

Duo/Duet Polishing Up Blocking

After blocking has been created it needs to be practiced until it is sharp, clean, and believable. Regardless of if the event is Duo Interpretation or Duet Acting, there are particular tactics that can be employed to help ensure a clean performance. The follow will be of use to any level of Duo/Duet actor.

Work Exchanges

Whether physically performing an exchange with a partner or not, all interactions must be worked. A Duet interaction can become muddled if not worked through step-by-step. Much can go wrong. For instance, simply saying one person is to dip the other is not enough. Plan it out or there is a real chance of one partner missing a mark and the other being dropped to the floor. Duo Interpretation partners not only must worry about missing an exchange but also having it look fake. Because interactions cannot directly be done, the once easy act of shaking someone's hand can become trying.

Time Everything

A nearly effortless way to base blocking/exchanges is with timing. "Nearly" is used because breaking down the movement at first can be taxing, but after it is thought out and learned blocking will be painless with mild attention. Have marks to hit at certain moments within a piece. For example, having a word or phrase as a trigger for when to move, or even as an indicator of when to be in a certain area, makes

for consistent blocking. When blocking grows complicated it might also be beneficial to count out how long it should take to do something--like in dance.

Peripherals and Sound

In both Duo and Duet, though this is mostly for Duo, a scene partner will be "invisible." In performing a blind blocking exchange it is very useful to take advantage of the senses. Largely, when marks are hit, timing is in sync, and things are going well there will be little use of this. However, not everything always works as planned and being aware makes for a competent performance anyway. Take control of the scene! Make use of one's peripheral vision to be knowledgeable of where a partner is at all times. Also use sound. Lines are excellent cues to know when to move and where to be at a certain moment. But sounds such as a partner walking, hitting something, or sound effects are a clear tell of where someone is located. Perhaps some blocking involves upstaging? Using sound would be a great way to know if a mark was hit properly.

Setting and Space

Duo might not have a physical representation of a set like Duet has, but that should not stop an actor from making use of a set in blocking. A quick way to help burn blocking into a person's memory is to make use of spatial clues. Knowing that by a certain line one needs to be upstage left, or sitting behind the table to do something, helps in remembering where to go.

Start Slow, Repeat

Memorizing blocking usually requires having the script in hand to be sure marks are hit. And once the script is removed slight motions might be missed, but overall blocking is readily learned. However, some movements are complex (especially when transitions are added). Thus, to learn a tricky bit isolate a section to work with and begin rehearsing slowly. Gradually increase the speed to “normal” as the blocking becomes better. This constant repetition and speed increase brands the blocking steps into mental and motor memory. Getting to the phase of being able to do a section without much thinking through the motions is a sign of true memorization. When the section is learned add it into the rest of the piece and work the entire performance.

Evolve

Blocking never is done. Even when an action works well it can most always be improved upon. Continually think and play around with ways to make something better. Not only will the repetition be good for memorization, it will lead to a cleaner version of blocking for a piece.

Review

Practice, practice, practice. If a partnership wants to truly make a piece as clean as possible they must forever be practicing. This can include a regular paced rehearsal. A speed-through (doing everything as fast as possible). Even a slow-motion version when just beginning to learn blocking helps. Being able to

perform a piece in new ways shows a clear understanding and memorization of the motions. And going through blocking a lot ensures that forgetting is less likely to happen while in a round.

Quick memorization of blocking, and consistent execution, comes from being aware and in control of the scene. Losing attention, for even a moment, can ruin hours of preparation and rehearsal. Fortunately, using the above techniques not only teaches actors to remain cognizant, but also helps with motor and mental memory.