



# Performance Studies

**A LEVEL**

**Performance Studies:  
DV8 and Lloyd Newson**

Topic Exploration Pack

September 2015

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*This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.*



## DV8 and Lloyd Newson

### Teacher Guide

When introducing a new topic, especially one with elements of physical theatre, students will have some misconceptions and assumptions about the style. Depending on the skills base and previous experience of your students, most will assume that performing in the style of Lloyd Newson and DV8 will require them to gain extensive dance skills. Ensure that you introduce the terminology of 'emotional movement' and 'physical theatre' to avoid alienating those students with a largely drama or music skills base.

Ensure that you give the students plenty of time to view clips of DV8 performances on their own in their own time and during the tutor sessions. This avoids shock reactions to subject matter within the performances and allows the students to form opinions on the issues explored and performance techniques. Please be aware that some of the performances that you will be studying explore subjects of a sensitive nature that could be seen as shocking to some students. Try to be sensitive to your student's personal and religious beliefs when exploring the issues within DV8's pieces.

### About DV8

DV8 was formed in 1986 by a collection of dancers who had become frustrated by the direction of contemporary dance at the time. Lloyd Newson has led as the director since 1986 and is a founder member along with Nigel Charnock and Michelle Richencoer. The name DV8 refers to the Video-8 cameras that were used as part of the creative process during rehearsals of *Strange Fish*.

Newson's personal academic background in psychology has often led the issues explored within their pieces. The relationship between men and women, gender roles, human desires and sexuality are often explored.

Their approach to performance is to take risks, examine 'the norm' and break down the barriers between dance and theatre, not only by their physical style but also through the issues that they explore. Their performances are a collaboration of art forms using dance, physical theatre, dialogue, soundscapes and music to build an emotional story for a character. They tour internationally but are based in London.

## Physical Theatre Background Reading

The term physical theatre means different things to different performers but its general meaning is a performance that puts the emphasis on physical movement, rather than dialogue. Physical theatre shows that you don't have to use dialogue to express creative ideas. It uses techniques such as movement, mime, gesture and dance to explore complex social, cultural and historical issues.

<http://www.pushtheatre.org/>

<http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/>

<http://old.meyerhold.ru/en/biography/>

<http://www.pinabausch.org/en/pina/biograph>

Clips of DV8 productions available on their website, these are essential to get students engaged in the topic.

<https://www.dv8.co.uk/>

## Stage Productions

- *My Sex, Our Dance*, 1985
- *My Body, Your Body*, 1987
- *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, 1988
- *Strange Fish*, 1992
- *MSM*, 1993<sup>[2]</sup>
- *Enter The Achilles*, 1995
- *The Happiest Day of My Life*, 1999
- *Can We Afford This?*, 2000
- *Living Costs* (promenade performance), 2003
- *The Cost of Living*, 2003
- *Just For Show*, 2005
- *To Be Straight With You*, 2008
- *Can We Talk About This*, 2011
- *John*, 2014

## Films

- *My Sex, Our Dance*, 1986
- *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, 1989
- *Strange Fish*, 1992
- *Enter The Achilles*, 1995
- *The Cost of Living*, 2004

Part of DV8's production process is to create student suitable resources to help engage them their performances and their devising process. These are valuable for research and could even be used as stimuli for their own performance. In particular the interviews with Lloyd Newson should be used. (see lesson three)

<https://www.dv8.co.uk/students>

For a performance to be in the style of DV8 it should be:

- Challenging for an audience with possible taboo subject matter
- Physically demanding movement (performers must take risks too)
- Challenges the conventions and traditional forms of dance
- Reflects real human relationships and desires
- Developed through improvisation and experimentation
- Challenging staging requirements that performers interact with
- Use music, song, dialogue and soundscapes.

## Lesson One

**WARM UP** – Students must walk around the room, with a relaxed body. They must develop a way of stopping everyone in the group walking and starting them again without communicating verbally with each other. Remind students eye contact is the key to this level of teamwork. Depending on the group, you may need to repeat this process until they can do it with ease. This can be used regularly as a warm up. It can be developed to include personal motifs related to their current working process.

Inform the students that they are going to follow someone in the group without letting them know. They must walk around the room in the same way as the previous task, only they must develop a way of following someone. It must be subtle and secretive. Discuss with students:

- Did you know who was following you?
  - Did you feel uneasy simply because you *thought* someone was following you?
  - Did this impact physically on your movement?
  - How did your movement change? (example - hunched shoulders/looking over shoulder)
- Spotlight some of these altered movements.

Choose one student's altered movement for the whole group to work on. The whole group will develop exaggerated versions of this movement. The aim is to develop a contorted, disfigured style work that provokes shock from an audience and challenge them as performers.

Show the group a short clip. A 1min40 clip is available here.

<https://www.dv8.co.uk/projects/archive/enter-achilles--film>

Ask the students which character they identified with and why. What movements made them identify with character?

As a group (between 3-20 students) ask the students to recreate the movement that moves the DV8 ensemble around the set (around 40secs into the clip). Ask them to develop an individual movement to disperse them as a group.

Possibilities to film and review movements used. Peer review effectiveness.

## Lesson Two

**WARM UP** – Students to walk around the room. They must keep a constant eye level with light flowing arms and legs. They need to form brief moments of contact when going past each other using unusual body parts. Development could limit the amount of space used.

Show a clip of DEAD DREAMS OF MONOCHROME MEN (available on Youtube).

- Ask the students which scene's physicality had the most impact on you individually and why?
- Identify key words/themes/motifs. How did it make you feel?
- What emotions did you experience?

Ask the students individually to put that emotion into movement thinking about action/space/dynamics. Spotlight and review.

Incorporate all these separate motifs together in small groups. What is the impact of the larger groups? Spotlight and review.

Develop the incorporation of narration to explore the emotions from the themes initially explored within the performance clip.

## Lesson Three

Understanding Lloyd Newson's development process

<https://www.dv8.co.uk/students>

As a group read and explore the Newson interviews from the link above. Highlight the sections that explain and explore devising and choreography. Write a plan of *how to develop in the style of Newson* this can then be used as a revision tool in exams or at the start of a devising project.

Research the subject matter within *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*. How did Newson use the subject matter of Dennis Nilsen? How were his crimes explored? Why did Newson feel connected to this subject?

What is an issue that you feel strongly about? Use the Newson's style devising process to begin your own piece (in groups or individually.)

## Texts / DVD

*Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*

by Simon Murray (Author), John Keefe (Author)

*Killing for company: the case of Dennis Nilsen* by Brian Masters (arrow 1995)

*Three Ballets* by Dv8 available on DVD

*Enter Achilles*:DV8 Physical Theatre Paperback – 1995

by David Tushingham and quotations from others authors. Lloyd Newson (Author)

## Potential Tutor learning:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/physical-theatre>



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