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Composing with Light and Color: Storytelling Through Art and Science

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by

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Abstract

Composing with Color and Light: Storytelling through Art and Science is an exploration of all of theatrical productions that I designed within the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of South Carolina, with a concentration in Lighting Design and focuses on the design process from beginning to end. Each production had its own set of challenges and lessons that have prepared me for more professional design opportunities as my career expands around the world. Each University of South Carolina production presented specific and unique challenges. From paperwork, to learning and understanding how to communicate with a team and knowing that theatre is a collaborative job.

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Chapter 1 Introduction – Step-by-step

When I entered the University of South Carolina's MFA Lighting Design program, I had no previous experience with designing for theatre, other than what I was fortunate enough to observe Tony award-winning designers Jules Fischer, and Howell Binkley's work while living in New York for a year. While working in New York, I was hired at Second Stage Theatre to run cable and assist with getting projectors working in time before technical rehearsals. It was at those jobs, where I observed lightning designers at work, that my interest in how lighting directs the audience's attention and focus, and fills a stage with energy, temperature, and mood, grew into a passion.

I reached out to UofSC in the hope of learning everything needed to become a successful lighting designer. I just knew that I wanted to be in the theatre as much as I possibly could for the rest of my life. The way I chose to do that, which aligned best with my interest, was by becoming a designer. When I was an undergraduate at the University of Florida majoring in Film Studies, lighting design was far from my mind as something that I could do, let alone wanted to do, as a profession. Looking back at my film classes at the University of Florida, most of our lessons had to do with learning how to create a dramatic shot and using specific lighting instruments as a tool to enhance that shot. As a graduate student, I came to the University of South Carolina seeking to expand my understanding of art through film to the theatre arts, an art form that extends back into pre-history and is practiced by nearly every culture in an incredible variety of forms. I

knew that I needed to learn and understand a complex craft that blends this tradition with the most modern of techniques and tools. From color theory to computer software to electronics, there is much to learn to become a good lighting designer and enter a lifelong career.

The program at the University of South Carolina was challenging. Walking into the program I felt very insecure being the only student in my year who had no experience designing in theatre prior to coming to the program. It felt as if I was behind or at a disadvantage compared to others who were entering the program with more experience than I had, but the program gave me a strong support system. My faculty adviser helped me build my first plot and worked step-by-step with me throughout the entire process of designing a show from beginning to the end. I never once felt like I was alone or that I had to do it all by myself. Everyone I worked with shared their knowledge and expertise freely. This helped me build confidence so that I could complete the design of the next shows more on my own and learn how to be a designer.

My first design assignment was The Crucible by Arthur Miller. This was my first time designing any show and every step I would have to take to make this a successful show would be a new lesson. From learning how to draft a lighting plot, knowing where to hang the lights, and choosing the appropriate lighting fixtures that would support our design team's vision of the world of the play. It became apparent early on that there are many layers to designing lighting for a play.

While writing each chapter of this thesis, I realized how much I learned from each project. In my first year of graduate school, my focus was on learning the foundation and process of design. I took few risks and my main concerns were being able to balance light

throughout the stage equally, choose the appropriate colors that would support the play, and learn how to use all the tools in my lighting design toolbox when I needed them. The further on I moved through the program the more risks I took. The more I wanted to challenge myself as a designer and create work that would leave the audience thinking about what they had experienced after they left the theatre.

There are moments in a good story that makes my heart race and takes my breath away. Those moments are short lived, but they are powerful. It's moments like those that inspire me to work harder to develop my own storytelling skills. Throughout the program, I often succeeded in creating moments like that, in others I failed, but learned much from my failures. The beauty of storytelling is that, with experience you can only get better. You should never stop learning.

Chapter 2 The Crucible – Supporting the World of the Play

The Crucible, by Arthur Miller is a play that keeps the audience frustrated and tense. Miller makes the audience cheer for justice to prevail, but they leave the theatre with the harsh reality that justice is not always on the good guys side. New York Times theatre critic Ben Brantley wrote "It is the kind of openness that let us see the divided soul beneath the skin…". The Crucible reveals the wickedness within us, and just how far we will go to harm another person.

When researching images for the play I realized quickly that it wasn't just the script I had to know well. I also had to know what kind of houses the Puritans lived in, what materials they made their windows out of, what they used as a light source at night. These were things that I never thought that I would need to look into until I started working on this show. At first, I believed that because our director's interpretation of the play was set in a more contemporary time and place, I would not have much need to research the 17th Century Puritans and how they lived. It seems obvious now, after completing this show, that knowing how the real Puritans lived helped me paint them with lighting that could capture their essence, even if we did place them in a different location and time. Until you do it yourself, you don't realize what it will take to make a play successful.

Miller chose the Puritans as the social and moral basis for his play because their hunt for witches in the new colonies of the 1600s paralleled the hunt for Communists in

1950s America. To understand how a usually moral modern society can become blinded and turn on itself, it is revealing to understand the pressures and influences on Puritan society; the fears they lived with, the tension always found in a small community, and the repression of their daily lives. This understanding is needed to bring the play to life and make it relevant today.

My next step was to speak with our director, Professor Robert Richmond, and ask him about his vision and the message he wanted to tell through The Crucible. Talking to the director about his creative intentions is a step that sounds so simple, but once again, it took me longer than I expected to figure out the right questions to ask and how to get the most information I could from him. Fortunately, we connected through our similar taste in movies and television series. Prof. Richmond said that he was inspired by shows like The Handmaid's Tale, American Horror Stories series, and Stranger Things. I was also a big fan of these shows and went back and watched a couple of episodes of each series and compared them. I noticed that a blue atmosphere hovered around or enveloped the characters during many of the dark and eerie scenes. Blue tones were also used to create different specific emotions in each series but the underlying feeling that came through for each of them was cold and unwelcoming. This approach would later turn out to be a key inspiration and a major component in lighting our production.

Much of the image research for the production involved keywords that I thought would suggest relevant pictures that would give me ideas to illustrate what I envisioned for this show. I quickly learned that knowing how to search for images is an artform all on its own. In order to get useful search results that are relevant to the play, I needed to

learn how images are classified in search engines. I figured out that I got more and better results with the fewer words I typed.

Figure 2.1: Research image from the television series The Handmaid's Tale for The Crucible

Eventually, I found the key picture that captured everything I felt about creating an atmosphere for The Crucible and that expressed what I wanted to say. It was a black and white image of women with their faces covered and looking away from us, except for one woman in the middle. She looked directly at us with her eyes and the rest of her face and head completely covered. It reminded me of The Handmaid's Tale and it gave me the feeling that she was rebelling against oppression. The picture is especially poignant considering the pushback against women's healthcare in society today and for our own country where it has become possible to elect a leader who wants to separate us further and demonize groups of individuals and their original cultures. We can no longer separate

fact from lies and we see what we need to see – this play hits too close to home – and so does that photograph. This picture really gave me an emotional key to tie to this play, it gave me something to hold on to throughout the whole process of creating the lighting.

Figure 2.2: Key research image for The Crucible

The production team had weekly meetings that started with each design department showing their renderings and research pictures of their vision for the set, costumes, and lighting. With Randy Young as our scenic designer, Molly Morgan the costume designer, and Daniel Wilson as the sound designer, most of us, other than guest artist Daniel, were first year design students. The early meetings focused on the set and the overall look of the created world. Practical items like how we could hide lights and a smoke machine under the set were also covered. At first, the set was going to look like a courtroom because the director wanted to support the feeling that the audience is sitting in judgement of the characters. Eventually the set changed to resemble a Victorian

surgical teaching theatre, where peers and medical students would watch doctors performing surgery on their patients. This also worked well in Longstreet Theatre, an arena, with the tiers of seating around the stage actually being similar to a real surgical theatre.

The scenic design originally envisioned a large faux wooden beam that spanned across the entire theatre space above the actors. A full-scale mockup was installed in the theatre in order to understand the challenges this beam might cause. It was clear to everyone that this element would obscure the stage for some audience members seated in the higher seats and make the space difficult to light. It was decided to replace the beam with a large surgical operating room examination light over the center of the stage and that the lighting department would work around the fixture.

The examination light itself was a source of inspiration for lighting the play. Hospital lights are bright because Doctors need strong light in order to see clearly while they perform surgeries. For the play's trial scenes, the goal was to make the characters feel exposed of all their lies and sins. The examination light was an obstacle on one hand but also a handy storytelling tool.

Figure 2.3: The Crucible – examination light used to symbolize exposure of the characters' hidden secrets

The next step sounded like the simplest, but far from it. A primary goal of stage lighting is to make sure that all characters are well-lit, no matter where they walked. This was where I learned all about the concept of area control and its usefulness. Area control gave me a better understanding of how to separate the control of my lights and how to use them effectively. The Longstreet Theatre is an arena style theatre and we needed to make sure that the actors were properly lit on all four sides. We had to choose between a three- or four-point system. Meaning, we had to decide if we wanted our lights to come from three different angles, or four in order to make sure there was always light on the actors face no matter where you were seated.

I decided to go with the four-point system because it gave me a more secure feeling. There were two primary reasons for selecting the four-point system; to have

better overall coverage from all sides and to improve focus around the large chandelier that hung at the center of the stage. It was important to properly the actors without creating a shadow from the chandelier. The four-point system uses more lighting fixtures and so provides smoother coverage than the three-point system. Once the general acting light was appropriately covered, I could now focus more on color, texture and painting the stage with expressive light.

It wasn't until technical rehearsal that I fully realized that every side the audience sat in the arena theatre would look a little different than another side. Even if it was the same set and same actors, the appearance on the lighting was different on each side. This is where I started thinking about the concept of creating "plasticity" and making the actors "pop" in the world that we created. A related concept that I was taught was "jewel lighting", or "Broadway lighting", this means that, generally, the back lighting and side lighting would be at a greater intensity level than the front light. A really handy thing to do in a normal proscenium style theatre where the audience is only looking at the stage from one direction but when the audience is sitting on all four sides and surrounding the audience it is a lot more challenging to provide an appropriate stage picture. In an arena theatre, it is simply more difficult to light the stage space as the audience can see everything from all sides. During technical rehearsals I would move around the theatre frequently to make sure that each lighting cue looked good from every angle.

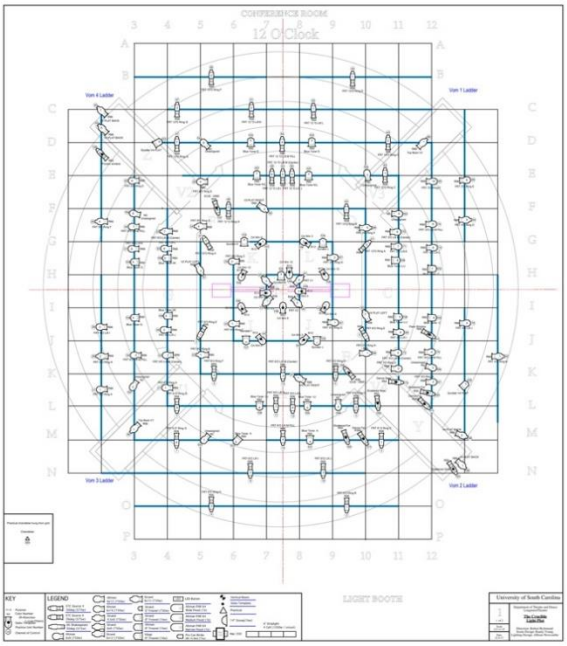

Figure 2.4: The Crucible. Light Plot.

In the Longstreet Theatre, every light was a front light, sidelight or back light – all at the same time depending on where one is seated. In order to make sure that all the actors "popped" and were not flattened or silhouetted, the intensity of the area-controlled lights had to be balanced to give the actor a sharp and plastic look. So while the actors had a lot of shape to them, each side for the audience perceived a different key light and the actors had different shadows. We made one audience side the priority seating area. Mainly because that particular side would fill up before all other sides.

Figure 2.5: The Crucible – special with gobo situated at 12:00 in the theatre used to add texture during fight scene on elevated stage

There were moments in the performance where a more drastic look was called for. For example, in the beginning of act two, there is a key scene where the entire energy of the play changes. What had previously seemed like an organized society, is shown to be full of tension, secrets, and anger. Professor Richmond wanted to use the elevator capacity of the stage to enhance the chaos happening in the court room as the conflict surrounding Proctor's wife comes to the surface. There was a lot of choreographed fighting and argument between the actors, and the platform of the stage was constantly in motion to emphasis the disruption caused by this shift in energy. The challenge was how to light this in a way that would also enhance the drama.

From my background in cinematography, I knew the power a strong shadow has to add drama to a situation. On top of the drama of the choreography and the motion of

the stage I knew we could add even more punch to the emotions by casting strong dark shadows. To do this, I added three specific lights with gobos inside that covered the entire area of action. Then at intervals during the choreographed fight, all the actors would freeze in place. While the actors are moving, the lights were a normal wash, but when they froze, even though papers were still falling out of the air, the light changed to a stark purple casting sharp shadows. The planes of darkness cast across the stage created a heightened the drama.

Those are the moments where a lighting designer creates a unique look to support a change in the plot and atmosphere is known as a special. This means that light fixtures are placed for the soul purpose of this one moment in the performance. They can be striking, sharp, and beautiful. Figure 3 below is an example, there were only two lights on to create this striking moment at the end of the first act. Sometimes, less is more and can often have a much more emotional impact than broader lighting.

Figure 2.6: End of Act One – John Proctor Special

Looking back, The Crucible was an ideal play to be my first design project in both graduate school and in my life. I discovered the effectiveness of plasticity and shaping the actors. Making an actor still look three dimensional when being lit artificially takes experience because you have to do it enough times to really understand the effect. The Crucible was not a flashy or cue-heavy show, so it allowed me to really focus on every cue and make sure that no matter where the audience sat, they would all be able to experience the same world on stage.

Paperwork - The Crucible

Directed: Robert Richmond

Scenic Design: Randy Young

Costume Design: Molly Morgan

Lighting Design: Allison Newcombe

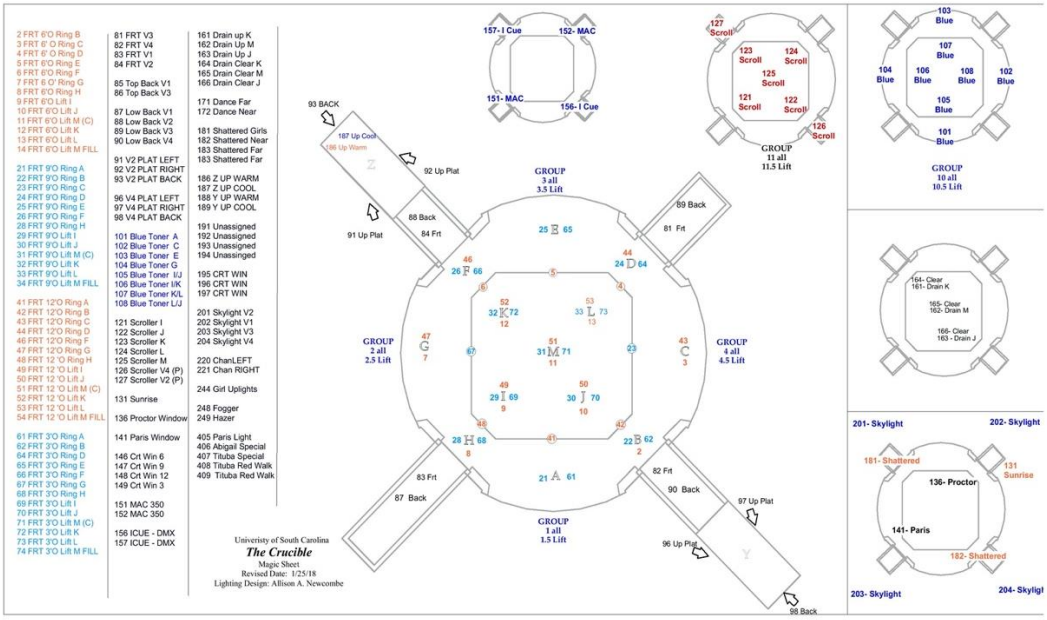

Figure 2.7: The Crucible. Magic Sheet.

Chapter 3 A Piece of My Heart – Less is More

In the spring of 2018 A Piece of My Heart, written by Shirley Lauro, opened in the Booker T. Washington black box theatre. Our scenic designer was undergraduate student Curtis Smoak and graduate student Molly Morgan was the costume designer. A Piece of My Heart tells the emotional story of the brave women who served as nurses in the heart of the Vietnam War. Los Angeles Times critic, Tom Titus, says the play "…resurrects a period of American history that most of us either have forgotten or were born too late to experience – the horrors of Vietnam and their effects on those who came through it apparently unscathed." The plot is focuses on personal growth and empowerment, with an upbeat and hopeful mood contrasted with the chaos of war and trauma. The Booker T. Washington such a small space, the biggest challenge was figuring out how to fit the full weight and history of the Vietnam War into a small black box theatre that could hold an audience of only sixty people.

Feeling overwhelmed and limited at first, I quickly learned that these restrictions can end up being a creative advantage. In this case, less was more. Each lighting fixture in the theatre's limited inventory of twenty-four would have to be used for multiple purposes. A goal of the lighting design was to give the audience the understanding that the story was in Vietnam at one point in time and located in America at another. Another goal was to support the emotions each character was expressing in their flashbacks to Vietnam. Making the most with a limited inventory of fixtures was the challenge.

The biggest takeaway from designing A Piece of My Heart was learning how to use isolations as an advantage. This was particularly challenging due to the small space. In the end, sticking to the concept that less was more ended up being what made this show successful. With a limited inventory and few circuits, it was important that the backlight could have multiple color options to help support the different locations and emotions in the play. Color scrollers were used as the backlight system to provide this capability. It was a very important part in the design because it was crucial that the light plot remain small but able to provide multiple lighting tools.

One challenge of using scrollers in a confined space is that they are loud when moving from one color to the next. Depending on the scene, the selected color of the scrollers was determined by the location of the story, the emotion of the scene, and, as a practical matter, also the placement of the color in the scroller color string. If the needed color was ten sheets away from the color that was currently being used for a scene, the only two options were to either fade out the backlight system for a period of time as the scrollers quietly moved to the new desired sheet, or to use a color that was closer to the current sheet. The faster the color sheets moved, the louder the scrollers would be, and in a small space such as Booker T. Washington, where a person could reach up and touch the lighting fixtures from the floor if they wanted to, it was important that the scrollers be as quiet as possible, especially during the more intense and emotionally jarring scenes.

Figure 3.1: Back light scrollers were key to changing location and mood for A Piece of My Heart

Will all the many challenges of working within a small space, it was also a significant advantage that there was little space to cover. The plot unutilized just two small movers and they were enough for the entire space. Movers are moving lights that can pan and tilt as programed by the designer. They can change color, add gobo images, and create lighting effects that strobe, or move in a pattern. If a special was required to move the story along, the mover was a reliable tool just for that. The Mac-350 movers came with a lot of texture options as well and the units beam spread allowed it to cover the entire space nicely. These multifunctional lights help the plot to remain minimal because the movers could hit just about every angle and provide a both texture and color options.

At an early point in the drafting process, I chose to hang the movers above the audience and in front of the stage. The space has such a low ceiling height that the movers would not be used to their full potential if they were hung above the actors on stage. The short height of the space meant that the movers had reduced coverage. In the end, they were most important for the texture options they provided which required some distance from the stage for the beam to spread and they were more readable when falling on the audience side the characters and set. A palm leaf breakup texture really helped provide a sense of being outdoors when the story was in Vietnam. The moving gobo rotator became handy for a night club scene using the unit's full range of lighting effects including moving, changing colors and textures while on.

While A Piece of My Heart presented many challenges, it certainly forced me to be more imaginative and creative within a very limited space and using a limited range of equipment and lighting options. The fact that the lights could not be hidden and that were forced to become a part of the show was a big adjustment for someone who was accustomed to hiding their lighting instruments. In the end, the small space made the audience feel more connected -- and vulnerable -- and connected with the characters. One could feel what the characters were feeling. Mounting a personal story like A Piece of My Heart in a small black box theatre was appropriate and made the evening more meaningful. It didn't feel like a performance, it felt as if we were listening to a story told first person by someone who had been there and walking with them as they re-lived their own experiences in a war zone.

Paperwork - A Piece of My Heart

Directed: David Britt

Scenic Design: Curtis Smoak

Costume Design: Molly Morgan

Lighting Design: Allison Newcombe

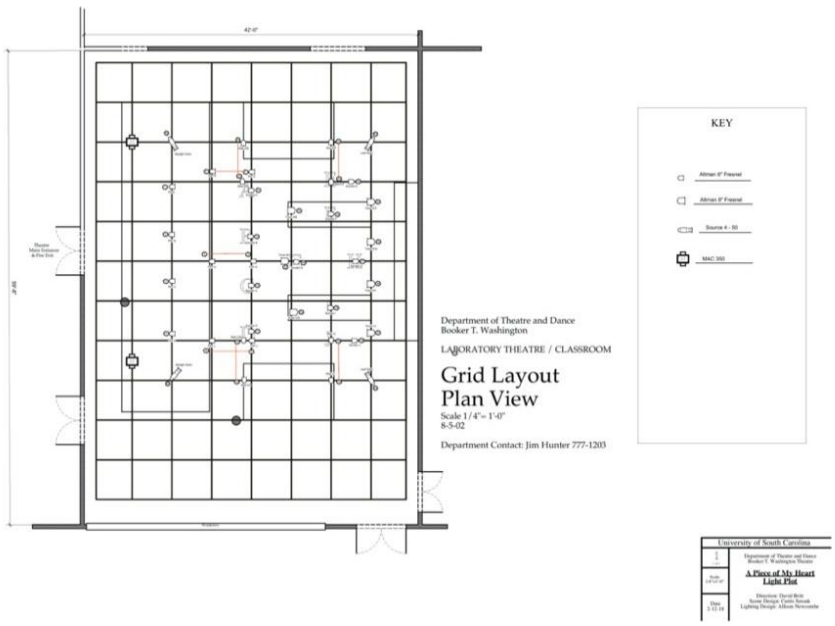

Figure 3.2: A Piece of My Heart. Light Plot.

Figure 3.3: A Piece of My Heart. Magic Sheet.

Chapter 4 Shakespeare in Love – Composing with Light

Shakespeare in Love, written by Lee Hall, was a big step from The Crucible and A Piece of My Heart. This show demanded more dramatic and different lighting looks and effects for just about every scene. To add to it, the actors would be travelling and moving around two very tall rolling staircases all over the stage that required a complete second system of front lighting be used in order to hit the actors on top of the stairs. The challenges of this production taught me many of things that are required to be a competent designer, everything from creating the systems you need in order to support the show, the right magic sheet that works best for you, and knowing that each show you work on is unique in its own way and will requires its own unique color palettes, gobo textures, specials, and more.

The magic sheet is also known as the lighting designer's cheat sheet. If done correctly, it allows the lighting designer to briefly look at the sheet and find the needed light during live editing. A lighting designer must be fast when the director asks you to create a new look during a tech rehearsal or if you are editing while the actors are in dress rehearsal. For the magic sheet to be the most effective, it is important that the channel number and purpose of the light indicates what the light will be doing on the stage and where the light falls on the stage, not where it hangs on the electric. For example, for the front light that falls in area A, the label for the corresponding Channel 1 would be placed by the area designation letter A on the magic sheet. That way the designer can simply

look at the magic sheet and call the channel at once and the light should hit the actors standing in that area.

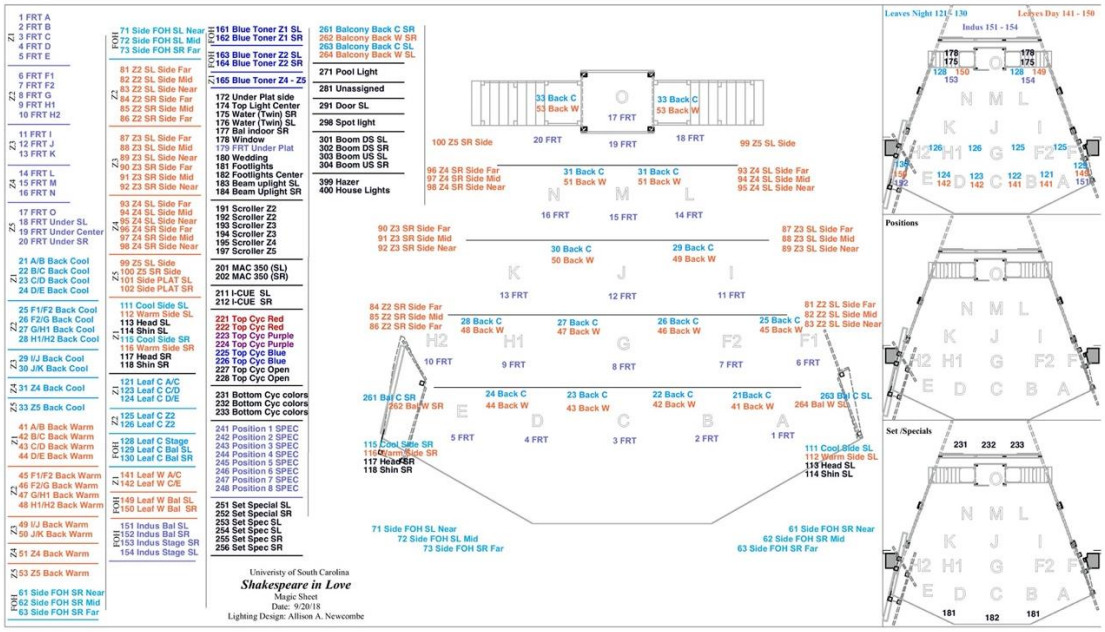

Figure 4.1: Shakespeare in Love Magic Sheet.

The light fixtures on a light plot are organized into systems according to their purpose, and then groups within the systems, and these relationships are also documented on the magic sheet for quick reference. For example, the purpose of a system of lights could be the front light, warm back light, cool back light, texture, LEDs, and much more. This makes the plot much easier to break down for the lighting designer by bringing order to the plot and making it easier to manage. Shakespeare in Love had more than 180 fixtures and even the lighting designer cannot remember every light and what it does by just looking at it hanging on the electric. Systems are also important when it comes to designating groups. It is important for a lighting designer to be able to use the light board

command “group” to call on lights that have the same purpose together as quickly as possible, so that the cues are on time, especially during tech rehearsal.

Whether it is day or night, in nature our primary light originates from single powerful sources, either the sun or the moon. When a lighting designer wants to add a leaf texture to their plot for specific scenes, the light must come from one direction, as if it were the sun falling through actual leaves. For Shakespeare in Love, the light for daytime leaf texture came from house left, and the nighttime leaf texture came from house right. Using angle, as well as color, made it clear that the light was coming from a single distant source, which could be perceived as the sun or the moon. The daytime and nighttime textures washes were each their own system because they both served a different purpose in mood creation and had completely different gel colors.

The most important source for ideas a lighting designer has available to them is the script and is comparable to a score being the most important tool for the composer. The script tells the lighting designer exactly what they must try to achieve. For example, there are descriptions and other clues that indicate if the scene takes place inside or outside, day or night, or winter of summer. The script may also call for fire or other special effects that can be created or enhanced by the lighting designer. A character might have a line that calls for a shift in the lighting environment to come on at a special moment or to emphasize an important action, as well.

Figure 4.2: Shakespeare in Love. Front uplighting during torture scene.

Figure 4.3: Shakespeare in Love Same front uplighting used during romantic scene.

To help me better understand the importance of the script, my advisor asked me to find pictures that would help me create the very look that I wanted for each different location in the script. This helped me understand how to previsualize the look that I wanted, inspired how I could bring that look to life, and how establish a certain mood for a scene. For example, in the hanging of Henslowe scene the space should be lit to create a grim, ominous, and frightening environment. Henslowe, the owner of the Rose Theatre that is putting on the play within the play, is being tortured by a group of powerful backers that he owes money to. I thought of them like the Mafia and went from there. The scene itself is described as taking place backstage, which makes sense as the torturers wouldn't question a person somewhere that is populated with witnesses. To create the scene, I researched images of light shining through the slats of barn doors and found the inspiration pictures that shaped how I envisioned the scene to be. I then printed out the images and taped them into corresponding pages in my script, to help make programming each look much easier than trying to envision it without a visual guideline

in hand. Including research pictures directly into my script became an extremely handy reference when building looks for each scene.

The biggest challenge for designing Shakespeare in Love involved me having to think outside the box more. My successes included how to hit the actors on the moving stairs, how less lighting can sometimes accomplish more, and that each scene should have a distinctive look from the rest. I made a lot of mistakes, but I made a lot of good decisions. Looking back now, I can see that a lot of my mistakes were things that I simply didn't know how to do yet. This mainly involved how to be in better control of my lighting rig. A big plot can be overwhelming if you aren't organized enough and having the proper paperwork is everything for a designer. Preparation and documentation were the biggest lessons of this project.

Paperwork - Shakespeare in Love

Directed: Andrew Shwartz

Scenic Design: Nate Terracio

Costume Design: Molly Morgan

Lighting Design: Allison Newcombe

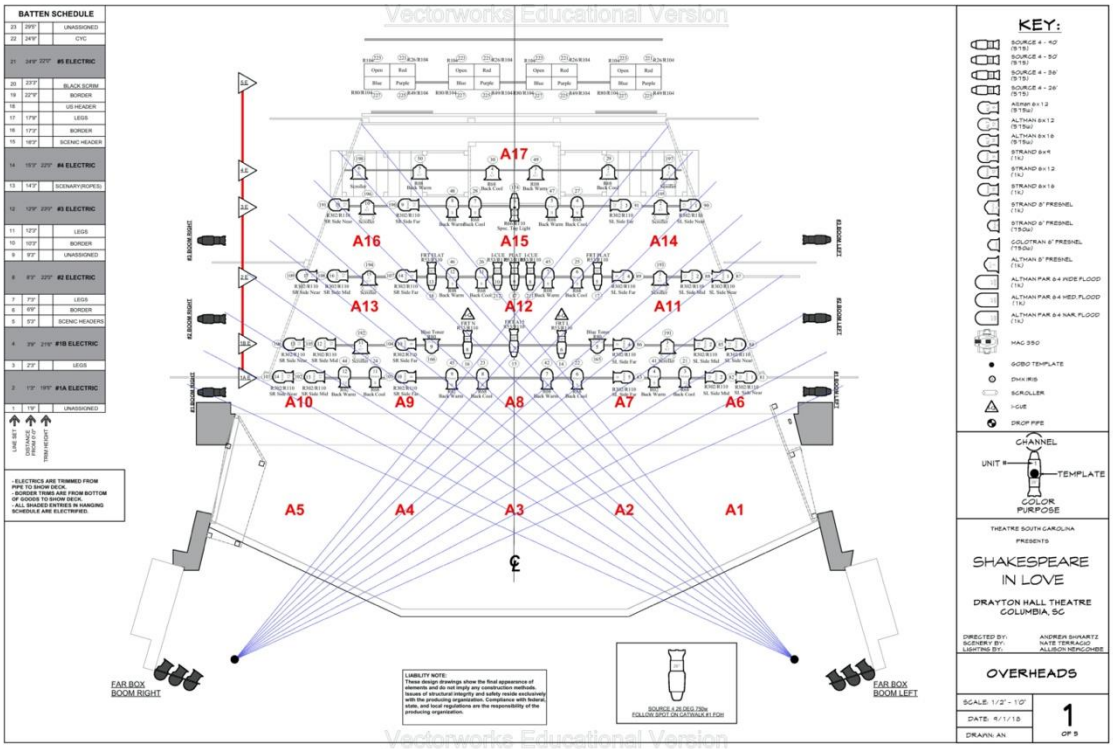

Figure 4.4: Shakespeare in Love. Light Plot.

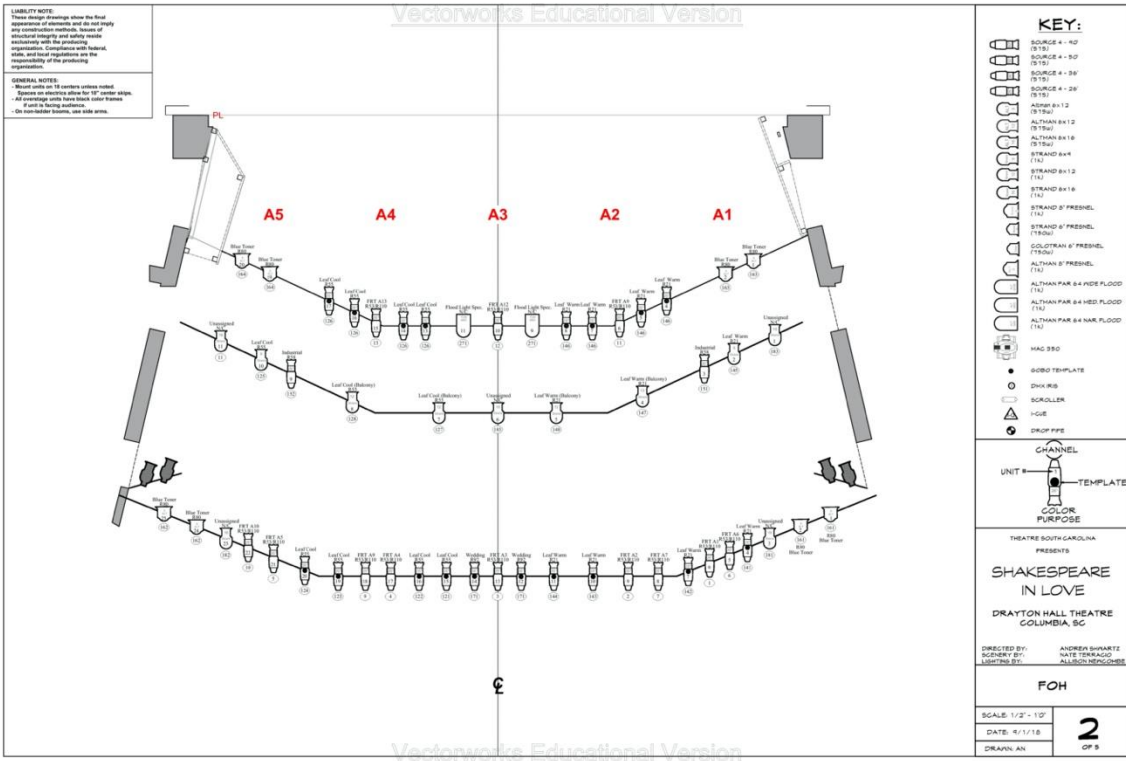

Figure 4.5: Shakespeare in Love. Light Plot.

Chapter 5 The Revolutionists and Waiting for Godot – Two In One

As mentioned, less is more when designing in a small black box and the Center for the Performing Arts Experiment was no different. However, there was the added challenge of creating a light plot that satisfied two shows running in rotating rep, as well as two very different directors. Each director had their own personality and way of doing things. They were both very different when it came to speaking with a designer whose goal was to bring their vision of the play to life.

The plot itself was built with area control being the number one priority. The Center for Performance Experiment was built to adapt quickly to new and widely different performances. A large black box theatre with a grid that was easy to access was ideal for both shows. It made sense that the scenic design and lighting should be just as effective at adapting to a totally different show. Using ETC Desire 60 full color mixing light fixtures combined with the scrollers on traditional fixtures as side light managed to support both shows and their different demands. Graduate design student Nate Terracio's scenic design for the rep shows used the same limited, but multipurpose, tools approach. He made sure that each set was able to come apart and rebuild again in a simple and safe way for the stagehands.

The director of Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett, had years of experience as a director and designer. In additional to directing, Prof. Pearson was accustomed to designing both scenic and lighting for his own shows. In fact, it seemed like that was

what he preferred the most. Prof. Pearson knew what he wanted for his show and he was hardly interested in any suggestions. At one point he even refocused a few lights that the electric team had carefully focused for use in both shows. This director was impossible to reach and would not explain what he wanted or his vision for the production. It felt sometimes as if Prof. Pearson did not want a designer to begin with.

By contrast the director Mary Beth Gorman for The Revolutionists, written by Lauren Gunderson, was eager to have a design team but did not know how to use them right away. It was the first time collaborating with a team. While Mary Beth was new to working with designers, from the very beginning she was eager to collaborate and incorporate ideas from her designers into the show. The energy that came from this director was positive and contagious. We were all very eager and excited to see this story come to life. Mary Beth challenged us to be really creative and think of ways that would transport the audience from one location to the next in the small black box theatre. At times, she even relied on the designers for inspiration with some scenes. In the end, it felt like our ideas were valued and that we were seen and respected as designers and not just students.

There were different experiences when it came to researching the two very different shows. Surprisingly, the more complex show, The Revolutionists, seemed to be the simplest. It was most likely because the director was so accessible when there were questions to be answered. Mary Beth was very excited to share ideas about what she wanted. She even had her own file of research images that only aided to the design team's research. When presenting my ideas, it was easy because I felt valued.

Figure 5.1: The Revolutionists. Marie Antoinette.

Technical rehearsals for both plays were completely different as well. The Revolutionist was what a typical technical rehearsal felt like, racing against the clock to get all of the cues in before 11p.m. It was busy, stressful, and time flew by. The Waiting for Godot rehearsal only had four cues and the day was spent mainly for the actors.

The two directors each treated their technical rehearsals much differently. The Revolutionist director was collaborative, looking for guidance and advice and ideas when working on a scene. She trusted her designers to make the best choice for the scene. While it was great to have a say in what would help move the story along, there is such a thing as having too much creative freedom and it would have been nice if the director would have given the designer some more specific feedback. The more freedom we had

with our work, the more it felt like we were all telling very different stories. It was important that all the design elements ultimately come together and be consistent with their work. If it did not flow together, then the show would not succeed. Part of the director's job is to hold the vision for the production, and then keep the team on the same page working towards a unified goal. While in the end, the work we did was successful and we found ourselves on the same page, it was not until we actually started the technical rehearsal that we realized the director was still trying to figure out how to make the entire play flow smoothly.

The Waiting for Godot technical rehearsal, for a simpler show, was stressful at first because Professor Pearson had a strict vision that could not be changed. The only wiggle room designers had was when we reached a transition scene that involved projection of a full moon and lighting that supported the shift from day to night. The rest of the play was one solid look that Professor Pearson wanted.

Figure 5.2: Waiting for Godot production photo.

The Revolutionists and Waiting for Godot are two very different plays. The Revolutionists has a very quick pace with multiple locations varying from indoors and out. The script and Mary Beth called for many different effects and color changes. Waiting for Godot was constant, with only one location, one daylight look and one nighttime look. Of the two plays, The Revolutionists had more demands and so it made sense to build the rep plot that catered more to it. If the plot could support The Revolutionists, it should also support Waiting for Godot. So, while the plot had lighting fixtures that could change colors and create interesting effects, these tools were not called for in Waiting for Godot but were required for The Revolutionists.

Looking back, it was valuable as a student to work with two very different directors with very different tastes and styles. It made it very clear that every director I

would work with in the future would be different from the others. Learning how to communicate effectively with directors will mean future work later. As a designer, you have to be flexible and, in the end, the director's vision of a play is the primary goal.

Paperwork - Waiting for Godot/The Revolutionists

Directed: Steve Pearson/ Marybeth Gorman-Craig

Scenic Design: Nate Terracio

Costume Design: Tyler Odmensun/ Kennedy Roberts

Lighting Design: Allison Newcombe

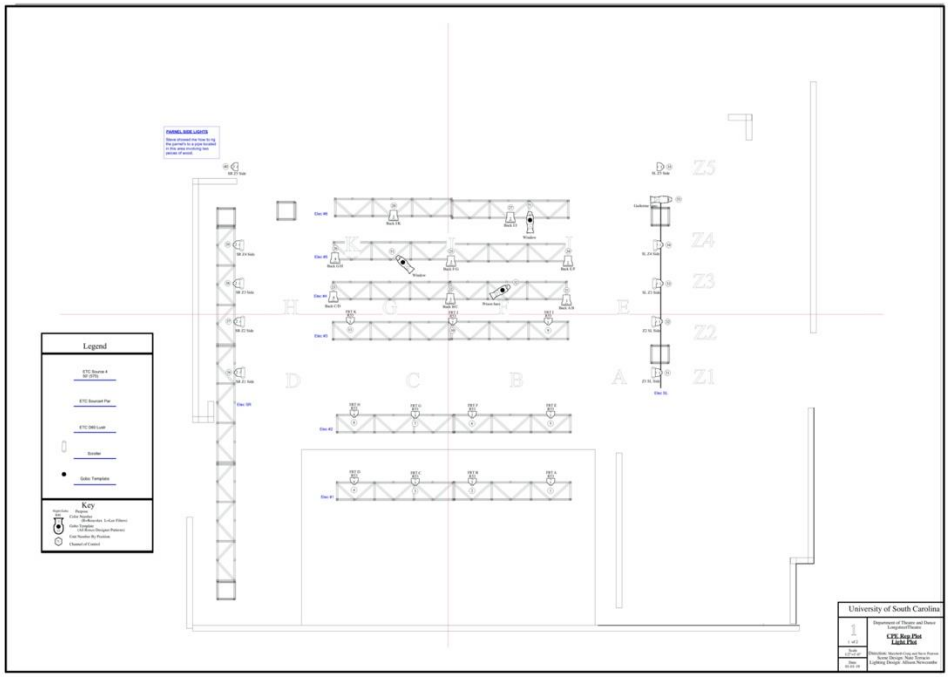

Figure 5.3: Center for Performance Experiment repertory Light Plot

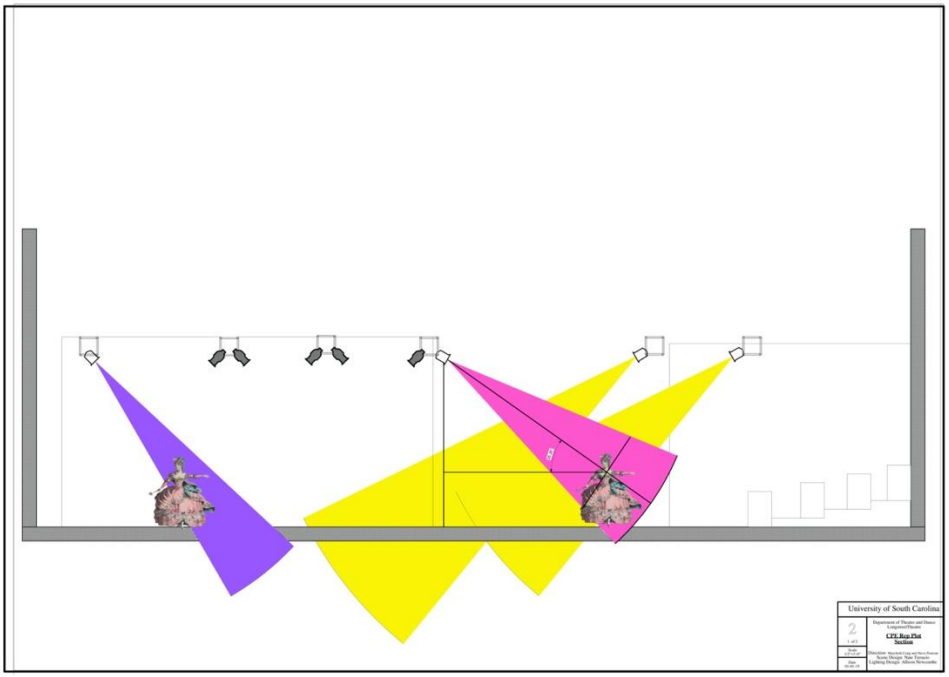

Figure 5.4: Center for Performance Experiment lighting section

Chapter 6 The Wolves – Designing on a Budget

The Wolves, by Sarah Delappe, is a coming of age story about a girls indoor soccer team who have to come together and rely on each other for support as they go through a life changing and terrible accident as they lose one of their own. The girls are warriors and they overcome their opponent teams just as they overcome their own challenges in growing up.

The Wolves is a good example of making do with what is available and working with no budget. Originally, The Wolves was supposed to be a smaller show in the Booker T. Washington Black Box Theatre but was moved to the arena style mainstage Longstreet Theatre. The Wolves did not demand much from scenic, costumes or lighting departments. The entire action takes place in one indoor soccer arena throughout. As far as lighting was involved, we used whatever we had left in our inventory while Waiting for Godot and The Revolutionists rep shows were still going on. There was also a dance production happening in the Drayton Hall Theatre placing even more demands on the department's total lighting inventory.

The most important thing that we needed for The Wolves to succeed was having total control of the area lighting. The plot was simple because our inventory was stretched with three shows happening at the same time. The biggest concern was making

sure we had a light for each designated area. If there were any lights left over, they would be used for specials that could be added when needed. The Wolves is another good example with being creative with a limited amount of equipment.

Figure 6.1: The Wolves. Production photo.

Longstreet Theatre arena's format felt like a soccer stadium. Working with the scenic designer, Prof. Jim Hunter, we were able to install four "towers" of stadium lights at each corner of the arena. The stadium lights were functional lighting positions that also served as scenery. At first this was only supposed to help the audience feel like they were actually sitting in a stadium but was later discovered that the stadium lights could also be used for story support by showing a transition in time and reinforce music underscoring.

The show started out with the intention of being small and not creating a lot of work for the designers. In fact, this show wasn't supposed to be a mainstage show to

begin with and, after just completing tech of two other shows, the graduate students were stretched thin. Fortunately, designing the show ended up being a fun process and it had a successful run. Our director, Lindsay Rae Taylor, had a solid vision of the script and its characters. She was open to any idea that came up in our production meetings. The show was perfect for the Longstreet Theatre arena theatre and proved that less can be more and just as entertaining and that a designer does not have to give the show more elaborate lighting than what is really called for. Really study the script and talk to the director. Find out what is needed and what is just a bonus that could enhance and push the story forward.

Paperwork - The Wolves

Directed: Lindsay Rae Taylor

Scenic Design: Jim Hunter

Costume Design: Tyler Omundsen

Lighting Design: Allison Newcombe

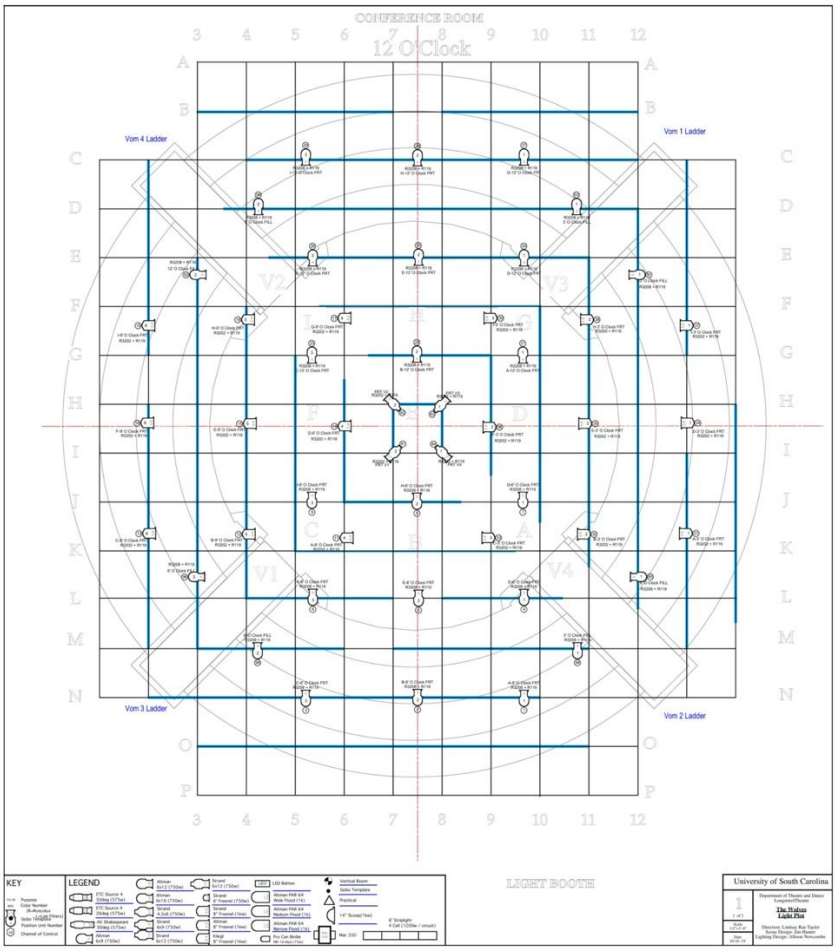

Figure 6.2: The Wolves. Light Plot.

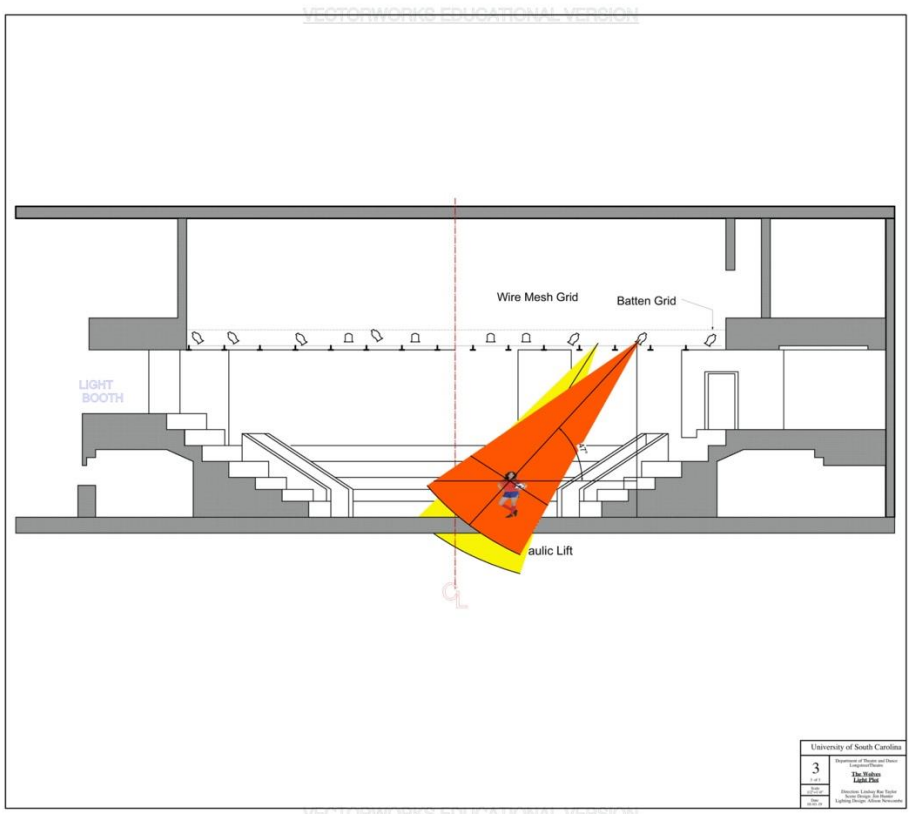

Figure 6.3: The Wolves. Section.

Chapter 7 Eurydice – From Concept to Reality

Eurydice by Sarah Ruhl is a special play and great example of how a simple class assignment turned itself into an actual fully realized production. It started a year before opening when Tyler Omundsen and I were paired with an MFA director candidate, Lindsay Rae Taylor, for a design project. The goal was to create a design concept for Eurydice, which at the time was not yet selection for the next year's production season, as if it was actually going to take place. This involved scenic ground plans, light plots, costume sketches, and a concept statement. Later on, the director presented our work and ideas to the theatre department that then approved Eurydice as one of their selections for the department's next main stage season. It's not common for a lighting designer to be involved at the very beginning of building a show. Designers are typically called in after the show and director has been selected by the producing organization. I loved this script and knew from the very beginning that if this show was going to make it to the main stage, that I wanted to be there every step of the way and see it through and even flew in from New York where I was working at my university sponsored internship to design Eurydice.

New York Times critic Charles Isherwood wrote "Eurydice evokes the discombobulating experience of grief and loss, the desperate need to move on and the overwhelming desire never to let go – to turn and look back just one more time."

Eurydice is a play about absence and growth. The atmosphere is full of fluidity and enchantment. Our goal was to support that fluidity thought lighting.

When Eurydice was just a paper project, there was no limit to what we could use in terms of lighting equipment, scenic build, etc. This was quite different when the show was set to be performed live and a strict budget was set. All departments had to compromise their idealized vision in order to keep close to the budget but without straying from our original design concepts from the paper project. The biggest challenge was that the production could not use any water on stage as earlier envisioned. Longstreet Theatre is a historical landmark building and the threat of possible water damage was too high. Therefore, the director turned to lighting to create water by using the effect of shimmer and reflectivity of water when it was needed. The play called for a lot of interesting and different effects. Such as an elevator that rains inside, and a pool. In the end, we figured out that the department's traditional incandescent fixed lighting fixtures would not help us bring this show to its greatest potential.

Connections that were made with Martin Lighting Professionals at LDI were called in. They were kind enough to let us borrow six Martin Encore Performance CLD moving-head lighting fixtures for the entire run of the show. We purposefully chose the Encores Performance for their animation wheel, additive color mixing, effects builder, and how quiet they can be in a small theatre space.

As rehearsals progressed, the director and designers made many discoveries involving the moving lights. We started asking ourselves, "If lighting can be used to represent water, how else can we incorporate lighting into this world?" It didn't take long until just about every scene had its own special lighting, whether that was a practical light

or an effect. This concept had all started back when Eurydice was still a paper project. The project's design for the string room were string lights. We wanted to give the impression that the string room was alive and had its own heartbeat. It would interact with the actors through effects and color-changing cues. The idea was that the Father put a little bit of himself and his life essence into the string room and this was supported by string lights changing. This led us to questioning what else is "alive" in the play? Eventually, we integrated string lights throughout the majority of the set as we continued to build on the idea that the lights were alive.

Figure 7.1: Eurydice. Production photo.

All the design departments had to give up on a few of their ideas. The production did not have enough stagehands to staff the production as originally envision. In order to lower the demands for crew, the lighting department decided to cut all needs for spotlight operators that were originally planned as a key lighting element for isolating the characters in their separate worlds, and supporting the idea that the world of the dead

seems so endless, yet confining. This is another area where the Martin Encore Performance lights were highly useful. Where any specials or static spots when required and we could also use the movers to act as follow spots. While the Martin Encores were better than having no follow spots at all, the movers tend to operate in a somewhat robotic and lifeless way compared to a live follow spot operator.

Many discoveries were made as technical rehearsal moved closer. The scenic department continued to add to the set right up until opening night and the lighting department had to add lights to the rig and on new scenic pieces as they were incorporated. At some point it started to get a little chaotic as more and more scenic elements continued to be added. While the designers and director wanted the production to be as good as could be, at some point someone should have decided everything was finished and that no more could be added. The longer we continued to add to the show, the more stressful it became for everyone.

Another challenge was the actual scenic element functionality of the string room. The string floated down from the grid and the actor needed to be able undo and stretch the strings out wide on to the stage to create space for actors to occupy within the string room. There were a lot of challenges that came with this piece. One being that we had to find room for it up in the grid that was not noticeable. We really wanted to surprise the audience as it descended from the grid and onto the stage and then have it light up as if it was “awake” now and a part of the world. The second challenge was making it easy for the actor to undo the string room and spread it out. The third challenge was for the lighting to avoid as many shadows as possible. The string room was very low on the ground and the lights had to properly light the actors inside of the string room. We did

manage, in the end, to avoid a majority of the shadows, thanks to the scenic department cutting back on the amount of strings that fell from the grid. There were a lot of concerns when it came to the string room and it was the element of the show that would take the most amount of time to get through.

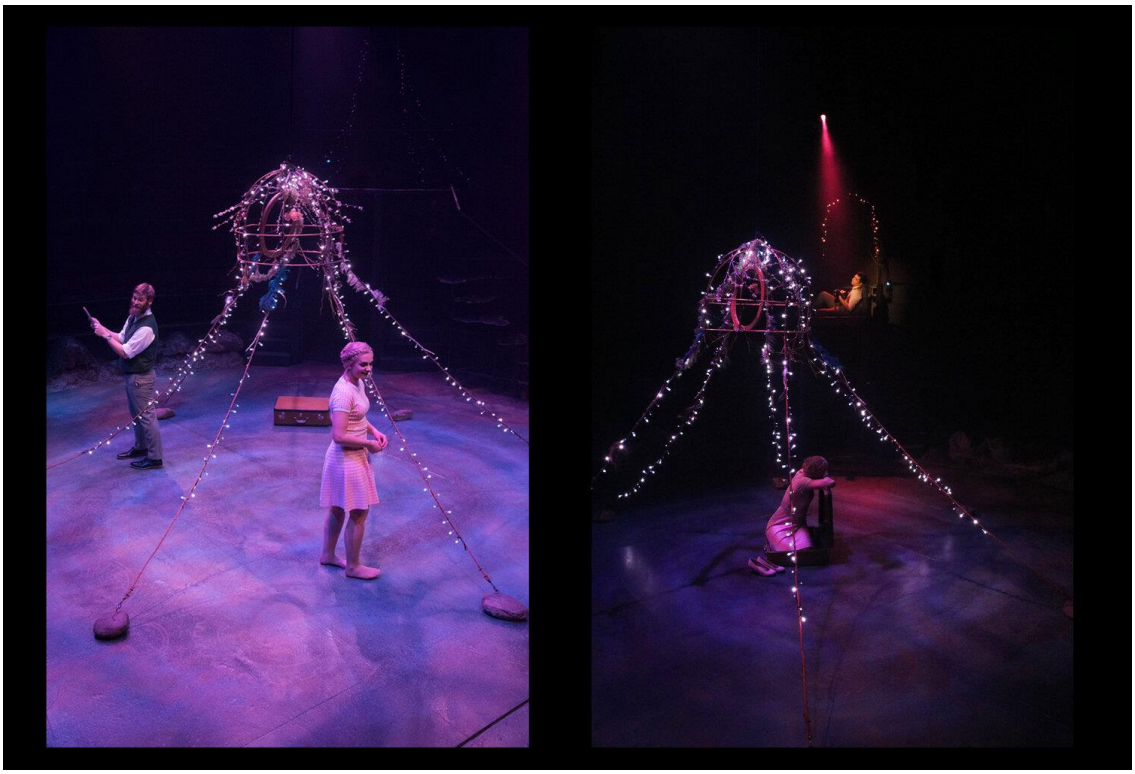

Figure 7.2: Eurydice The String Room.

Figure 7.3: Eurydice The String Room.

Eurydice was a great experience to end my time at the University of South Carolina as a student. It felt like that everything I learned both at the program and while I was in New York completing my internship was used for this show. It was one of the most complex rigs I've had to work with so far. Just about every type of effect for the movers was used. There were a lot of discoveries both before, during, and after technical rehearsals and it took a lot of quick thinking and actions to make it all work. It ended up

being one of the most successful shows I have been a part of but this wasn't done alone. It took a great director who respected others and genuinely loved to work with a team. Eurydice needed a director who was patient and really loved the message behind the story and had a lot of experience in directing. We couldn't have asked for a better director than who we had. Lindsay Rae knew what she wanted and acted as a leader.

Eurydice will always be a favorite experience with a story that I would happily design again one day.

Paperwork - Eurydice

Directed: Lindsay Rae Taylor

Scenic Design: Mona Maria Damian Ulmu

Costume Design: Kennedy Roberts

Lighting Design: Allison Newcombe

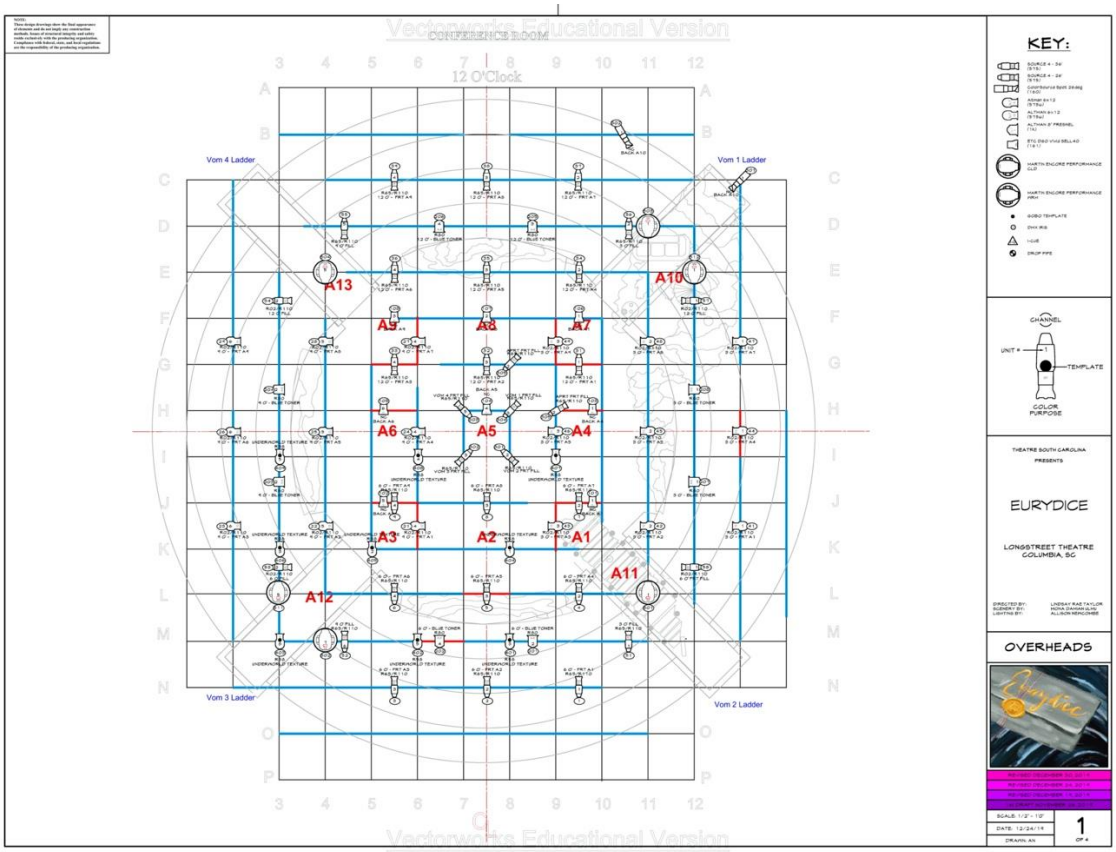

Figure 7.4: Eurydice. Light Plot.

Chapter 8 Conclusion – Still More to Learn

> "A room is like a stage. If you see it without lighting, it can be the coldest place in the world."
>
> – Paul Lynde, American Comedian

I have been a student at the University of South Carolina for almost three years. As I near the finish of my time here and complete the program, I can look back at each show I have designed at the college and remember something valuable that I learned from it. Attending a school that offers a proscenium, black box, and arena theatre is a tremendous advantage in preparing us as storytellers as we venture out into the world and take on many interesting and challenging shows that might not always be located in a traditional space.

Looking back at my time at the University, I can see the value in every show I worked on. From paperwork, drafting an organized plot, to the craft of storytelling through light and painting the stage with your choices of color and texture. I believe the biggest challenge for me was transitioning my skills as a storyteller from film and photography, to stage lighting.

Learning to collaborate with a team and talking about lighting was also a challenge that I now see will take years to perfect. How does one talk about lighting and explain their vision without images? How do you explain daylight? Or a type of shadow

on a person's face? These are things that will have to be practiced over the years. In order to be a good collaborator, one must also be a good communicator.

I now understand the importance of systems in a light plot, how it functions, and feeling confident that the plots I create will support the play to its fullest. I now know how to ensure the magic sheet is always up to date with the latest plot and that it is easy to read in a dark theatre during technical rehearsals.

Knowing that you're not always going to click with the director you are working with was an incredibly valuable lesson. Sometimes, if not most of the time, they will not trust you right away. You will have to earn their trust through your work and assuring them that you know what you're doing, demonstrating your own competence through professional action and behavior. On the other hand, you might also get a director who gives you too much freedom because they are excited and relieved to have a designer on their team. In that case, it's important to understand that there is such a thing as having too much freedom and it is up to the director to set a limit as to how much they want.

The last lesson is that each and every show will present its own set of unique challenges that you as the designer must figure out. There will be a lot of late nights and a lot of frustration as you solve problems and find innovative solutions to the many challenges presented by a living, breathing, and emotionally satisfying show. In the end, having the show opening and looking good with the help of your lighting is the most rewarding feeling of all. The opportunity I have had to learn so much in such a short time has made going through graduate school an incredible and valuable experience.

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