**What is a style?**

Melodrama and Style

A Style is a special type of drama within a broader form or a recognized manner in which a particular type of drama is created and presented according to which it is interpreted. Style often relates to a particular historical period, movements, a writer or performer.

We have all heard of different styles of music – Classical, Swing, and Rock and Roll – even in those styles there are many different forms. In Rock and Roll, we have heard of Classic Elvis rock, there’s Acid rock, there’s Pop and a dozen different type of Rap music too. Well in Drama there are many different styles too. We might be aware of the realistic or type of theatre that looks like what we call ordinary life, or a tragedy like Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare, well Tragedy and Realism are Styles of theatre. The Style that we will be learning about and performing in a little more than three weeks is both from a long time ago and is very well known now. It is call Melodrama. If you have seen Star Wars, The Matrix or Titanic they could all be called modern melodramas. Melodrama is a style of drama that is connected to a historical period when it was developed to please and distract. And it’s still doing that today.

**Historical Context of Melodrama**

About the time New Zealand was being settled, a hundred and fifty or more years ago in what was called the 1800s or the 19th Century the world of men was going through a huge change. Men had based their lives on the natural world, - growing crops or digging for minerals, burning coal and wood for heat, traveling by horse or sea, sudden a whole series of scientific and industrial discoveries came along and the machine became the centre of men’s lives and wealth. It was both exciting and terrifying. Millions of people lost their jobs; a few became extremely rich and many extremely poor.

Frightened and hopeful people began moving out of the green of the country and toward the cities either to become rich or fall into desperate situation. Everyone began to hear about the possibilities in the far world. The families and cities who became rich built huge theatres in order to watch spectacles of theatre that could be created with the new machinery available. The less rich longed to escape from the new grey world of the city they lived in. They felt a helpless, growing anger at the great industrial and land owning men who seemed who seemed to be controlling everyone’s lives. Alcoholism became a epidemic problem. Who would save them? There were many humanitarian movements at the time to make life fair but help was slow in coming. Out of these forces came a theatre that had many features that we recognize in the movies of today.

In the huge theatres the actors had to be grand in their gestures and voice. In the extreme time extreme and dramatic stories of good conquering evil felt very good. Every ones loved Romantic of exotic places or great and perilous chases and battles so they could forget the troubles of the time. **Melodrama!**

###### Major Features and Elements

* **Exaggerated and Stylised Movement and Extended vocal technique expressing Extreme Emotions and Sentimentality –** Based on the size of the Theatres of the time and the extreme characters
* **Stereotyped characters** – **Exaggerated** (e.g. hero, heroine, comic character & villain) who are usually one-dimensional – they do not change psychologically or morally, which means the interest lies in the manipulation of the plot in which fate, providence and justice play important parts. The action arises out of the evil machinations of the cold-blooded villain operating on a falsely accused hero, a captive maiden, long suffering elders or some variation or combination of the above. *– Role*
* **Good verses Evil** -***moral struggle*** The human struggle between pure good (usually the poor or downtrodden) verses pure evil (usually the rich, greedy, or powerful). The **strict observance of poetic justice** in which good is always rewarded and evil always punished. The world of melodrama is one in which deeds and characters are separated by **clear-cut distinctions**. Originally a play embellished with music (Gr. *melos*), Melodrama follows a fairly narrow contextual scheme- *Tension.*
* **Audience interaction** for maximum sense of empowerment. They may be helpless at home but they can beat the bad guys at the show – *Convention of Participation.*
* **Spectacular Events** such as chases, explosions, battles, fights, fierce arguments, sea voyages or supernatural events.- *Action*
* **Fast paced dramatic** plots - always surrounding an exciting story. Suspense, often using a unity of time. There is often a series of plot twists, i.e. discoveries, hairbreadth escapes utilizing secret passages, hiding places, disguises, etc *- of Time.*
* **Audience response** Melodrama employs a rather simplistic recipe: very basic emotional appeals are involving "arousal of pity and indignation at the wrongful oppression of good people and intense dislike for wicked oppressors."

background information

* **Exotic locations** - The exotic or far away – ugly, desperate or lush and beautiful – never ordinary - The most humble or the grandest. eg. Persia, the old west, Alaska, the

Sahara, a desert Island etc.  *– Place*

Poses:

Grief

Fear

Pride

Mercy

Anger

Scorn

Wonder

Love

Evil

Hatred

Jealousy

Now do a tableaux of these combinations:

Scorn/ Love

Pride/hatred

Mercy/ Evil

Fear/ Rage

Wonder/Horror

# Characters

Main Characters are

Villain: cruel, mean, evil, powerful, sneaky, sly

Hero: Brave, reliable, honest, strong, fairminded

Heroine: innocent, pretty, courage, determined, sweet

Sidekick: comic relief can hinder or aid depending on whose side they are on

( other characters can be The widowed mother, Overbearing father, deformed servant)

1. In groups Create a pose for each character ( remember poses to be held for 3 seconds)
2. Create a tableaux showing at least 3 of the characters.

Acting Styles:

Aside

Swoon

Gasp

Declamation

Long walk downstage

Pacing

The sigh/ groan

Remember the extension also applies to the use of language. The voices should be exaggerated types. You can use the vowels to extend the word when you work with script but also the mini script.

[THE TEN MAJOR EMOTIONS FOR ACTORS](http://thecrushedtragedian.blogspot.com/2007/08/ten-major-emotions-for-actors.html)

One of the first things a 19th-century actor would learn was the expression of the "ten major emotions": Joy, Grief, Fear, Anger, Pity, Scorn, Hatred, Jealousy, Wonder, Love. These covered most dramatic situations. Contemporary theories of psychology, physiology, and elocution held that internal emotions were expressed externally on the body, the body's external positions could create internal emotions, and attitudes of emotion would communicate and sometimes instill themselves in the viewer. In dimly lit and noisy theatres, the taking of commonly understood positions helped viewers follow a story, of course.

*Ten Major Emotions for Actors (1756)* by Aaron Hill, was published in Britain and was still running through many successive editions in Jacksonian America. I've listed below the emotions in the order Hill did -- words in brackets are Hill's explanations of the emotion. The descriptions of physical expression are from another very popular book, *Lessons in Elocution* by William Scott (the 1814 edition). This was another 18th-century title, a standard text for study well into Victorian America. Abraham Lincoln pored over his copy to learn proper modes of declamation and oratory. Copies of *Scott's Elocution* show up regularly on eBay, generally for about $10 a copy, its ubiquity a testimony to how many copies were printed and kept in early America.

1. JOY [PRIDE possessed of TRIUMPH] when sudden and violent, expresses itself by clapping of hands, and exultation or leaping. The eyes are opened wide; perhaps filled with tears; often raised to heaven, especially by devout persons. The countenance is smiling, not composedly, but with features aggravated. The voice rises, from time to time, to very high notes.

2. MELANCHOLY OR FIXED GRIEF [DISAPPOINTMENT void of HOPE] is gloomy, sedentary, motionless. The lower jaw falls: the lips pale, the eyes are cast down, half shut, eyelids swelled and red, or livid, tears trickling silent, and unwiped; with a total inattention to every thing that passes. Words, if any, few, and those dragged out, rather than spoken; the accents weak, and interrupted, sighs breaking into the middle of sentences and words.

3. FEAR [GRIEF discerning and avoiding danger], violent and sudden, opens very wide the eyes and mouth; shortens the nose, draws down the eyebrows; gives the countenance an air of wildness: covers it with a deadly paleness; draws back the elbows parallel with the sides; lifts up the open hands, the fingers together, to the height of the breast, so that the palms face the dreadful object, as shields opposed against it. One foot is drawn back behind the other, so that the body seems shrinking from the danger and putting itself in a posture for flight. The heart beats violently; the breath is fetched quick and short: the whole body is thrown into a general tremor. The voice is weak and trembling…

4. ANGER [PRIDE provoked beyond reach or regard of Caution] expresses itself with rapidity, interruption, noise, harshness and trepidation. The neck stretched out, the head forward, after nodding and shaking in a menacing manner, against the object of the passion. The eyes red, inflamed, staring, rolling and sparkling; the eyebrows drawn over them; and the forehead wrinkled into clouds. The nostrils stretched wide, every vein swelled; every muscle strained, the breast heaving and the breath fetched hard. The mouth open, and drawn on each side towards the ears, shewing the teeth in a gnashing posture. The face bloated, pale, red or sometimes almost black. The feet stamping, the right arm often thrown out, and menacing with the clenched fist shaken, and in a general and violent agitation of the whole body.

5. PITY [active GRIEF for another’s affliction], mixed love and grief, looks down upon distress with lifted hands; eyebrows drawn down; mouth open, and features drawn together.

6. SCORN [negligent ANGER] - [contempt unconnected with anger…gained…by a seeming unsinewy slackness of muscles, associated with a look of placid indifference. When, however, the passion rises into nervous and exclamatory violence, the laxity of the muscles, added to their given disposition, will require a look that flames with anger and insult, a big and bursting expansion of the body, and a voice of grand and lofty loudness.] …sets the jaws or gnashes with the teeth; sends blasting flashes from the eyes; draws the mouth towards the ears, clenches both fists, and bends the elbows in a straining manner. The tone of voice and expression are all much the same with that of anger; but the pitch not so loud.

7. HATRED (AVERSION) [restrained, yet lasting ANGER] …drawing back, as avoiding the approach of what he hates; the hands, at the same time, thrown out spread, as if to keep it off. The face turned away from that side…the eyes looking angrily and asquint the same way the hands are directed, the eyebrows drawn downwards, the upper lip disdainfully drawn up; but the teeth set. The pitch of the voice loud, the tone chiding, unequal, surly, vehement.

8. JEALOUSY [doubtful ANGER, struggling against LOVE and PITY] shows itself by restlessness, peevishness, thoughtfulness, anxiety, absence of mind. Sometimes it bursts out in piteous complaint, and weeping, then a gleam of hope lights up the countenance…. Immediately the face clouded with a general gloom shows the mind overcast again with horrid suspicion…the arms are folded upon the breast; the fists violently clenched; the rolling, bloody eyes dart fury.

9. WONDER [inquisitive FEAR] opens the eyes, and makes them appear very prominent: sometimes raises them to the skies; but oftener fixes them on the object. If the cause…be a present and visible object, with the look all except the wildness, of fear. If the hands hold anything…they immediately let it drop…the mouth open; the hands held up open, nearly in the attitude of fear.

10. LOVE [DESIRE kept temperate by REVERENCE] lights up [the face with] smiles. The forehead is smoothed, and enlarged, the eyebrows are arched, the mouth a little open and smiling; the eyes languishing and half shut, dote upon the beloved object. The countenance assumes the eager and wishful look of desire; but missed with an air of satisfaction and repose. The accents are soft, and winning; the tone of voice persuasive, flattering, pathetic, various, musical, rapturous, as in Joy.

Love Expressed (Male) – Chest held high, right hand crosses the chest and rests on the upper left over the heart, then opens out to the right and the loved one.

Love Expressed (Female) – Chest held high, head cocked a bit to the side, opposite leg goes out with foot pointed, hands under the chin, fingers entwined and bent at the first and second knuckles (almost praying), hands go toward the loved one, smile on face.

Grief – Head down, shoulders rounded, hands cupping the face. Raising the shoulders up and down, with a sobbing noise, is optional.

Horror – Eyes wide, mouth open, both hands to the cheeks with the fingers extended.

Fortitude – Body straight, chest up, hand to forehead, with the palm facing the audience and fingers curled slightly.

Evil Planning – One eyebrow up, the other down, a grimace on the face and hands rubbing together, if it is a really good plan, the fingers twiddle.

Evil Sneaking – Shoulders hunched over, arm raised to cover the nose on down, eyes free to shift around the room, legs bent on the cross of the stage.

Pride – Chest up, hands with knuckles to both hips, legs slightly apart, a balanced look.

Overwhelmed – Chin up bringing the face to look up, one arm dropped limp to the side, the other hand open with palm towards the audience on the top of the forehead.

**Practice the Gestures !**

**EXERCISES**! In doing the pose exercises below every pose must be fully done never ½ way.

**For example** extending the vowels: the oooh of You can be “Youooooooo” or the R on rent could be trilled. Or the Heroine’s pay could be “Paaaaaaay “or I could be I “Ahhhhheeee” (experiment.).

**Exercise #1** In a circle, every student taking every part take the poses as fully as possible. With each pose find how your weight is always on the foot which is either un action (front foot or in retreat (back foot)

**Exercise #2** Change from pose to pose in rapid fire succession.

**Exercise #3** One side is heroine one side Villain- the villain steps forward and points, heroine responds with hand on forward wilt away from him. Repeat using action response with different characters.

**Exercise. Game:#4** 8 students get up . Someone calls different poses. Everyone must do them immediately without pause. The again someone calls and everyone must do any pose except the one called- people eliminated if they make a mistake- calls go faster and faster.

**Exercise #5** Mini-melodrama – do the mini melodrama *The Rent* with full physical commitment. And extending the vowels for dramatic effect. Take 15 minutes to prepare each group of 4 they can read off the board or have it memorized.