime goes back more than 25,000 years and examples of movement without words can be found in most cultures; the skills of the mime artist emerged from ceremonial performances across every continent.

In Ancient Greece, mime became a fine art and produced the first named artist. Telestes was said to be so talented that he was able to perform the entire Trojan Wars 'through rhythmic steps and gestures' while the Chorus spoke the rest. As Greek theatre developed, movement became essential to the actor's art.

Roman mime was rooted in the words of the written play and the mime artist's function was to paraphrase the play in a non-verbal language. An exciting development came with the specific differences between Pylades, the great tragic actor and his contemporary, Bathyllus, the great comic mime artist. The latter performed improvised burlesque scenes that depicted current events, love and adultery and even mocked the Gods. When the Roman Empire fell, this comic tradition was continued by wandering troupes who moved across Europe using dance, gesture and some rough speech but never abandoned the ancient mime tradition.

During the Renaissance in Italy, mime flourished and in the mid-fifteenth century the Commedia dell'Arte was created. This popular theatre of the day was robust, farcical and vulgar and its acting companies continued to perform throughout Europe until the mid-nineteenth century.

From the eighteenth century in the more refined courts and theatres a pageant-type ballet-pantomime, often based on mythology, became the new entertainment. In London, John Weaver staged *The Loves of Mars and Venus* at Drury Lane in 1717. In England these pageants and the Commedia dell'Arte evolved into melodramas and harlequinades which in turn influenced the Christmas Pantomimes, many of which still contain stock characters today.

Meanwhile in France a more serious form of mime was developing. Deburau immortalized the silent 'Pierrot' mimes and was the first to de-emphasise the face by coating it with white flour, as opposed to wearing a mask showing a character. After his death in 1846 the mime tradition struggled until in the 1920s Jacques Copeau founded his school of mime. His students took mime to new heights and by the middle of the twentieth century Paris was the mime centre of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Pecknold, *Mime: The Step Beyond Words*

French based mime was then taken in two directions:

- Etienne Decroux explored pure mime using the mask and white faces. Marcel Marceau followed him and became an international mime artist.
- Jacques Lecoq wanted mime to be part of the actor's general technique and created a school that has influenced much of the physical theatre of today.

## Different Types of Mime

### Character

A particular character that finds themselves in all types of situations and conflicts drives these mimes. Sensitivity and physical awareness are vital to create and sustain a character. Great mime artists have built special characters that become known and loved by their audiences. Marcel Marceau's *Bip*, Charlie Chaplin's *Tramp* and more recently Rowan Atkinson's *Mr Bean* have all become immortal characters in the mime tradition.<sup>2</sup>

### Occupational

Here the purpose of the mime is to communicate 'business'. It can range from making a sandwich to working a machine. It can be naturalistic but needs theatrical understanding to turn it into a performance. The use of the 'Clic' (the accentuated muscular energy that starts and concludes each gesture as described on page 11) and stylised movement can give this mime greater credibility. Characters can be involved, but should not dominate.<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

This type of mime communicates moods and emotions without the use of occupational mime. Its title can be a subject or problem rather than a story, for example *Grief* or Marcel Marceau's *Life Cycle*. Etienne Decroux developed his 'corporeal' mime, convinced that the human body alone could fill a stage and express abstract and universal ideas with clarity. The mask or a white face is often used in abstract mime to give emphasis to the bodily movement.<sup>4</sup>

### Traditional

Deburau, the Bohemian French mime artist, became the 'Father' of traditional mime when he created the poignant Pierrot character. Many more white faced, sad 'clowns' followed, producing highly emotional mimes full of illusion, comedy and pathos. The stylised movement of traditional mime is instantly recognisable and often includes the specialized mime moves, for example walking on the spot or climbing the ladder. Traditional mime must have a fine rhythm and a theatrical quality.

### Commedia dell'Arte

Commedia dell'Arte is a form of Italian theatre containing stock characters, masks, farcical action and scenes full of beatings, acrobatics and comic stage business. It was originally performed by strolling players, who improvised short simple scenes and had the freedom to mime and clown. Many of the characters are still recognised today. For example, Pulcinella became the puppet Mr Punch, Arlecchino is recognised as Harlequin and the simple servant Pedrolino was the inspiration for Pierrot.

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<sup>2</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 4

<sup>3</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 4

<sup>4</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 7

Other stock characters were Pantalone, a rich old miser whose red breeches were passed down to us as pantaloons and finally pants; Il Capitano the swaggering soldier; Il Dottore the fraudulent doctor; Scarramuccia, a type of Robin Hood and Columbina, the witty bright servant. The only unmasked actors played the Innamorati, or lovers, who were not caricatures. In a typical scene, a beautiful girl is seated holding and sniffing a bunch of roses. Sad Pedrolino sees her and falls for her; he then hides as Il Capitano enters. He is followed by the cruel Pulcinella, who is also after the girl. The servants Arlecchino and Columbina come to save her and then her father, Pantalone, rushes in. This results in a huge chase. Someone is hurt and so Il Dottore enters to help. Eventually after much 'business', Pantolino takes his daughter away and all leave the stage. Pedrolino returns to the seat and finds a single rose that she has left behind.

Today in Venice the traditional masks and costumes of Commedia can be seen and bought.

## **Practitioners**

### **Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977)**

His life is the epitome of the rags to riches story.

Born in South London, his parents both worked in the music halls. They separated and he lived in poverty with his mother. At age seven he was sent to a workhouse, at nine his mother was committed to a mental asylum and by 14 he had to fend for himself.

He registered with a West End theatrical agency and his potential for comic review was noticed. By 18 he was an accomplished comedian. Touring with Fred Karno's prestigious comedy company, he went to America and was spotted by a film company. He never looked back. Before the First World War he had become the most famous film star in the world. In these silent movies, mime was the means of communication.

Over the years he was a mime artist, a film director and a composer but he is primarily remembered for his early role as *The Tramp* which brought the art of mime, slapstick and visual comedy routines to a huge audience. *Kid Auto Races at Venice* was the Tramp's debut. Four years later in *A Dog's Life*, Chaplin brought more pathos to his character and made him a sort of Pierrot or sad clown.

In his *The Mime Book*, Claude Kipnis says 'perhaps the greatest influence upon contemporary Mime has been Chaplin. His body is always ready to move in any direction, and his physical flexibility, in turn, suggests a psychological flexibility. It is impossible to like mime and not to like Chaplin'.

He was knighted in 1975 and died two years later in his Swiss mansion.

### **Etienne Decroux (1898-1991)**

Decroux was born in Paris to a mason and a cook. He cared deeply for his parents and spoke of his father as a 'moving statue'. He grew up loving the circus. Until 25 he had many different manual jobs including plumbing and farming. Then because he had political aspirations, he decided to have voice training to help him eliminate his working class accent. His life changed when he began to study under Charles Dullin and he quickly became obsessed with using the body as the primary means of expression. He was a contemporary of Charlie Chaplin and also a film and theatre actor, but he is remembered most for his inspirational teaching methods.

He began by being fascinated by the sculptures of Rodin and developed body training that was based on isolations (a mime technique further discussed on page 10). He also worked on the artists' centre of gravity and management of balance. He brought these ideas together and called them 'Corporeal Mime'.

He is known as the 'Father of modern mime', having created the art of dramatic movement.

His 'Corporeal Mime' gave prevalence to the trunk over other parts of the body and he said that uncontrolled uses of the face and hands made them 'instruments of a lie'. The



influence of Greek sculptures and Rodin's work are evident in Decroux's later teaching, where attitude became more important than gestures.

His work continues to stimulate and inspire as it spreads the 'word' of mime.

### **Marcel Marceau (1923-2007)**

Born in Strasbourg to a Jewish family, he fled with his parents to Limoges when France entered World War II. His father was taken to Auschwitz. Later Marceau joined the French Resistance and helped to smuggle children across to neutral Switzerland; he started to mime as a way of keeping them quiet.

In 1946 he attended drama school in Paris and studied under Etienne Decroux, quickly becoming an acclaimed mime artist. By 1948 he had created *Bip*, the white-faced 'clown'. Bip's misadventures were limitless and through them Marceau became an international star. His one-man show toured the world and audiences loved his mime 'exercises', such as walking against the wind, as much as his characters and stories. Of his famous *Youth, Maturity, Old Age and Death*, one critic said 'he accomplishes in less than two minutes what most novelists cannot do in volumes.'

He opened his own school of mime in Paris and established the Marceau Foundation to promote mime in the USA. Television and film helped to spread his 'world of silent art.' In the film *First Class* he played 17 roles. His final world tour concluded in Australia in 2006. He has been honoured throughout the world. In his own words from *The Mime*, 'when a mime artist sustains his dramatic action with the inspiration of his thought, the sensitive response he induces is the echo of his soul, and the gesture becomes a silent inner song.'

### **Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999)**

Born in Paris, Lecoq loved sports at school and at 17 became a gymnast. He was especially adept on the parallel bars and the horizontal bar and he worked to understand the geometry of movement. As his love of physicality developed he became more aware of the movement of the body through space. He defined the rhythms of athletics as a kind of poetry. In 1941 he entered a physical theatre college where he met Jean Conty, an international basketball player. Conty's great friends were Antonin Artaud and Jean-Louis Barrault who were well known actors. Their influence kindled Lecoq's interest in theatre.

Fascinated by movement for theatrical performance, he worked with Comediens de Grenoble. This led to eight years in Italy becoming the mime master of Teatro Piccolo di Milano, one of the last great companies still practising Commedia dell'Arte. With this very special blend of skills he was able to develop teaching methods to create mime, movement and physical theatre. In 1956 he opened his famous school in Paris – L'Ecole Internationale de Theatre Jacques Lecoq.

His aim was to nurture the creativity of the performer. His training involved an emphasis on masks to aid awareness of physical mannerisms. He encouraged playfulness, togetherness and openness in his students. His influence can be seen across Western physical theatre and his theories still predominate the mime scene. His methods are now referred to as 'Mime for the Actor'.

## The Difference between a Mime and a Mime Scene

A mime shows a concentrated moment portraying the mood and movement of one particular activity. At its most simple it could be 'eating a banana' or 'walking across pebbles'. It can involve the creation of a character, but this character must be focused on one occupation. An animal can be depicted, showing its shape and natural moves. It is always a solo piece. Marcel Marceau called such mimes his 'exercises' but in performance, for example *The Cage* or *The Mask Maker*, they kept his audience enthralled.

A mime scene, or monodrama as Marceau's longer works came to be known, is a series of activities that create a piece of drama. This can range from a simple episode – for example, looking at the exhibits in a museum – to a more complicated scene in which museum exhibits come to life. It can show conflict between characters. It may be abstract or tell a story, be comic or poignant. A mime scene needs to use space theatrically to portray the illusion it is creating. One mime artist or a group can perform a scene. Sound effects, music or even a speaking chorus may be used and the scene should take the audience on a journey.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grades 1, 2 and 3

## **Specific Basic Mime Skills/Techniques**

### **Isolations**

This is the technique of moving each segment of the body independently. To begin, the body must be straight and still, relaxed but ready to move. From this state, one element of the body – for example, the right-hand little finger – must move while the rest stays perfectly still. Then the isolations continue. This sounds simple, but is not easy to master because our body parts are not used to moving in isolation.

### **The Three Elements of Movement**

#### **a) Immobility**

This is perhaps the most essential skill for a mime artist, as it prepares and concludes every movement. It is a neutral state where the body and mind are relaxed yet alert and is the starting point for all actions and reactions. Standing with feet comfortably apart and arms relaxed, the mime artist can be aware of feeling energy flow up through their body. They need to create a charged stillness from which the smallest movement can be made to attract attention.

#### **b) Clic**

'A short outburst of energy that marks the beginning and end of a movement.'<sup>6</sup> It marks the body's passage from immobility into movement and gives a performance vitality and clarity.

The Clic is the difference between a movement that is merely comprehensible and one that is distinctly credible. Examples are 'the initial outburst of the chest (Clic) in a burst of joy, and the sharp stop (Clic) of an accusing finger'.<sup>7</sup> Used well, the Clic can make illusions believable.

#### **c) Pressure**

The force of pressure can help to maintain a position or sustain a movement. It is an awareness of emotion and mood. To understand pressure it is good to concentrate on the lower part of the body. A gentle weight can be felt through hips, legs and feet.

Pressure is the use of weight and gravity in all moves to create a precise effect. It makes our feelings show through the way we use our bodies. Centering both physical and emotional pressure is critical to a mime performance.

### **Fidelity and Focus**

Concentration gives the actor the ability to focus their eyes on an imaginary object, whether near or far and then to remember the positioning and be able to return to it.

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<sup>6</sup> Claude Kipnis, *The Mime Book*

<sup>7</sup> Claude Kipnis, *The Mime Book*

'Fidelity to an object and to the changes it undergoes, sustains the illusion'<sup>8</sup> and makes the invisible world believable.

Having mastered Isolations and with the knowledge of the three elements of movement, the mime artist can now work with fidelity and focus to find ways of approaching, taking and finally releasing an object.

To conclude, all movement must be meaningful and economical but still theatrical enough to engage and connect with an audience.

'Every action and every gesture of every mime character must be seen by every member of the audience.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Claude Kipnis, *The Mime Book*

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Pecknold, *Mime: The Step Beyond Words*

## Mime Games/Exercises

### Hands

Following a warmup with the hands which could involve curling the fingers, circling the wrists and moving each digit individually, try the following exercises to combine dexterity with imagination.<sup>10</sup>

#### a) Finger Painting

Using one hand to hold an imaginary palette, use the other to paint an imaginary picture. Different parts of each hand can be used to create the painting, taking care to stay within the boundaries of the canvas.

Progression: Encourage the rest of the group or a partner to describe the colours used and the composition of the finished picture.

#### b) How Heavy Is It?

Practice holding different weighted objects with sensitivity. Start with holding a light feather between finger and thumb, progress to a robin's egg in the palm of the hand and then a hen's boiled egg. Try holding a light bag of shopping or a heavy bucket of water; challenge learners to use both hands to grasp something that takes all their strength.

Progression: In twos, ask one person to hold a certain object and pass it to their partner without telling them what it is. Check that the weight transference is accurate.

#### c) The Four Elements

Exploring the qualities of elements through the hands:

Water: Make a wave by undulating from the wrist, palm, first knuckle, second knuckle and third repeatedly. Then use both hands to create ripples, currents, waves and different types of water, from raindrops to icicles.

Fire: With fingers facing upwards, light each one as a spark, get them to flicker, grow to flames then sink to smouldering embers and finally just glowing.

Air: Ensure both hands are sensitive to the air around them and get them to float and appear completely weightless. Try to make them relaxed but not floppy.

Earth: Clench and open fists to feel the strength and weight in the hands. Then start to knead imaginary mud, turn it into clay and finally create a solid object.

Progression: Develop a sequence in which the different elements are explored and take over from each other, for example a flame emerging from the earth, being encouraged by the air and then being doused by water.

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<sup>10</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 1

## **Feet**

Warm up the feet by wiggling toes, rocking backwards and forwards through each part of the foot and circling ankles and knee joints.<sup>11</sup>

### **a) Camera**

Stand on one foot and bring the other up into the air in front of you. Imagine your big toe is a video camera and you are filming the floor of the room. Move the camera/toe around to film the walls, other people and yourself. Shots need to be captured on all levels and angles.

Progression: In twos, a partner can suggest more subjects to film and become images themselves and encourage close-ups or long distance shots.

### **b) Walking Over**

The whole space should be used with learners walking normally at first and aiming to walk into the gaps in the room. Then explain that the floor is covered with ice and ask learners to imagine crossing the icy space. Try walking across hot coals with bare feet or through a floor thick with sticky porridge.

Progression: See what happens to your feet when you travel through half a metre of ping-pong balls, a metre of mud or even piles of ice cream and challenge learners to move at different speeds across the different surfaces.

### **c) Circus Walks**

Start by walking naturally across the space, noticing the sensation of the feet touching the floor. Then walk with the toes meeting the floor first and then with the heels touching the floor first. Try walking with just the outside edge of the feet making floor contact, just the balls of the feet or completely flat-footed and then walk with the feet turned in or turned out.

Progression: Use this exercise to start creating characters by making the positions of the feet dictate a type of circus performer, such as the pigeon-toed clown or a dancer on horseback on the balls of her feet.

## **Face**

Warm up the face by making shapes, such as a long face, fat face, a face that is open wide, a face that is tightly closed and by chewing an enormous piece of bubble gum and blowing bubbles with it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 2

<sup>12</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 3

### **a) Eyes**

Keep your head held completely still and make your eyes move up and down, left to right and roll them around in a circle without moving the head at all. Then reverse this by keeping the eyes still and moving the head up, down and side to side.

Progression: Explore the movement in your eyelids and see what they can do, for example wink, flutter, feel heavy or snap open.

### **b) Eating and Drinking**

Use your eyes to see a particular piece of food or drink and communicate a reaction to it. Try seeing, picking up and eating a crunchy apple, a sugary doughnut, hot chilli sauce, cooling ice-cream, buttery corn on the cob, a juicy peach and an ice cube. Drinks might include hot tea, a fizzy drink or iced water. Try using a china tea cup, a thick mug or a straw. A sense of smell can add truth to the mime and time should be taken to savour and enjoy each mouthful or to show dislike or discomfort.

### **c) Revelation**

Ask your learners to shut their eyes and the teacher then describes what surprise they are going to see when they open their eyes, for example a dear friend they have not seen for years. Count down 'three, two, one' and they open their eyes on 'one' and show the expression in their face. Try this with seeing a scary monster, something very special in the palm of your hand, a kitten or someone you don't want to see.

Progression: Ask learners to freeze and hold the expression, then get them to exaggerate their expression over the count of five until it becomes grotesque. They can then reduce the expression over a count down from five to one, ending up with a blank face.

## **Mime Games/Exercises to Develop Precision in General Characterisation**

### **Follow My Leader**

Leading with different parts of the body can be an enjoyable way of finding new characters through physicality. Ask learners to move around the room led by their nose, elbows, knees or toes.

Rippling or undulating through the whole body in an exaggerated way can develop this exercise; children can add a circling finger to help them follow the movement. At any moment the teacher can ask learners to freeze and then move around the room in that particular shape. Notice the different physical qualities that emerge from, for example, a convex or concave chest and how different a character leading from the forehead is from one leading from the knees.

### **Imitation**

Imitation is one way to build a 'library' of characters. Start by watching someone walk and notice how they shift their weight or hold their head and question whether they might be happy or sad. Try to eat and drink the way you imagine that person to. Observe someone who has very different gestures from your own and then try to recreate them. Explore how these characters think and feel and ask questions about them – are they young or old, active or lazy? These observations help to create a group of characters that can later be used to develop a piece of drama.<sup>13</sup>

### **Animal Magic**

Creating an animal mime needs a process of building the physicality. Careful observation, as in the above exercise, is necessary but to create the physical quality of a particular animal it may help to start with the heart rate. Find out how many beats to a second or a minute and you will discover that the quicker the beat, the smaller the creature. Imagine the pulse and try to gasp or pant in time and with a rhythm. If it is fast, the sensation of being a tiny mouse can be felt and physical moves can develop from the breath. Try the cat family, from a small kitten to a lion; listen to a dog panting and find a walk that responds to the rhythm. Try moving to the slow heartbeat of an elephant.

Add the breath and rhythm to observations of the physicality of the animal and then develop actions for the animal, such as hunting or being hunted, sleeping and waking, eating, drinking and washing and you can start to build a mime sequence.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 4

<sup>14</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 5



## Slow Motion, Music and Face Masks

### Miming in Slow Motion

Slow motion is the continuity of movement at a slow, steady pace and this continuity can be difficult to sustain. However, once it is mastered it is indispensable to a mime artist who can use it in many ways, for example to get him/herself in and out of dream sequences.

To help develop the technique of moving in slow motion, ask your learners to be aware of walking normally while feeling the air push past every part of their body. They can then imagine a thick fog curling around them. It gradually becomes even thicker, changing to liquid and they must feel the energy needed to push through water. To slow learners down further the liquid can become pea soup or custard, which becomes harder and harder to move through until it eventually becomes concrete.

As they move, learners need to be aware of any part of the body that wobbles and allow the liquid to be thicker around that area. Eventually the whole body will be able to sustain the slow continuity of movement.<sup>15</sup>

### Miming to Music

Music can be a most helpful introduction to mime. It can inspire the creation of a situation, support a characterisation and sustain a complete performance. Rhythms and evocative emotional qualities can guide learners away from self-consciousness and help them to find movement and create moods with greater confidence.

Try to use music and sound effects with mime to create a satisfying whole. Strong rhythms can be an effective accompaniment to a comic situation. Lyrical music can support and help develop an abstract mime. The performer must know their music perfectly so that every change of emphasis supports the movement. In order for a piece to be a complete blend of timing and sensitivity, learners need to build each movement in response to the music.

If a learner has developed a character and possible situation idea then it may be interesting to play some different pieces of music and ask learners to choose which piece might best fit the idea. Alternatively, a teacher may propose a piece of music and see what this evokes in the learners' minds. For example, *Walking to Regios*, a track by Isaac Hayes, provides the inspiration for a devious character. The piece of music clearly takes that character and their actions across a cityscape – it is furtive, searching and it concludes with a meeting and possible conflict.<sup>16</sup>

Film music, such as the soundtracks for *Chocolat* or *Amelie*, and classical music such as Holst's *Planets Suite* can be useful.

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<sup>15</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 6

<sup>16</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 6

## **Miming using a Full Face Mask**

Masks have been worn in performance for centuries, from the actors in Greek theatre to players in the Commedia dell'Arte and contemporary cartoon characters. They can help the body to suggest a whole range of expressions, some realistic and others highly exaggerated, and they can be used to develop the physicality of characters.

The plain white mask is used to completely take away facial play and encourage the performer to focus on their body language. In a full mask, the performer needs to be physically precise and to connect with the audience through gesture.

To focus on communicating in a mask, the performer needs to warm up well so that the body is flexible enough to show the tiniest detailed gesture or the greatest effort of strength. Physical control can be used to create rhythmic, precise movements which help the progression of mood and thought.

To help develop these techniques, learners can be asked to create a statue or freeze of a particular reaction, such as shock or surprise. As the teacher then counts down from five to one, the learners transfer all the emotion and expression out of their faces and into their bodies, so that every part of the body is communicating the shock, apart from the face where there is no feeling at all.

It is important for the masked performer to be aware of the fourth wall (the audience in an end-on configuration) and keep their mask towards the audience as much as possible. By watching others in mask, learners can observe how the slightest change of angle or difference in gesture may communicate a different action or emotion and how all of the body has to be committed to communicating a clear message.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Linked to LAMDA examinations in Miming at Grade 8

## **Developing a Mime Scene Making Appropriate Use of the Acting Area**

A mime scene must have a beginning, middle and end. It should take the audience on a journey with or without a story line. Decisions need to be made on the style of mime, whether or not to use music or sound effects and where the action takes place.

The performer must decide how to use the stage area for their mime. All areas of the stage should be considered, with a balanced use of up stage and down, left and right. Playing on diagonals is often effective. If the performer is aware of the space, it will help the audience to understand what the space represents in the mime. The idea of the fourth wall should be understood and used imaginatively, giving the audience a clear view.

Whether the action is to take place in or out of doors should be considered and the precise location decided. Comedy could involve a scene in a kitchen involving attempted cooking or a hose tap in the garden taking on its own life. Every object that is used needs to be clearly established. Here an understanding of 'fidelity and focus' is necessary as the performer must always return to the exact spot or level to find the object again. An abstract scene could use a completely empty space and in that context it is important to use different areas that balance each other.

To help ensure the space is used well, try an exercise called Balancing the Space. Imagine that the performance space is a flat, square plateau which is balanced on a central pivot. Start with a performer in the centre which is perfectly balanced. If the performer moves to one side, another performer must enter the space and find an opposite point to the first performer, which will be equidistant from the centre. As each performer moves, the other needs to try and balance out the space. Add in more performers and also ask learners outside the performance space to observe when the space becomes unbalanced and the imagined plateau tilts.

Using the space with total confidence, spatial awareness and a sense of rhythm produces a fine structure in which a mimic can flourish.

## **LAMDA Miming Examinations**

The benefits of studying the art of mime are manifold. Movement is basic to life and the study of mime encourages observation, awareness and sensitivity towards situations and other people. It can enable those who are shy or have limited language skills to express themselves through movement and body language. This freedom builds self-confidence and enhances communication skills. It also provides learners with the opportunity to develop skills which support the delivery of dramatic text and to increase their knowledge of the performance process.

LAMDA Examinations offers Solo/Duologue Miming examinations at Entry Level, Grades 1, 2 and 3 (Level 1), Grades 4 and 5 (Level 2) and Grades 6, 7 and 8 (Level 3).

At Entry Level, using the stimulus provided, learners will create a scene that has a structured sequence of events, using the performance space appropriately with clear, confident movement. Learners will be able to describe each activity.

At Level 1 (Grades 1, 2 and 3) learners will understand the difference between a mime and a mime scene. They will create mimes specifically focusing on the hands, feet and face and mime scenes that reveal and engage with a place or situation. Learners will be able to describe the details of each activity.

At Level 2 (Grades 4 and 5) learners will be able to demonstrate that they can create a believable character through mime, create relationships with other characters and engage with the imaginary. Their movement will be clear and co-ordinated, with the application of developing technical skills. For Grade 4, learners will present a mime based on a specific occupation and a mime scene developed around an episode and character from a story, book, film or play. For Grade 5, learners will present a mime depicting an animal, bird or reptile and a mime scene depicting the interaction between two characters. Learners will be able to describe the characters and situations explored.

At Level 3 (Grades 6, 7 and 8) learners will be able to demonstrate physical control, precision, flexibility and co-ordination through mime. They will create and inhabit a character and situation, structure scenes to reveal a progression of mood and thought and be able to sustain their imaginative engagement throughout a performance. For Grade 6, learners will present a scene incorporating the use of slow motion and a second scene based on a conflict between two people. For Grade 7, learners will present a scene set in a cultural or historical context and a second scene using the stimulus of a given one word title. For Grade 8, learners will present a scene using a full face mask, a second scene exploring a humorous situation and a third using a picture, poem or piece of music as a stimulus. At this level learners are expected to be able to describe the performance demands of mime and analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of their work.

## Appendix

### Acknowledgements

Most of the exercises have been inspired by the work of the mime artists referred to and Jerzy Grotowski, the famous Polish director who has influenced physical theatre since the late twentieth century, as recorded by Stephen Wangh in *An Acrobat of the Heart*. The work of mask and physical theatre company Trestle has also influenced this material: [www.trestle.org.uk](http://www.trestle.org.uk).

### Bibliography

Title	Author	Publisher	Date
<i>An Acrobat of the Heart</i>	Stephen Wangh	Knopf Doubleday	2000
<i>Mime: The Step Beyond Words</i>	Adrian Pecknold	Beaverbrooks	1983
<i>The Mime Book</i>	Claude Kipnis	Meriwether (2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.)	1988
<i>From Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond</i>	Annette Bercut Lust	Scarecrow Press	2002
Recommended Resources			
<i>Le Mime (French Edition)</i>	Marcel Marceau	Somogny	1996
<i>The Story of Bip</i>	Marcel Marceau	W W Norton (1 <sup>st</sup> ed.)	1976
<i>Marcel Marceau: Master of Mime (age 7 plus)</i>	Gloria Spielman and Manon Gauthier	Kar Ben Publishing	2011
<i>Chaplin: A Life</i>	Stephen Weissman	W W Norton	2011
<i>Etienne Decroux</i>	Thomas Leabhart	Taylor & Francis	2007

<i>Jacques Lecoq</i>	Simon Murray	Psychology Press	2003
<i>The World of Mime Theatre</i>	<a href="http://www.mime.info">www.mime.info</a>		
<i>Charlie Chaplin</i>	<a href="http://www.charliechaplin.com">www.charliechaplin.com</a>		
<i>Encyclopaedia of Mime</i>	<a href="http://www.mime.info/encyclopedia/marceau.html">www.mime.info/encyclopedia/marceau.html</a>		
<i>Moveo</i>	<a href="http://www.moveo.cat">www.moveo.cat</a>		
<i>École Internationale De Théâtre Jacques Lecoq</i>	<a href="http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com">www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com</a>		
<i>Theatre de l'Ange Fou</i>	<a href="http://www.angefou.co.uk">www.angefou.co.uk</a>		
<i>Source Material on Jerzy Grotowski</i>	<a href="http://www.owendaly.com/jeff/grotDir.htm">www.owendaly.com/jeff/grotDir.htm</a>		

### Recommended Music

- *Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saens
- *Spring* from *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi
- Theme from *The Light of Experience* and from the film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Gheorghe Zamfir
- *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* by Debussy
- *Homeless from Graceland* by Paul Simon
- *The Little Train of the Caipira* from *Bachianas Brasileiras No 2* by Villa Lobos
- American India Dance Theatre
- Ennio Morricone Film Tracks

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