

ensemble choreography very credibly – on crutches.

Further highlights include **Guony Armannsdottir** from Iceland, who certainly has the likeability factor and an infectious cuteness, particularly suited to comedy and demonstrated in her scene from *The Deal*. **Candice Palladino** is a powerhouse performer with brash energy, giving that extra per cent to every fibre of her performance. **Rachel Middle** has a very castable innocence while **Helen Hart** gives a good rendition of *Wait a Bit* from *Just So*. **Seth Lieber** combines very good looks with an abundance of charm while **Stephen Arden** gives his all to a scene from *Yellow Moon*. It was, however, a scene from *The Wall* that proved to be my favourite of the afternoon, with Scottish natives **Kelly-Anne Jones** and **Ross Sharkey** establishing some very watchable characters.

All in all, I felt this showcase moved along at a good pace, displaying all it needed to. However, most of the material felt very modern and sometimes almost too cerebral. A few of the less well-known, reliable standards or classics would not have gone amiss. Richard Taylor's *Because* worked well as a suitable closing, summing up the anticipations and aspirations of these young graduates about to join the industry.

Jennifer Reischel

Expert choice

Peter Charlesworth, agent:
• Paul Hodge
• Melanie Bell

Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts Postgraduate Acting Showcase 2010

Criterion Theatre, London
September 22-23

Director: Caroline Eves

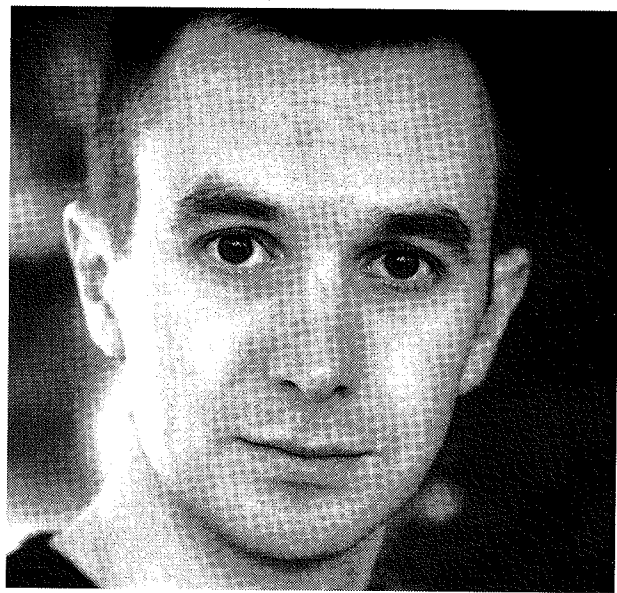
Cast: Robert Bradley, Hannah Casley, Fanni Compton, Anita Goundar, Charlie Harrison, Anthony Harwood, Emma Hymas, Richard Ian-Foster, Nick Kay, Adele Keating, Charlotte King, Melanie Loudonsack, Julia Marie-Frost, Philip Nightingale, Roger Nuttall, Edward Pemberton, Francesca Secchi, Tamara Cowan, Molly Small

Running time: 1hr 10mins

There is a circus element from the outset in this showcase, with students on stilts, waving flags, playing flutes, dancing and then performing a scene from *Hamlet*, all in chaotic harmony, skilfully orchestrated by director Caroline Eves.

Fanni Compton and **Philip Nightingale** set the tone for this showcase with a scene from *On Love* by Mick Gordon, in which a couple discuss the ups and downs of their relationship. Compton and Nightingale seem particularly relaxed in their roles, lending them a maturity beyond their years and allowing them a style that is both unpretentious and unaffected.

Such a focused opening is a hard act to follow, but Immac-



Roger Nuttall

ulate by Oliver Lansley gives **Robert Bradley** and **Melanie Loudonsack** a chance to perform some broader comedy. Loudonsack is good fun as the forthright virgin mother giving Bradley's stressed-out Scottish Gabriel a dressing down over future child support. Bradley's final breakdown on stage is quite successful, heightening the comedy and balancing the scene.

Tamara Cowan chooses a slightly disturbing piece of black comedy for her monologue. Over a glass of wine she details the time she caught a mouse and cut it up to make a greetings card. Dark enough to be a risk indeed, but Cowan judges the scene well, balancing the humour against the psychosis perfectly. Much lighter in tone is *The Glass Room* by Ryan Craig, in which **Nick Kay** and **Molly Small** exhibit some fine flat-share humour. In the short time both performers are on stage each establishes strong characterisation and history. The timing here is crucial and the couple handled the audience reaction well, taking care not to talk through the laughter.

Christopher Durang's work is becoming regular fare at student showcases, so it is no surprise to see *Beyond Therapy* on the list. **Charlie Harrison** and **Charlotte King** make a fair stab at the vaguely surreal author, and King in particular has great success in detailing the underscored desperation of Prudence's plight in this amusing scene.

Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* is another reliable source and **Hannah Casley** and **Anita Goundar** are both superb, pinpointing the drama between the sisters in the scene and levelling the intensity of their argument. These are both thoroughly absorbing performances that work well and should create a lot of interest among the agents and casting directors gathered.

Lighter in tone is *Crap Dad*, a bitter-sweet scene in which a young couple discuss their future on the edge of a dirty, inner-city canal. **Adele Keating** has a frenetic energy about her as the young girl, but the focus is clearly on **Roger Nuttall** as the panicked but

endearing boyfriend. The success of these performances relies on timing and the scene is paced perfectly, although the humour wears after a while.

Ayckbourn appears a lot less often than one might imagine in student showcases, yet this scene from *Flatspin*, perfectly executed by **Anthony Harwood** and **Francesca Secchi**, contains many levels of emotion and humour. Harwood plays the persistent security guard sexually harassing Secchi's young actress on the day of her audition. Harwood and Secchi have very different styles of acting and yet here they are in accord and after an awkward opening, move in perfect harmony to create a thoroughly rewarding duologue.

I am sure **Richard Ian-Foster** never expected to make his West End debut dressed as a giant mouse, but thanks to Sue Townsend's *Disneyland* It Ain't, this is indeed the case. Costume aside, his scene with **Julia Marie-Frost** as the desperate mother works beautifully, providing both actors with some poignant moments on stage. Marie-Frost has an intensity that can focus the audience and there is an edge to Ian-Foster's performance that effects both humour and understanding.

Edward Gant's *Amazing Feats of Loneliness* is new to this reviewer, but definitely sticks in the mind. **Emma Hymas** and **Edward Pemberton** play the broad humour of the scene beautifully, with the style lying somewhere between parody and burlesque. Ultimately this is a showy, comic



Fanni Compton



Kate Brennan

scene that could have been simply an ego trip, but thankfully Hymas and Pemberton approach the piece with complete conviction and play the comedy at the perfect level.

With the company offering a group epilogue from *As You Like It* for a finale, this brought to a close a particularly rewarding showcase and a feather in the cap to all concerned.

Paul Vale

Expert choice

Hannah Troup, junior agent,
JAM Agency:
• Fanni Compton
• Roger Nuttall

GSA – Musical Theatre and Acting MA showcase

Criterion Theatre, London
September 29

Director: Michael Vivian

Cast: Acting students – Kelly Amber, Rosalind Button, Charlotte Dalton, Pamela Donald, Lara Frances, Juliana Hansen, Toby Liszt, Alexander Mircica
Musical Theatre students – James Benthams, Kate Brennan, Cian Brennan-Gavin, Hannah Ray Darcey, Saskia Floor, Owen Graham, Gareth James Healey, Helen Kelly, Sejal Keshwala, Josefien Kleverlaan, Shaun McCourt, Alex Nasmyth, Jonathan Redfern, Candra Sorensen, Mikel Sylvanus, Benjamin Vivian, Nicola Westwood, Tegan Williams
Running time: 1hr 10mins

Cutesy flappers from the twenties, a bit of gritty New York street banter, modern-day London relationship drama, and a rather cleverly-executed puppet spoof accompanying a



Alex Nasmyth

popular Disney tune. Meet the 2010 Guildford School of Acting Musical Theatre and Acting MA students, who present an impressively versatile array of talents and styles. In addition to their action-filled year of training, they have also had the chance to participate as the Street Chorus in Bernstein's *Mass* at the Royal Festival Hall directed by Jude Kelly.

Tightly packed, yet never feeling rushed, this showcase keeps a delightful undertone of tongue-in-cheek humour. Director Michael Vivian expertly gives each student a solo moment, while successfully avoiding a fragmented or disconnected result. A veteran at devising innovative scene changes, his attention to detail and enthusiasm mirrors the message in showcase song *Dressing Them Up* from *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*.

Owen Graham's almost operatic style conquers his part in *Mountain Duet* from *Chess* perfectly, sitting with ease in his range and proving he is a very secure and reliable top tenor. He accompanies this with a leading man's stage presence and intelligently-placed acting choices, taking command when appropriate but also bringing across a sense of supportiveness regarding his (very capable) duet partner **Saskia Floor**.

Kate Brennan is a tour de force, giving the strongest female vocal performance of the afternoon with *Gorgeous* from *The Apple Tree*. Bursting on to the stage a la Tracy Turnblad, she proves to be a true triple threat, proficiently mastering all her quick and rather complex choreography, as well as displaying exceptional comic timing and leading lady qualities.

Alex Nasmyth is one of those rare actors whom you find yourself drawn to, whether squeaking as a puppet animal in a group number or dazzling us with his own solo moment, the aforementioned *Dressing Them Up*. Combining elements of Fred Astaire, Noel Coward and his unique approach to performing musical theatre, it is clear that he will stand out in the future. The Emcee in *Cabaret* springs to mind as an obvious casting choice, although as

a tenor with a top C and a fabulously expressive and versatile manner, he should have many options open to him.

Acting graduates **Charlotte Dalton** and **Lara Frances** both convince with a very strong sense of comedy in a scene from *The Blueberry Hill Accord*. Playing off each other perfectly as two doubtful best friends lining up terms to go their separate ways, Frances proves to be very competent and watchable, while Dalton (also a proficient and graceful dancer), contrasts nicely as the hopeful yet no-pushover underdog.

Further highlights include **Sejal Keshwala's** vocal solo in *I'm Here* from *The Color Purple*, clearly showing her suitability to the musical theatre/pop/contemporary genre, while **James Benthams** gives us some great period jazz dancing and model looks in *What Do I Need With Love?* from *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

A scene from *Closer* shows off a beautiful and strong **Juliana Hansen**, while Irish natives **Cian Brennan-Gavin** and **Hannah Ray Darcey** present a lovely song excerpt from *A Man of No Importance* – Darcey particularly suiting this musical style. **Mikel Sylvanus** is compelling and to be reckoned with in *A Piece of the Action* from *The Life*, while **Pamela Donald** and **Alexander Mircica** keep the tension and energy mounting in a sizzling scene from *Songs of Grace* and *Redemption*.

Earning many deserved laughs, **Nicola Westwood** and **Jonathan Redfern** give their all with hilarious consequences in *Marriage Tango* from *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*. **Josefien Kleverlaan** is Disney personified in *Happy Working Song* from *Enchanted*, enchanting us with an almost elf-like quality and finesse. **Benjamin Vivian** comes across as one of the most truthful performers of the afternoon, holding our attention in the palm of his hand with *Memphis Lives in Me* from *Memphis*, while **Helen Kelly** and **Shaun McCourt** are well cast in a song-medley including music by Charles Miller. **Rosalind Button** and **Toby Liszt** definitely deliver in the most dramatic scene of the showcase (from *Love and Money*) and **Candra Sorensen** displays a strong belt in *Get Out and Stay Out* from *9 to 5 the Musical*.

Having opened the show with great stillness in *I'm Here* from *The Color Purple*, the students contrast this well with the rather turbulent closing, *Another Saturday Night* in *New York* from *I Love You Because*. If this were Ascot, I would declare the large majority of contenders deserving winners on all accounts. GSA strikes again.

Jennifer Reischel

Expert choice

Peter Charlesworth, agent:
• Kate Brennan
• Alex Nasmyth

East 15 MA Acting for Film, Television and Radio Graduate Showcase

BAFTA, London
September 16
Directors: Vito Rocco, Clifford Milner
Author: Drew Pautz
Cast: Alexander Thompson, Rebecca Cammillare, Mia McLiam, Lianna Clark, Jennifer Thomas, Claire Tredgold, Eva Jane Gill, Hayden Thomas, Lindsay Konieczny, Sam Treharne, Eli Ellwood, Charlotte Vickers, Sophia Leonie, Kathryn MacColl, Sally Marie Curtis, Janie James, Francesca Grace, David Taylor-Sharp, Lisa Larson, Zoe Gibbons, Jo Wickham, Gabriela Romanov, Molly Seymour
Running time: 30mins

BAFTA provides the ultimate venue for showcasing the film and television showcase, in that its main stage is more suited to projection than theatre. Over the last few years East 15's course has become more finely tuned, as reflected in the work on display here.

Relax tells the story of Emma's desperation for a job in a massage parlour and the discovery that her husband is a client. There are some well observed moments of intimacy, particularly in the scene between **Rebecca Cammillare** as Emma and **Lianna Clark** as the vodka-swilling retired masseuse. Clark's is a particularly hard-edged role that the actress fills well. **Mia McLiam** brings an unspoken humour to her scenes as Lisa, while **Alexander Thompson** conveys every bit of his character's awkwardness and embarrassment without overplaying it.

Look is an amusing study of three girls' views of the classical art in a stately home and an exercise in subtle camera acting for everybody in the scene. **Jennifer Thomas**, **Claire Tredgold** and **Eva Jane Gill** are all in medium shot, gazing up at a painting of a widow. Subtle glances to each other, particularly from Thomas, immediately establish a history between the girls and these moments are every bit as humorous as the Drew Pautz script. Meanwhile, This is a three-minute comedy of manners with **Hayden Thomas**, hilarious without even trying to be, as the snooty invigilator.

Push has a much tighter narrative and a darker tone, with **Lindsay Konieczny** as Sue, a barmaid people-watching in her busy pub. **Sam Treharne** as Luke and **Charlotte Vickers** as Fi are a young couple splitting up – performed with understated dignity, particularly from Treharne, while **Eli Ellwood** and **Sophia Leonie** play a couple undergoing a break-up with a greater impact. An emotionally-wrought scene, played beautifully for the camera and enhanced with distinctive editing, the actors convey a perfect mixture of anger and repression. Konieczny has no dialogue but acts as the outsider allowed to observe these public break-ups and, in doing so, draws us into the scene.

Hey Diddle Diddle features

a much larger cast and the fun storyline focuses on a film crew trying to remove an untalented leading lady from their movie. The comedy is provided by a selection of fun cameos – in particular, **Gabriela Romanov** in haughty mode as Daniella, the movie star, **Zoe Gibbons** as the hapless runner Milly and **Jo Wickham** as the bored but efficient make-up artist Sara. The narrative is engaging but veers off in many directions, creating a perfect opportunity for showcasing individual talent, such as **Molly Seymour** as a Sloane PR, Anna. The only male is **David Taylor-Sharp** and his role as the concerned director Carl is perfectly observed.

Neat, however, is a wholly distaff production telling the story of what happens when you want revenge over a bad job interview. There is a good deal of acting here behind the dialogue and **Sally Marie Curtis** as the boss, Siobhan, oozes vindictive authority in the scene. **Kathryn MacColl** runs a whole gamut of emotions in the small amount of screen time she has and both **Janie James** and **Francesca Grace** make their marks as the duped work colleagues.

Judgement of the performers at work here relies on interesting and engaging stories that showcase the students to their best advantage. Directors Vito Rocco and Clifford Milner work Drew Pautz's intricate screenplays perfectly and the team at East 15 produce a worthwhile showreel of work for their students.

Paul Vale

Expert choice

Duncan Benedict, Duncan Benedict Associates:
• Hayden Thomas
• Sally Marie Curtis

E15 Acting School MA Acting Showcase

BAFTA, London
September 16
Director: Andrea Brooks
Cast: Catherine Lucie, Emma Connell, Nicole Anderson, Samantha Pain, Assen Kukushev, Sarah Gibson, Kathryn Papworth-Smith, Lawrence Russell, Cate Myddleton-Evans, John Canmore, Ethan Loftus, Kate Thomas, Emily Sansiri, Johanne Wang-Holm, Andy McLeod, Harriet Green, Penelope Driver, Tracey Pickup, Francesca McCrohen, Simon Nuckley, Georgina Periam, Helen Booth, Zack Wycherley, Kieran O'Rourke, Jonathan Saunders, Clare Blake, Rhian Marston-Jones, James Stanyer, Charlotte Akenhead, David Provost, Frankie Meredith, Kate Thomas, David Tyrrell, Rebekah Roe, Iain Fitzgerald, Elizabeth Henstridge
Running time: 1hr 15mins

Director Andrea Brooks dives straight in with a heavy-duty classical duologue from Sophocles' Electra. **Catherine Lucie** and **Emma Connell** make an excellent Electra and Clytemnestra respectively, demonstrating a strong attachment to the emotional thrust of the piece. There is little attempt

from either actor at naturalism, as it should be with such a piece of heightened text, but their strident delivery is strangely intimate and compelling.

At the other end of the scale, equally forceful personalities are brought to the fore with **Nicole Anderson** and **Samantha Pain** in *The Power and the Glory*. There is a real character turnabout here, with Anderson showing a strong sense of physical comedy matched exquisitely by Pain's perfectly observed switch from brazen nonchalance to surprised concern. Acting in a scene such as this requires steady hands on the reins to ensure the peaks and troughs of comedy are neatly judged and Anderson and Pain get it just right.

There is more comedy, albeit slightly lighter in tone, in *Laura Wade's Other Hands*, allowing **Kathryn Papworth-Smith** and **Lawrence Russell** a chance to shine. Although the structure is fairly straightforward, the success is based on the actors' timing. Papworth-Smith plays her sexually-frustrated computer owner to the hilt while Russell flourishes as the epitome of the awkward urban male. A change of pace ensues when **Ethan Loftus** and **Kate Thomas** take to the stage as Lenny and Ange, the two achingly working-class terrors from Doug Lucie's *Progress*. In a difficult scene, both performers bring their characters to life emotionally, creating a palpable tension during their short time on stage.

Perhaps one of an actor's most important tasks is finding that connection to a chosen piece. Graduating students have a wealth of literature to choose from, and yet so often their emotional connection to a scene can be perfunctory. Not so for **Andy McLeod** and **Harriet Green** in their scene from Anthony Nielson's *Realism*. McLeod as Stuart tells his story simply and honestly and he is matched in intensity and sincerity by Green as Laura.

It is surprising not to see *Love Song* by John Kolvenbach more commonly performed in student showcases, as it offers a rich level of characterisation and quirkiness to suit most young performers looking to be noticed. **Simon Nuckley** makes an arresting Beane, a bundle of nerves and indignation, but it is **Francesca McCrohen** as the strangely forceful Molly who really guides the scene through. McCrohen is a strong presence on stage that should stand her in good stead for rewarding character roles in the future.

A scene from *Charlotte Jones' In Flame* gives a group of four actors a chance to showcase their ensemble talent. Actors should strive to be generous performers and here **Georgina Periam**, **Helen Booth**, **Zack Wycherley** and **Kieran O'Rourke** have chosen just the scene to allow each to have their perfect moment on stage. Periam and Booth are Alex and Clotie, two women arguing over the men in their lives, while Wycherley and

O'Rourke appear as the hapless men. Within seconds of appearing on stage, Booth establishes the relationship between the four characters and the rest is left to excellent writing, astute choices by the group and some fine technical work. Booth, quite rightly, gets the broadest laughs with Clotie's drunken revelations, but it is the quiet persistence of Wycherley's performance that gives colour and background to the situation. In a large group you might be at risk of blending into the ensemble, but it certainly pays off here.

Happy Savages by Ryan Craig is a difficult piece to attempt, given the passionate nature of the characters. In this case it affords **James Stanyer** and **Rhian Marston-Jones**, in quite a physical scene, the opportunity to showcase their knack for taking slick, if slightly bizarre writing, and giving it an effortless immediacy.

When it comes to choosing a piece of theatre for a student showcase, it is always so much easier to choose a role you could easily be cast in. A scene from *The Priory* by Michael Wynne provides wonderful casting for **Frankie Meredith** and **Kate Thomas** as Laura and Kate. Meredith imbues Laura with a wide-eyed, innocent quality that juxtaposes beautifully with Thomas' well-judged, insecure Kate.

Modern Dance for Beginners is now a popular scene in student showcases, and here it provides just the right edge of comedy to make it a highlight of the afternoon. The frustrated female epitomised by Julia, and brought to life brilliantly by **Rebekah Roe**, requires much more than a knack for comedy. Julia's deeper motivations must seep through to make the character work and Roe, despite the laughter raised by the situation, never loses sight of her motivation. For his part, **David Tyrrell** is great as Kieran, the builder who is desperately trying to redress the balance of power in this particular battle of the sexes.

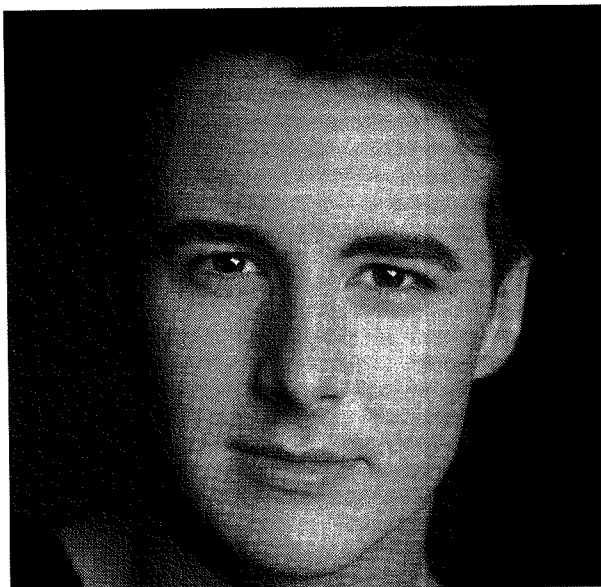
Paul Vale

Expert choice

Manuel Ortiz, professor of drama, University of Chile:
• James Stanyer
• Rebekah Roe

Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama – Musical Theatre MA Showcase

Criterion Theatre, London
September 20
Director: Claire McKenzie
Cast: Stephen Arden, Guony Armannsdottir, Melanie Bell, Kristopher Bosch, Gram Cumming, Zoe Demetriou, Michael John Griesen, Helen Hart, Paul Hodge, Carly Holt, Kelly-Anne Jones, Andrew Keay, Danielle LaRose, Seth Lieber, Byron Martin, Rachel Middle, Candice Palladino, Ross Sharkey, Jamie Szynal
Running time: 1hr 10mins



Paul Hodge



Melanie Bell

This international group of musical theatre MA students has had an eventful year, participating in John Barrowman's *Tonight's the Night* as well as taking part in the Scottish premiere of the musical *Spring Awakening*. The group's training culminates in a showcase that demonstrates great strength in ensemble singing, innovative choreography and some stand-out solo moments.

The opening number, *The Jet Set* from Broadway-bound *Catch Me If You Can*, certainly starts this lunch hour with a bang. It shows off strong dance skills from **Kristopher Bosch** and **Zoe Demetriou**, who establish themselves as the most proficient of the group at this musical theatre element.

Closest to the Moon by Richard Taylor creates an entirely different atmosphere, as we marvel at **Gram Cumming's** balancing skills on the backs of fellow cast members simulating Mount Everest. In *Touch* by Dougal Irvine allows individual voices to excel, while the *Spring Awakening* medley gives all a chance to let rip and show off some formidable company work, originated at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Cumming shines from moment one with a strong, unique look, drawing us in with a quiet, relaxed confidence. His monologue from *Hymns* captures a nice, understated innocence without losing focus or pace. Though very at home on a stage, I believe his style of

performance would be particularly suited to the screen. He proves he is also a strong singer (including falsetto) with *Pretty Lies* from *Taboo*, which requires a stratospheric tenor range.

Paul Hodge is of Australian origin and convincingly portrays the deliciously sleazy and arrogant Adolpho in *I Am Adolpho* from *The Drowsy Chaperone* with hilarious effect. In contrast, he proves he is also capable of a lovely dramatic stillness in a more subdued scene from *Strawberries* in January. With stand-out comedy timing, a wide acting range and a very strong voice, he is surely one to watch for the future.

American **Melanie Bell** comes across with a very strong presence, first in a song excerpt from *Sunday in the Park With George* and equally in a convincing scene from *Pterodactyls*. I felt she had the best female voice of the afternoon with belting, as well as effective, lyrical capability – the latter predominantly apparent in her solo moments in some of the group numbers.

Michael John Griesen has a cheeky face and an excellent expression and demeanour. His interpretation of *My Unfortunate Erection* from *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is of a high calibre, contrasted nicely with a rather word-shy Benjamin in an excerpt from *The Graduate*. He also manages to execute all the