

SYBIL DOES DUO

Guidelines for Creating a Multiple Character Duo

by David Kraft

Duo as you may know is an event that is relatively new to the NFL, having had its national inaugural in 1996. The event went off with little problems and much success, and was popular enough to draw a large and enthusiastic audience at 8:00 a.m. on "Finals Friday" in Fayetteville. The NFL Committee, democratically trying to define the event, has decided to modify one of its initial guidelines. The change is simple. The original rules mandated that each Duo performer could not portray more than one soul, or character. To do so would be to risk disqualification. This year, however, teams are free to perform, if they so choose, "Multiple Character Duo Selections." While this change may, at first, seem to be an innocuous technical modification, it does open up script possibilities and requires the script to be cut carefully and blocked meticulously.

Multiple characters is now an explorable avenue when considering possible scripts for use in Duo Interpretation. Because this is a new entity to an event that is still in its infancy, perhaps some guidelines would be helpful when considering, cutting and blocking a multiple character Duo.

What Exactly Is Changing?

The first thing to consider when approaching the task of multiple character Duo is NFL Event Description. It is important to remember that the only change to the rules and guidelines for this event is the allowance of a performer to play more than one Soul. Every other aspect previously considered when judging or coaching this event still applies. Performances will still be judged with the old criteria no matter if they are doing multiple or single character cuttings.

One of the standard criteria that will still be considered when evaluating is balance. It is important that the actors contribute equally to the performance. In other words, Duo is not a one person show. A judge should never feel that one person is "carrying" the

show and the other is just a catalyst for that performer. This applies to multiple character Duo when considering who is going to play what characters. For example, if you were to do Hamlet as a multiple character Duo, a balanced cutting probably would not be for one performer to play Hamlet, while the other plays everyone but Hamlet. Both performers should play multiple characters. The cutting is not balanced if one performer is portraying 10 characters and the other is portraying 1.

Interaction will also still be an important criterion. Effective Duo performances largely depend on interesting and effective interaction between two people. Traditionally, those two people are portrayed by two performers. In cutting a multiple character Duo, it

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would not be prudent to cut scenes when one performer is playing two characters who are simultaneously speaking to each other. This is one of the aspects that sets a multiple character Duo apart from a Dramatic or Humorous Interpretation.

How Do I Cut It?

Cutting a multiple character Duo presents a few unique problems. "How many characters can I use?", "How do I get from one character to another?", "How do I cut this and still have a piece that flows well?". These are some of the questions you will face when approaching your text.

As mentioned earlier, Balance and Interaction are the keys to an effective Duo performance. These are also the major considerations when cutting your piece. Unlike a DI or HI, you need to create a cutting that will showcase the talents of two individuals instead of one.

The cutting should also reflect

the justification as to why you chose to do this material as a Duo as opposed to a DI or HI. Does the performance gain something by having two performers present this material? Is using the technique of multiple characters adding to the overall theme of the material or is it distracting? Was there a purpose to introducing this character or was it just an opportunity to do another character simply for effect? These are a few of the overall questions you will need to address.

Another guideline that will be helpful when cutting your multiple character Duo is the use of what I refer to as "Post Characters". The Post Character is your main character, the center of the story. S/He is what holds the text together and each performer should have one. In the literature itself, the "PC" is generally obvious; the "PC" should also be evident in you cutting. Here are a few examples as to what a Post Character actually is.

A popular text in HI this year is *A Tuna Christmas*, the sequel to the Broadway hit *Greater Tuna*. The show's creators, Joe Sears, Jaston Williams and Ed Howard originally wrote this comedy for two actors to play multiple characters who live in a small town in Texas called Tuna. As directed by the text, each actor plays 11 characters. The show itself centers around a radio show called the "Wheelis, Struvie Report". The two radio announcers, Arles Struvie and Thurston Wheelis, are the Post Characters for these two actors. Not only do they give a central point to the many and varied characters who are portrayed, but they also serve as a way to introduce many of the other characters that are to be presented.

When cutting *Greater Tuna* or *A Tuna Christmas* for a multiple character Duo, each performer should play one of the radio announcers. It would not be acceptable for one performer to play both of the radio announcers, while the other performer plays all of the guests who are one the show. This goes back to the consideration of

Interaction. At no time should one performer hold a conversation with him/herself.

Another example of the Post Character can be seen in the play *The Compleat Works of Wilm Shkspr*, by Jess Borgeson, Adam Long and Daniel Singer. This play centers around a group of actors who are putting on a variety style show that gives us modernized samplings of Shakespeare's greatest hits. Here the Post Characters are the actors, or narrators themselves. The actors introduce what is going to come next and set up each scene.

The only problem here is the fact that there are three actors in the original text. While now the rules state that you can do multiple characters in Duo, it still does not allow you to take lines from one character and give them to another. For instance, if you pick Narrator number 1 and 2 as your Post Characters, the scenes you can use are the ones that these two narrators actually perform. You cannot take all of the lines from the three narrators and combine them into two.

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You are bound to certain consistent decisions.

In addition, it would also be confusing for the audience if the cutting demands that the performers actually play all four narrators. First of all, this would probably mean that the performers are changing characters a number of times within each scene or segue. While acceptable in DI/HI, this would be confusing in a multiple character Duo. Second, this would mean that your cutting now has three Post Characters. This would be too much. One Post Character per performer is ideal (Although it is not impossible for one person to play two Post Characters, but doing so risks being sloppy and unclear).

How do I Block It?

Changing characters in DI/HI is done in a variety of ways. Most performers usually include a physical, vocal and focal point change to

achieve this. These are the same elements that should be used when blocking the character changes in a multiple character Duo.

In HI/DI, the performers will change his/her stance when changing characters. This is achieved by creating a change in the position of the shoulders, torso, face, arms and legs and any other extremity available. This technique can also be used in a multiple character Duo. The only difference is that the change should be bigger. Perhaps the performers can actually turn out and into a character to show change. This way, the change is big enough that the audience knows that the performers are doing different characters. It is also recommended that the performer changes his/her character while the other performer has the line. To alter a character right after that performer says a line would be too abrupt of a change.

It is also possible that both performers can change characters simultaneously. This is usually done when going from one scene to another. A good way to separate the scene and character change is to start with a freeze in action to show the audience that a change is about to occur. Then the two can simultaneously go into the new characters. The freeze creates enough of a separation from the previous scene that the change in scene and character is not confusing to the audience.

Changing your focal point is another excellent way to show the audience that you are doing a separate character. If the first character is speaking straight out, then their next assumed character could be angled to the side to show that this is a different person talking. This, along with using perhaps a freeze before a turn, will make for a clear character change.

Obviously, there are a number of ways to use the voice to change characters. This is perhaps the most noticeable way to the audience that a change has occurred (though it is important to note that a vocal change by itself is not enough to separate your characters). This technique needs to be used along with a physical change of some kind.

Other blocking techniques include turns and pivots. This is actual physical movement to show a

change in scene or character. For instance, if one character has monologue, it might be effective to place the non-speaking performer directly in back of the other to give more emphasis to the speaking performer. This technique can be used in many variations. A simple turn to the side or a complete turn without changing placement. These are excellent ways to make the esthetic picture more interesting while giving emphasis to the more powerful moments of the text.

So now you have a basic understanding of how to create a multiple character Duo. While multiple characters are not preferable or better than a two character Duo, it is simply another choice to consider. Obviously, depth and sustaining of character are crucial factors that weigh in the favor of the two character Duo. Character count should not be a determining factor in the evaluation process.

When used properly, multiple character Duo can be an effective way to create a wonderful performance that enhances the original

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message of the literature as well as showcases the talents of two performers. Though some will insist on using this technique because it is new and different, there should be some sense of purpose as to why these characters are being introduced. Otherwise, it just becomes a way to amaze or shock the audience with no true purpose at all. Remember, this is the NFL, not the NBA, and one Dennis Rodman in this world is enough.

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