

TAKING
STAGE

Section 1

*The
monologue*



SCRIPTED MONOLOGUES



You have been asked to select a monologue and perform it in front of an audience.

1 Choosing a monologue

A monologue means that one person is alone onstage speaking aloud.

The script for a monologue may be written by a playwright especially for that purpose. It is more likely, however, that the material for a monologue will be taken from a full-length published playscript. So the first decision is how to choose material from a scripted play that will make an effective monologue.

Look at the following:

LT COL GRAHAM: War Office, Whitehall, London. 10th April, 1916. Mrs Sarah Simpson. Madam, I have it in command from His Majesty the King, to inform you as next-of-kin of the late Private John Simpson, No. 202, of the Australian Army Medical Corps, that this Private was mentioned in a Despatch from General Sir Ian Hamilton, dated 22nd of September 1915, and published in the Supplement of the 'London Gazette' dated 5th November 1915 for gallant and distinguished service in the field. I am to express to you the King's high appreciation of these services and to add that His Majesty trusts that these public acknowledgements may be of some consolation in your bereavement.

from *Simpson, J.202* by Richard Beynon

Although this passage may be dramatically effective for an audience watching a production of the play, there is little to be gained from presenting it as a monologue because it doesn't

stand alone as a gripping piece. It merely imparts information. The language is formal, containing several dates and names. An audience would need to know more about Simpson and his history in order to become involved in the piece. There is little scope for an actor to do much beyond presenting a formal, military-style characterisation. In a production of the full play this speech might be presented as a voice-over, or delivered as the audience observes the effect that the letter has upon Mrs. Simpson. There is little dramatic content in the piece when it is taken out of the context of the play.

Now look at this script, also in the form of a letter:

EDNA: Dear Compere, I am just an ordinary housewife, and I would like to request John Hanson singing 'Greensleeves'. I'm sorry this request isn't on a postcard but I haven't got a postcard and I'm more or less stuck in the house to answer calls for my husband, who is a plumber. This record has a special significance for me because my husband used to sing it when we were courting. Now he sits there watching telly and I know he has one ear for the phone in case someone gets a late burst ... same in bed ... I know he's not with me even in our most intimate moments. I know he's elsewhere and he is elsewhere. He's with that phone. In a hard winter he never sleeps dreaming of frosts. But if you would play 'Greensleeves' sung by John Hanson I'm excited to think that your hands will touch this letter and then touch the record that means so much to me. Les's hands have gone very rough. It's the pipe-work. I've asked him to care for them, to go to a manicurist, but he growls and says he's not a great nance. What can I do? I'll bet you go to a manicurist. I've been greedy, haven't I? I've said too much. I know you wouldn't mind, I know you don't. Play 'Greensleeves' for me and I'll be thinking if not of Les, then of you. Signed: Hanson Lover. Mrs. Edna Riordan, New Cross, London.

from *Zigger Zagger* by Peter Terson

This passage is part of a full-length play, but it is entertaining in its own right. Edna's character comes through with some force, and her relationship with her husband is clearly defined, so an actor has plenty to work with. A good actor will try to capture the tragedy behind the comedy in this dialogue.

A monologue should stand on its own as a performance piece and not require a program note in order to make sense to an audience and be effective.