

# WOYZECK

## TEACHER'S NOTES

Notes for digesting Spies Like Us' production of Woyzeck as a piece of digital live theatre.

For GCSE and A-Level Drama/Theatre Studies teachers and students.



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**TIME  
STAMPS**

show the time a specific moment takes place in the recording of the show.

# ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Spies Like Us' **WOYZECK** was first performed at the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe** in August 2018 at Pleasance 10Dome. The digital recording was filmed on August 25th 2018. The script was written by Ollie Norton-Smith and Hamish Lloyd Barnes after Georg Büchner, with additional material **devised** by the actors: Phoebe Campbell, Tullio Campanale, Rosa Collier and Alex Holley.

## Credits

Alex Holley.....	Franz Woyzeck
Phoebe Campbell.....	Marie
Tullio Campanale.....	Doctor/Drum-Major
Hamish Lloyd Barnes.....	Captain/Showman
Rosa Collier.....	Andres/Margret
Director.....	Ollie Norton-Smith
Technical design and operation.....	Nikita Karia & Ollie Norton-Smith
Sound design.....	Oscar Maguire
Dance Choreography.....	Zak Nemorin
Producer.....	Nikita Karia

# CONTEXT

Woyzeck is the third and final play by German Dramatist Georg Büchner, who left the play unfinished when he died in February 1837. The play is inspired by the true story of Johann Christian Woyzeck, a wigmaker from Leipzig who became a soldier and subsequently murdered Christiane Woost, a widow with whom he'd been living. The real Woyzeck was beheaded in 1821, shortly after committing his crime.

Woyzeck is sometimes considered among the first 'modern' plays due to its use of elliptical scenes and **fragments**, which were not tied together in definite chronological sequence, but are instead presented as a series of related occurrences. For a play written so long ago it is remarkable for the fact it centres working class protagonists, and closely mirrors its form with its content: playwright Alistair McDowell describes how the increasingly short scenes give a sense that Woyzeck himself seems to fall through the fabric of the play. Almost 200 years later, Büchner's play remains vital because it asks us to sympathise with a man who is poor, who is a murderer, who has little education, who is mentally ill and who has few prospects.

Woyzeck can be read, and has been interpreted, a plethora of different ways: as a working class tragedy, a study of the dehumanising effects of jealousy, an analysis of the lasting effects of the horrors of war, a debate on free will and fate, to name but a few. What appears to have captured the imagination of so many is that Büchner seems to insist that Woyzeck's actions are symptomatic of, and even determined by, social and environmental pressures, a truly radical concept at the time of writing. Many productions focus on the animalistic terms Woyzeck is described in, and eventually inhabits. Woyzeck shows us that once a man has been dehumanised, he is capable of the most inhuman of acts.

In trying to understand the play's pervasiveness and consistent popularity for artists, critic Michael Billington identified "the mysterious attraction of the incomplete" in 2002. Its unfinished nature and highly contested content and narrative order has yielded a huge number of adaptations and interpretations from artists who have been drawn to different elements of Büchner's fragments and who found contemporary resonance in this strange play.

The **didactic** (but diversely interpreted) political message of the play, its use of song, and its **fragmented** scenes have been seen by some to anticipate Brecht's '**Epic Theatre**', whilst interpretations such as Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* (2014) have emphasised **expressionistic** qualities through physical movement.