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The Scenic Design of Bye Bye Birdie

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*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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THE SCENIC DESIGN
OF
BYE BYE BIRDIE

by
ERIN WEGLEITNER

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
MANKATO, MINNESOTA

NOVEMBER 2018
A Scenic Designer for Bye Bye Birdie

Erin Wegleitner

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

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ABSTRACT

Wegleitner, Erin I., M.F.A. The Scenic Design of *Bye Bye Birdie*

Mankato: Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2018

This paper is a complete description of the set design process for the 2018 production of *Bye Bye Birdie*, as designed by Erin Wegleitner. The submission of this document will serve to meet partial fulfillment of Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre. The content of this thesis will detail the preproduction analysis, historical and critical analysis, process, post-production analysis and review of artistic development. Within those chapters, all aspects of the set design are considered from the first concept to completed project. To support the paper appendices works cited and works consulted are included.
I would like to take this opportunity to first give thanks to the professors at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I thank Dr. Paul J. Hustoles, Dr. Heather Hamilton, David McCarl, Steven Smith and George E. Grubb for the education and support provided. A special thank you to John Paul, my advisor, for the hours spent developing my skills and acumen as designer. Melissa Rosenberger, I thank you for all of your guidance, friendship, and encouragement. I hope that we will find ourselves working together again one day soon.

To the graduate cohort, I thank you all. The comradery and support found among you can not be overstated. April Reed, I am so grateful to have you. I could not have made it through this process without you. Also, many thanks to the wonderful undergraduates that I have had the privilege to work with at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I would especially like to thank the dozens of you that came in at the eleventh hour to work on this show. To *Bye Bye Birdie’s* fantastic paint charge, Brittney Hollenbeck and incredible props master, Macaria Meza, heartily I thank you for all of your hard work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, who showed up in full force to support me in this project. Most of all, I thank my parents, who have seen me through the ups and downs of my career and have always strived to help me reach my goals.
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CHAPTER 1

EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

The introductory chapter of this thesis will detail the early production analysis of *Bye Bye Birdie* from the scenic design perspective. This musical comedy was written in 1958 by Michael Stewart, music provided by Charles Strouse, and lyrics by Lee Adams. The dates for Minnesota State University, Mankato's pre-production process are November 27, 2017, through April 4, 2017. Performances will run April 5, 2017, through April 15, 2017, in the Ted Paul Theatre. Direction and choreography of the play will be led by Melissa Rosenburger with musical direction provided by Nick Wayne. The stage management team will be comprised of Alyssa Thome as the production stage manager, and Kendra Gilsdorf as the assistant stage manager. Costumes will be designed by David McCarl, and Steven Smith will fulfill the duties of the lighting designer. Technical direction and sound design will be completed by George Grubb. Brittany Hollenbeck will serve as the show's paint charge and Macaria Meza will serve as the props master. The author will fulfill the role of scene design.

*Bye Bye Birdie* was originally produced in 1960 on the Martin Beck Theatre's stage. It closed in 1961 at the Shubert Theatre with a total of 607 performances. At the 1961 Tony Awards, *Bye Bye Birdie* was nominated for eight awards and earned Best Musical (The Broadway League). Two years later the musical was adapted into the well-known movie of the same name. Imagery from the movie has become iconic for its look.
and style. The audience will have some level of expectations for the look of this production. Some of these preconceptions may need to be approached differently to remount a show that is nearly sixty years old for a modern audience.

*Bye Bye Birdie* opens with the overture playing while projections give the audience a taste of the infamous rock star Conrad Birdie. These projections are flexible in how they are used to the point that there are options should the director choose not to incorporate them at all. The script notes suggest girls screaming and pictures of Conrad Birdie singing. An early thought considered by this designer is the incorporation of a projection screen shaped like a 1950s television set. The inclusion of the television set as the display surface for the projections will unify the various locations. Television influenced the daily lives of Americans in the 1950s and is central to the play *Bye Bye Birdie*. Presenting the entirety of the play as a singular television program has the potential to inspire a creative and humorous take on the show.

In the first scene, television becomes intrinsic to the plot as Rosie sells Albert her brilliant idea to promote Conrad's enlistment in the army as a means to sell one more hit before Albert retires from the music business. Rosie is the secretary to Albert, the owner of Almaylo Music Company. Rosie has concocted a plot to select one fan to represent all of America's teens parting with their hero. Conrad Birdie will kiss the lucky girl on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and sing his latest song, "One Last Kiss," which Albert has yet to write.

This first scene takes place in Albert's office in New York City. This will be the first of many locations in this show that are never returned to later. The script calls for
many general office requirements; a door, desks, a phone, just to list a few. The one specific requirement is the piano for Albert to write his music. Given this scene's limited appearance there is potential to reuse the same units later in the show. There is another office required towards the end of the first act.

In scene two the buzz has spread around the community of Sweet Apple, Ohio that two high schoolers Hugo and Kim, have just gotten pinned. One scene that has permeated pop culture is the song "The Telephone Hour." Much like the rotating stage in Les Misérables, the brightly colored stacked boxes have made an appearance in many productions of Bye Bye Birdie. The neighborhood kids are highlighted one by one, posed in a contorted shape that only a teenager could be comfortable in. Minnesota State University, Mankato's production could follow convention, but this show has an opportunity to refresh this musical.

Scene three focuses on the MacAfee home in Sweet Apple, Ohio. Moments after the big telephone number Kim and Ursula are talking on the phone. The joke is that after Kim's mother tells her to get off the phone, Kim opens her window to talk to Ursula who lives next door. Kim, after ending her conversation with her close friend Ursula about leaving the Conrad Birdie Fan Club, goes into the song, "How Lovely to be a Woman." In this number, she sings about how lucky she is to have grown out of her awkward stage and into a young woman. In her bedroom, Kim sings while changing from her school dress to a “tomboy” look. The script references her bedroom upstairs as part of a two-story unit. On the first story of the MacAfee home, the script suggests a combination family room and kitchen.
Two songs take place in scene four, the well-known "Put on a Happy Face," and, "A Healthy Normal American Boy." Both are set in Pennsylvania (Penn) Station, New York City as Albert and Rosie attempt to get Conrad to Sweet Apple with as little fuss as possible. This proves to be a challenge with the appearance of Albert's mother, the press, and crowds of young girls. To cheer up a sad group of young ladies Albert sings and dances, telling them to, "Put on a Happy Face." The crucial scenic elements of this number are the benches the girls sit on. There should be scenic pieces to clearly indicate that they are at Penn Station. For the second song, the train Albert is about to board should be noted in some way. By the end of the scene shift, they are just stepping off the train into Sweet Apple.

At the Sweet Apple station Kim comforts Hugo about the big kiss. She sings the song, "One Boy." It is important to distinguish the bustling Penn Station in New York, from the small-town railroad station in Sweet Apple. Both locations feature large crowd scenes that will make minute details disappear. Large distinctions will be more successful in communicating the space. The well-known clock and lamps at Penn Station could work as flying units. Additionally, a small sign and an exit platform could be enough to communicate the Sweet Apple location.

The audience is finally able to see Conrad Birdie in action in scene six, on the courthouse steps. At a town rally held in Conrad's honor, he is meant to be given a key to the city. The peaceful equilibrium of the town is turned upside down, however, as soon as he opens his mouth. During the performance of his song, "Honestly Sincere," Conrad drives the crowd crazy. Women and girls begin to faint and scream as he makes
his way down the courthouse steps. This is a moment to boost the fun factor. One
consideration of this designer is the idea of balloons. While researching courthouses and
parades this designer found an image that inspired the idea of balloons to bulk up the
crowd and add to the hometown feel.

In the aftermath of the events at the courthouse Mr. MacAfee is beginning to
have doubts about his daughter's participation. To soothe the patriarch of the household,
Albert and Rosie make the suggestion that he too could be on *The Ed Sullivan Show.*
Overjoyed with the news, Mr. MacAfee leads his family in a fantasy hymn dedicated to
Ed Sullivan. Over the course of this scene, the inner workings of the MacAfee home are
observed. The audience gets a sense that Mr. MacAfee is deeply upset by his hard-earned
routine being disturbed by this whole affair.

The last two scenes of the act take place at the Central Movie Theatre. After
Albert and Rosie prepare to film their segment on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, backstage at the
theatre there is a big dance number featuring Rosie acting out her frustration with
Albert's tendency to bend to his mother's will. She dances through various scenarios
detailing Albert's death with a guillotine, knife, firing squad, and so on.

The nature of the various deaths creates the potential for this scene to be prop
heavy. The use of the larger items will need to accommodate the timing of their
movement on and off stage. After Rosie finishes the set up for *The Ed Sullivan Show*,
the chaos prior to filming begins. There should be several pieces of television equipment
being moved around. Lights, drops, and cameras should shift in anticipation of their use
on the show. Towards the end of the scene, there seems to be an opportunity to use
projections again. If timed right the last few seconds could be filmed in advance to indicate to the audience that what they are seeing is playing live on television.

In the opening of the second act, the MacAfee home is once again the focus as Rosie and Kim sing about their disappointing beaus with the song, "What Did I See in Him?" Up in Kim's bedroom the pair plan to let their hair down and dress up for a night on the town. The costume changes in this room will need to be planned in the structure of the room. There could be a dresser or a closet, but either way, there will need to be a place for the clothes to be stored.

Shortly after, Conrad grows restless with his last night of freedom. Rosie and Kim join him on his way out the door. Ready for a night on the town, Conrad begins the song, "A Lot of Livin' to Do." Local kids join in as Kim and Conrad dance out into the street. The MacAfee's and Mrs. Peterson, Albert's Mother, follow their children. The group of adults sing about the disappointments of their kids, in a song entitled, "Kids." In these scenes, there will need to be a quick transition from the interior of the MacAfee home to the exterior. Additionally, the front door will need to be functional.

The location in scene four of act two is the interior of Maude's Roadside Retreat. Rosie is at the bar when she receives a desperate call from Albert. He begs her to come back to him in the song, "Talk to Me." During this scene both Maude's and the phone booth Albert is calling from will need to be on stage. There are a series of quick scenery changes that will have to happen at Maude's. After Albert's song is over, Rosie sneaks into the private dining room of the bar where a Shriners’ meeting is taking place. At the same time, the phone booth will need to leave the stage. In scene five Rosie has a big
dance number with the Shriners, and after, escapes out the back door of Maude's. Hugo informs her that Kim and Conrad have run off together but is swept away herself by the Shriners.

At the back door of Maude's, there is a clash of characters and information trading. Everyone's problems are put on hold when they realize that Kim and Conrad have run off together. With the reprise of, "Kids," the adults lament the effect of rock 'n roll on their children. Shortly after Rosie returns she reveals that Conrad and Kim are at the Ice House.

Kim and Conrad are cuddled close in the Ice House in scene seven. As Kim tries to convince Conrad that she's a grown up, the other kids from town find them. Caught up in the draw of celebrity they surround them and turn Conrad's words against him, quoting his song, "A Lot of Livin to Do." Before the situation becomes inescapable, Albert, Rosie, the parents, and the police show up to shut everything down. After Conrad is safely in police custody, Albert and Rosie mend their relationship. However, Mrs. Peterson, Albert's mother, ruins the moment by insulting Rosie's heritage. Frustrated with Mrs. Peterson, Rosie vows to behave as Albert's mother perceives her in her song, "Spanish Rose."

The final scene returns to the Sweet Apple Railroad Station. Albert gets Conrad on the first train out of town, and soon after does the same with his mother. Having finally stood up for Rosie she takes him back for good. Albert then sings, "Everything is Rosie," and the two happily plan their future.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The designer will discuss the research into the history of the play in this chapter. *Bye Bye Birdie* features a behind the scenes look at the making of a pop star. It also focuses on the impact of television programming on American culture in the 1950s. This designer will take a closer look at how the power of the fast-developing medium of television affected the youth of the 1950s and how it rose to such heights.

There can be no doubt of television's influence on the script of *Bye Bye Birdie*. In a 1951 New York Time's article, Jack Gould noted, "Television, in commercial use for a little more than five years, is influencing the social and economic habits of the nation to a degree unparalleled since the advent of the automobile." A proper assessment considering America's growing obsession with television media after World War II. The country was seeking relief in entertainment and often found it in the formulaic situational comedies. The first sitcom on TV, *Mary Kay and Johnny* set the standard for the genre. Though the show's conception was in 1947, its common narrative seems cliché today. A loveable but silly housewife gets into trouble only to be saved by her husband. This model was adapted to become the most popular show of the 1950s, *I Love Lucy* (Academy of Television Arts & Sciences).

These shows also served as the model for the new concept of the “nuclear family.” With growing prosperity after the war, people were able to afford their own
homes, changing the family structure within the household to a set of parents and their children. This broke from the traditional multi-generational household. Television programming not only tailored to this type of household, but it also reflected their ideal image back to the American people.

Television emerged as the ideal medium for the nuclear family in postwar America. Households consisting of a working dad, a mostly stay-at-home mom, and one or more young children living in the suburbs separated from the traditions of an extended family was now a majority lifestyle throughout the United States. (Edgerton 128)

Additionally, with this model placing men as the head of the family and breadwinners while women were the homemakers, television's main market became women. On average throughout the 1950s women accounted for 70% of daytime viewing, and 55-60% of the evening viewership. As a result, early sitcoms focused on the women of the household. With shows like I Love Lucy the focus was on the wife and her zany behavior. Nearing the 1960s, shows like Leave it to Beaver would start to relegate the wife and mother character to the background (Edgerton 138).

Of course, this female monopolized viewership was not always seen as a positive. In 1935 RCA Chairman David Sarnoff explained his worries over television's inability to function as radio does. The limited mobility of the viewer could hinder a woman's ability to carry out her goals around the house.

Today radio is used as a background for other entertainment, or by the housewife who . . . listens to the music, while she goes on with her work.
Television can never be like that, because not only will it require close attention on the part of the onlooker, but it will also be necessary for the room to be somewhat darkened. . . . Listners. . . instead of roaming around as they do now while enjoying a program will have to sit tight and pay close attention to whatever is being thrown on their screen. But will they want to do this? . . . I don't know. . . (Boddy 19)

For the chairman to have these concerns was no slight problem. The Radio Corporation of America, better known as RCA led the rest of the industry in the development of television in everything from technology to commercialization of the product. It was RCA that brought television to the 1939 World's Fair. They did so despite being brought up on charges of anti-trust law violations and patent monopoly. RCA narrowly avoided sanctions and was to resume control. With their patents on the technology, the leadership at RCA had quite a lot of power to control the use of the medium (Boddy 29). In truth, it was RCA's decision to distribute its funding to television instead of radio that ultimately led to Radio's consistent decline since the rise of television. The advertisers simply followed the trend established by RCA in an effort to stay relevant.

By the 1950s television's lead characters had changed from mothers to their children and had increased the barrier between the culture of young people and their parents. Another byproduct of the nuclear family representation on television was the concept of the teenager. The idea of the teenager had loosely begun to take hold in academic culture as early as the 1910s. However, it would take decades for the term,
“teenager”, to permeate into the American culture. The age range in between a child and adult had become overtly apparent in World War II with the hardline adult age of eighteen.

With the onslaught of the baby boom by 1956, there were around thirteen million teenagers in the United States. Furthermore, these teenagers created a seven-billion-dollar revenue stream (Popova). Teenagers became a massive target market because the entirety of their spending was based on desire rather than needs. This combined with the teen obsession over movie stars and rock ‘n roll, allowed for their influence to carry more significance in the medium of television. As Thomas Patrick Doherty put it in Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s, "Truth to tell, 1950s teenagers were strange creatures, set apart from previous generations of American young people in numbers, affluence, and self-consciousness.” (34).

The phenomenon of the teenager did not escape the attention of the host of The Ed Sullivan Show. Ed Sullivan sought to showcase entertainment that everyone could enjoy, but he was also smart enough to see the advantages of leading his show in the direction the youth of society were already going, rock ‘n roll. By choosing this path and continuing to cultivate it, Ed Sullivan remained not only relevant but beloved for decades.

Certainly, the variety show host became an icon. His show is known for introducing the world to Elvis and the Beatles while solidifying Sullivan's reputation for bringing culture to the masses. First created in 1955, CBS must have known they would have success on their hands as The Ed Sullivan Show began with a twenty-year contract.
It is also possible that CBS was willing to take the risk to compete with NBC's *Tonight*, hosted by Steven Allen (Edgerton 174).

*The Ed Sullivan Show* quickly became an amplifier for American culture. A performance on the show placed the artist right in the homes of millions of Americans and had the power to rocket them to overnight success. It was at the show's peak in the late 1950s that *Bye Bye Birdie* was written. The cast of *Bye Bye Birdie* was even invited to perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, including the number "Hymn for a Sunday Evening." The show's presentation of Elvis and the effect it had on teenagers is deeply ingrained in the plot of *Bye Bye Birdie*.

The credit given to Ed Sullivan for placing Elvis on the map may be a bit exaggerated. In fact, Ed Sullivan had claimed that he would never allow the hip-gyrating singer on his show. From the start, Elvis Presley made waves with his style and approach, and on January 27, 1956, Elvis made history with his first hit, "Heartbreak Hotel." As if overnight, his adoring fan base secured his stardom. "Heartbreak Hotel" became the number one selling record for 1956. "Much of the song's success stems from the restless culture of postwar youth who instinctively rebelled against the relaxed pace of their parents' lifestyle… Presley was their pop culture savior" (Neibaur 17). Between the song's success and an overwhelming ratings spike for *The Tonight Show* during Elvis's performance, Sullivan's tune quickly changed. On September 9th, 1956, Elvis performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to sixty million viewers or 82% of American viewership. By the end of that year, *The Ed Sullivan Show* became known as "the great
national variety theater" and Elvis became the most popular artist within the teenage demographic (Edgerton 187).

By the mid-1950s the influence of the American teenager was all but undeniable, especially in the arena of the music industry. With the rise in Elvis' celebrity status, teenagers proved able to shout over the dissenting voices of their parents. To undermine the powerful hold of rock n' roll, companies began scrounging for alternatives. Polka and folk music were forced into radio programming and television but were completely ignored by the goal target market. It was the parents, rather than their children that consumed these music options (Doherty 45). Eventually, most companies conceded to the lasting power of rock n' roll, and with good reason. Rejecting the music that the younger generation craved meant losing out on the largest demand for music in history (Doherty 46).

Teens were dominating in their demands and companies appeared foolhardy to ignore it. Elvis had been handed a leg up because the more their parents spoke out against him, the more their children adored him. To the relief of many adults, Elvis' career as an actor and musician appeared short-lived, as in 1958 Elvis was drafted into the army, but his fame had no such limit. As James L. Neibaur wrote, "Elvis Presley's initial report to basic training was a media circus, with photographers and film crews on hand to witness the issuing of his uniform, his weighing in, and his army regulation haircut (53).” Ironically, at the conclusion of his service the older generation began to view him with respect, and his return to music and film came with an audience more advanced in age.
Fittingly, the entertainment industry found a way to exploit Presley's service in movies and television and, with *Bye Bye Birdie*, capitalize on the idea of the exploitation. The idolization of stars such as Elvis Presley and their rebellious status was easily marketable. Teen fans consumed magazines and memorabilia at every opportunity. *Bye Bye Birdie* is the theatrical version of the same media frenzy it addresses. Although there is a level of self-awareness in the script, the show is as much of a propaganda piece as the films, *Jailhouse Rock* or *Rebel Without a Cause*. *Bye Bye Birdie* manages to balance the two narratives between parents and their children. Songs like, "Kids" demonstrate the fear and frustration the adults felt at the thought of their child becoming one of those juvenile delinquents that listen to rock n' roll music, while their kids were able to see themselves in "Lot of Livin to Do," which exemplifies the attitudes shown in music, television, and movies.

Sitcoms served as both an ideal and a reflection of the modern household. So too did teen-targeted media reinforce the idea of the teen. *Bye Bye Birdie* points out the flaws in the industry while perpetuating them. It is an exaggerated take on the media portrayal of youth culture, and the machine that created it.
CHAPTER III

JOURNALS

October 25, 2017

With the conclusion of my most recent project, *Little Women: The Musical*, I am intent on an early start to my thesis project. To begin the process, I have requested a meeting with the director of *Bye Bye Birdie*. We worked together on *Little Women*, and I believe that it would be beneficial to reflect on *Little Women* and to discuss what can be improved upon for the process on *Bye Bye Birdie*. There were both successes and missteps on *Little Women*, and I believe that we can learn from the choices we made.

November 6, 2017

Melissa Rosenberger and I met today to discuss how we want to approach *Bye Bye Birdie* compared to our *Little Women* process. Although our first production meeting will not be until later this month, I felt that we had an opportunity to rigorously evaluate our previous experience and improve on it. We discussed that although Rosenberger had not received a color concept model for her other shows in her tenure at Minnesota State University, Mankato, it was a tool that both she and I would like to use in our next production together.

Rosenberger and I discussed the changes we had to make on *Little Women* and that they felt extremely rushed. Although quick decisions are a part of the theatre our
hope was to anticipate any potential issues early in the process. Rosenberger and I discussed the issue of finance and the economic choices to consider. The discussion eventually turned to our knowledge of the show, its reputation and the movie.

The other issue discussed during our meeting was the break down in the work of the props master on *Little Women*. The negative consequences of that experience were events that we both hoped to avoid on the next show. With two undergraduates assigned to the positions of props master and paint charge, we agreed that I should remain in close contact and step in where needed.

November 27, 2017

The production team met for the first time today. Our initial production meeting began with Rosenberger describing her thoughts on *Bye Bye Birdie*. She expressed that she wanted to produce a high energy show with lots of fun. The music will largely take the lead in the show as it is the most memorable to audience members. Many songs will be recognizable to the audience and it's important that on that front the show delivers. *Bye Bye Birdie* is about rock ‘n roll infecting a small town. Rosenberger would like to emphasize the idolization of Conrad Birdie and play into the comedic parts of it. Humor will be a crucial element of the show. To avoid reaching a lull, the comedy of the piece will need to be punched in between songs. While the set likely will not directly add to any jokes it will be important that it allows for the opportunity. There needs to be an intention of how the scenery shapes the space to allow for physical humor.
The setting will remain in 1958. This time period calls for bright colors and modern design. We want to present the idea of the 1950s, but also have fun with it. There are a few places in the script that show its age and focusing on those moments distracts from the story we would like to tell. However, Rosenberger likes the manicured and perfected look of the 1950s. She cited the coloring in *Edward Scissorhands* as an example. Though that movie was set in a different period, the idea gave a clear visual.

Rosenberger’s thoughts on the set gave me quite a bit of room to work creatively. This show will not require heavy details for each location, instead, it will need an anchor for each location. Moreover, there will need to be space for movement in quite a few scenes for dance numbers. Rosenberger would like to create levels without a monstrous set. Nothing needs to linger, because the scene shifts happen so quickly. Only the idea of the location is needed, the action will take care of the rest. The contextual information should be derived from the color and texture provided on stage.

Currently, Rosenberger is unlikely to use projections in the show. Though the script calls for them, she is unsure what they could add to the show. Additionally, she is considering ways to reduce the size of the cast. She also adds that the music will be tracked. Finally, the team agreed that there was no need to meet again until after the winter break. To keep the process moving Rosenberger and I agreed to meet privately before the break to discuss ideas for the set. Steven Smith, the Lighting Designer requested to be in attendance at the meeting.
December 4, 2017

The director and I met today to discuss some ideas I had about the set. Smith was unable to attend. I discussed the fact that I wanted to break away from the typical set up for "The Telephone Hour." Traditionally the kids appear awkwardly posed in odd sized, bright colored rectangles for the duration of the song. Although I am unsure of what way I would like to go about changing my design from that image, I know that I do not want this to be a repeat of every other production of Bye Bye Birdie.

We also discussed that we want to minimize the amount of scenery used. This show is about the music and the dancing. A concept I shared with Rosenberger was the prospect of modeling the scenery after television shows of the time period. I think that using their methods for creating levels and changing rooms would add an element of humor to some of the scene changes, and hopefully keep them quick.

As added support for the idea, I proposed the use of a false proscenium shaped like a television set. The existing proscenium is the structural framing arch of the stage. A false proscenium would either build on top of the existing structure or extend the current framework further into the staging area. By keeping this element in play throughout the show, we could play with the idea of the play itself being a television program. There is the opportunity for commercials to aid scene changes by using a projection screen as the grand drape.

Rosenberger and I left the meeting excited to consider the possibilities we could incorporate in this idea. I plan to work on exploring the ideas over the winter break. I will bring design sketches and research to the next production meeting.
December 20, 2017

After responding positively to my pitch, Rosenberger decided to make her approval official and informed the rest of the production team. We will be pursuing the concept of the television false proscenium. This will frame the border of the stage proscenium or opening with a cartoon style representation of a 1950's television. Directly behind the false proscenium will be the projection screen.

Smith emailed a response with some valid concerns about how this will affect lighting options. An issue with our space is the ability to effectively create front light. The three front light positions would have difficulty reaching the stage with the lower proscenium height. Nearly all other light is provided by instruments that are above the stage which cast downlight. By lowering the height of the proscenium, there are limitations for Smith. This would be especially problematic due to the potential for second story platforms on the set. Thankfully, Smith has given me some parameters to work within. He says that he would feel uncomfortable lowering it beyond eighteen feet.

January 8, 2018

I met with the Technical Director, George Grubb, in the Ted Paul Theatre tonight. We discussed the feasibility of my idea of the television false proscenium. Grubb suggested that keeping the false proscenium in front of the true proscenium would be more effective. After our conversation, I am confident it is achievable without interference in the ability to light the show. I left the meeting feeling confident in the next step of the process. To see the false proscenium rendering reference figure 2.5.
January 11, 2018

With the confirmation of projections being incorporated into the show, the director decided to open our second production meeting with her thoughts on that element. She is open to using video to enhance the show but is aware of the amount of work that would go into that type of project. As of now, there is a heavy consideration for still imagery. She also expressed a desire for all of the projections to be in black and white. Rosenberger also stated that although she was unsure how to achieve this effect, she liked the idea of the opening scene presented in black and white. She likes the idea of arriving at Sweet Apple, Ohio and seeing an explosion of color. We discussed the fact that even with makeup, once the actors open their mouths there will be color on stage. Additionally, to create set pieces that are entirely in greyscale would eliminate the ability to reuse them later in the show. This would add more cost and detract from our goal of reducing scenery. A suggestion made by David McCarl, the Costume Designer was to film that scene in advance. By working it into the projections it could add emphasis to the zany events in Sweet Apple. This would have a considerable impact on costumes and our rehearsal schedule.

January 18, 2017

At today’s production meeting Rosenberger confirmed the plan to move forward with filming the first scene of the show. She informed us of her research into film and music of the time. The idea of adults changing channels resonated with how she
envisioned the opening sequence. As the introduction or reintroduction to the 1950s, the opening projections set the tone.

As a group, we discussed some of the small pieces of the set. The train station is a location that the director anticipates will need multiple levels. We talked about incorporating a set of columns at Penn Station that could eventually be reused. However, the identifying element of that location will be the clock. Nearly all images of Penn Station from the time period either feature the clock on purpose or include it in the framing of the subject. Smith expressed the desire to have it made of muslin to create the opportunity for backlighting.

In looking forward to the quick transition from Penn Station to Sweet Apple, OH Station, we discussed small changes. Potentially using different benches or using news kiosks that can easily roll on and off, to highlight the high occupancy to low occupancy. Another idea I proposed to the group was the use of balloons in the sweet apple crowd scenes. This would give the group some filler that wouldn't require a larger chorus.

Additionally, Grubb shared with the group that there are a couple of arch drop pieces. I am interested in what pieces we may have in stock, as it is quickly becoming clear how small our modified budget truly is compared to the projected budget. After a brief discussion with Grubb indicating that the set really has approximately half the projected budget to work with, I naturally went into restructuring mode. Grubb had stated that the budget concerns were not my problem, but I fundamentally disagree. While working as a scenic artist, I consistently encountered designers that appeared
ignorant to the financial constraints of the show. Just as consistently major issues arose due to a lack of funds standing in the way.

Given the constraints of the funding for *Bye Bye Birdie*, I found myself reconsidering my design after a conversation with John Paul. Shortly after my chat with Grubb, my weekly advisee meeting with Paul provoked an interesting thought. Originally, I had attempted to design the show with a minimal second story. However, I was still worried that we were building too much. While walking my advisor through the challenges we were facing on this show, Paul suggested that the staircases used in his design for *Ragtime* could potentially be reused for *Bye Bye Birdie*, as they were a similar height to the second story needed in the MacAfee home. From that point, the idea slowly crept into my design to reuse nearly the entire *Ragtime* set. See *Ragtime* drafting in figure 1.10.

It was this idea that I presented at today's production meeting. With this plan, we would reuse the units to create multiple locations. I applied that concept to every piece looking for ways that we could reuse every unit that came on stage. There seemed to be little in the way of opposition to this idea. With the thumbs up I am reworking the design to incorporate this plan.

February 1, 2018

Last week's production meeting was canceled due to the majority of the production team's members attendance at the regional Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, myself included. The gap in our meeting schedule left us with a lot to
discuss. Rosenberger confirmed that she will be moving into the next phase on filming. She is looking for a location and would like to do it earlier rather than later.

We also talked again about how to present Sweet Apple Train Station versus Penn Station. It might be that we are over thinking it. That scene will call for a bench and some type of indication that they are stepping off a different platform. And there will also need to be something leading to the tracks. Rosenberger suggested an anchoring set piece to make it appear more "hometown," like a tree.

Another set of scenes the group discussed was the sequence of events that take place at Maude's. We discussed that there will need to be a door on one wall to be the entrance into the backroom. Then for the Shriners' Ballet, in the back room, the circumstances of the scene will require a table that will seat seven. Macaria Meza, the props master, and I have agreed to brainstorm the solution for the table. The table will need to be sturdy enough for people to dance on, but we would like to avoid adding to the unnecessary cost of building the table, if possible.

Rosenberger committed to a cast size of thirty-seven. Given the large cast, we have chosen to rely primarily on actors to execute scene changes and will only supplement with stagehands. This will hopefully avoid breaking the fourth wall with stagehands in stage blacks without adding more costumes to the show. This large cast has also slightly changed Rosenberger's plans for the song, "Lot of Livin to Do." She would like to keep the stage bare for the dance sequence.
February 7, 2017

Rosenberger emailed me on Monday to ask about the ability to create the illusion of a hallway on the second story. This seemingly small request has sent me into a bit of a tailspin. I met with Rosenberger and later Grubb and ended up reworking the shape of my design into something I prefer. An unintended consequence of reusing the *Ragtime* set is the extremely square appearance it gave to the set. This has set me back a bit in drafting and rendering, but I know it will be worth it.

February 8, 2018

The very recent changes I have made to the design were not ready to present at today's meeting. Everyone was understanding, and we looked at the renderings I was able to present. The renderings were fairly well received with the exception of the "Telephone Hour" drop. The colors that I presented had dried with a bit more intensity than I had anticipated. It was agreed that the colors should be muted. See the renderings in figures 2.1 through 2.5.

February 11, 2018

I set out this weekend with the goal of completing the drafting for the set. However, early Saturday I realized that there was a sightline complication created with changes that were made to the set. I decided to email Rosenberger and Grubb right away and to focus on drafting the scenery unrelated to the house while waiting for their responses. Today Rosenberger and I had a helpful email exchange leading to us solving
the problem with prop placement and blocking adjustments. I think that we both are satisfied with the changes. I have also emailed Grubb to inform him that I will be sharing the updated drafting with him as soon as I have made the adjustments.

February 16, 2018

Rosenberger met with Ryan Sturgis today to discuss the expectations for filming. Sturgis plans to donate his labor and the resources of his video production company, True Façade Pictures, for *Bye Bye Birdie*. I am excited at the elevated quality his support will bring to the project. I, myself, am not experienced in filming and would have been out of my depth on this project.

Sturgis has also volunteered his home for a set location. According to Rosenberger, there will be quite a few benefits to filming in that space. First and foremost is the amount of control had by the crew. The obvious familiarity with the location will allow Sturgis to plan the angles and shots he would like to achieve. Also, we will have the ability to preset the space. Rosenberger gave me a list of props she believes will add to the space and give it an appropriate look.

February 19, 2018

At today’s first rehearsal of *Bye Bye Birdie*, I shared my designs with the cast. It was refreshing hearing their excitement over our plans for the set and the different ideas we have created. A lot of the cast are seniors working on their last show at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and I hope that we can give them a fun final experience.
February 20, 2018

Due to a personal complication, I was unable to attend today's production meeting. I was to present my color elevations with the adjustments made to the set. So, I opted to put all the elevations in the shared Dropbox, an online file sharing resource, and am meeting with the director separately. See the elevations in figures 3.1 through 3.11.

February 22, 2018

The props master and I are running into an issue over what we would like to see on stage versus what is in the university stock. The number called the "Shriner Ballet" involves a dance across a table that seats seven people. Meza and I have had difficulty finding a suitable table of this size. Additionally, we have found the perfect bench for one of our train scenes, but the scene calls for two. It is a difficult bench to replicate and will be rather time-consuming. I am hoping there is an alternative solution to building a replica.

February 27, 2018

In today's production meeting we were able to start talking in terms of functionality and detail. We discussed seating in the ice house unit as well as the benches and bar stools needed for the show. The team also went over the plan for filming and made sure that we had everything lined up.
March 2, 2018

The film shoot had to be postponed today because the lead actress, Delanie Wiedrich, is ill. Moving forward, the plan is to resume filming tomorrow. We will still assemble the set today. This should leave us in a position to work efficiently tomorrow.

March 3, 2018

The events of the day have been long, but successful. I started by heading over to the film site at noon to help with set up. With everything in place and the actors prepped the team was only slightly behind schedule. Wiedrich and Gabriel Sell rehearsed and did several walk-throughs of the scene. By early afternoon we started filming.

My presence was not strictly necessary, but I made myself useful whenever possible and kept an eye out for any notable continuity errors. I also helped by resetting everything after each take. Even with all our preparation, filming took four times as long as we anticipated. Still, I am confident that we will have an exciting product. Wiedrich and Sell were patient throughout the process and focused on remaining consistent with their performances. The procedure of filming was a new experience, but I believe we all handled it well. I can not wait to see the final product. See figures 4.3 and 4.4.

March 9, 2018

This past week was Minnesota State University, Mankato's spring break. During the break, the paint charge, Brittny Hollenbeck, and I worked on several projects for the show. With the help of some wonderful volunteers, we painted the "Telephone Hour"
drop. Then later in the week, I began the process of starching our two drops for *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The process of starching a drop is simply working starch into the fabric of the drop to prep the surface of the drop for paint. Starching helps to bind the fibers of the muslin drop together and prevent overabsorption of the paint leading to shrinking. I have held off on pushing farther forward because I would like Hollenbeck to have the experience of working with a muslin drop. See figure 4.2.

March 14, 2018

At today's production meeting we caught up on where the set was at in the construction process. All the drops have been completed with paint but require additional work, construction wise. To support the two small Ed Sullivan drops, bases are in the construction process, and the "Telephone Hour" drop needs assembly. We also discussed the issue that arose with the "Telephone Hour" drop. Grubb had planned to complete the assembly of the drop with foam and glue, unfortunately, the glue has not been delivered. Ideally, the drop pieces would move directly from their current position tacked to the floor into assembly. The compromise that was reached was that the pieces that are on stage would be removed, but that everyone would anticipate the eventual disruption of rehearsal when the glue eventually did arrive.

We also discussed moving the MacAfee home further upstage as a possibility. The fear is that during the very crowded "Ed Sullivan" number, there will not be enough room for the entire cast. I agreed to find out the effect this change would have on the sightlines. The last thing we discussed was the final scene of act one. Rosenberger has
reduced the number of moving objects during the Ed Sullivan Television scene in the show. This is a relief. Meza and I were having difficulty finding appropriate items for the scene.

March 19, 2018

I met with the director and stage manager today to look at how the set pieces interact with each other now that they exist physically. It is one thing to show the concept with the model and another to actually move the pieces into place. I had been a little anxious about all of the required movement of the pieces when I changed the approach to the set to involve all of these moving pieces. So, when the rehearsal reports posted with questions about how things lined up, I wanted to forestall any issues. After meeting to discuss it, the problem appears to be less significant than anticipated. All that was needed was some clarification on the placement of each unit. I hope that with practice the cast will be comfortable with the shifts.

However, an obstacle for the actors and crew is the lack of completed scenery. Props have been consistently making progress and Meza has done an excellent job at delivering on the items that are needed most. The set production has not been moving as quickly. This is partly due to the technical director's absence March 12th through the 16th for The United States Institute for Theatre Technology Conference. Although Grubb left a list of tasks for the shop to continue their work, more could have been accomplished as those tasks were completed earlier in the week. Student staff were then unable to continue progress without further instructions.
Another issue that has become apparent is the quality of the set pieces. Though structurally sound, the appearance of many units is less than satisfying. One problematic area of the set pieces are the large gaps in the facing on nearly every unit. Additionally, the Maude's units have an inconsistency in height as well as a slight bow. To improve the appearance of the set, adjustments will need to be made to correct these imperfections.

When I discussed these problems with Grubb, he agreed to fix the seams himself with joint compound by mudding the seams. This involves layering joint compound into the opening and around it to create a smooth sandable and paint ready surface. He said that he could do this but was unsure of which set pieces the treatment could be applied. This hesitation was due to the fact that some units needed to remain as clean raw lumber for the paint techniques that were to be used. I pointed out which units could be properly mudded and painted to hide it.

Grubb indicated at this time that he disagreed with the decision to economize by repurposing the *Ragtime* set because it required adding lumber to a metal frame. He felt that the gaps in those units were unavoidable and a direct result of that design choice. Although he admitted that debating about incorporating the *Ragtime* set into the *Bye Bye Birdie* design after the fact was not going to solve anything, and he should have been in production meetings to voice this opinion before the construction of the set began. I personally disagree with him on the method of construction. I have had several opportunities in my previous experience that involved metal framed structures faced with luan. I believe that the units could have been completed with fewer gaps and
inconsistencies which would have avoided the need for corrections post construction. I hope that our discussion will lead to the necessary improvements to advance progress on the set.

March 21, 2018

We started out today's production meeting by talking through where we are with projections. The team lead by Sturgis is in the final stages of editing. Sell and Wiedrich are going back to clean up some audio issues on the recording, but we are expecting the finished product soon. Another option we are considering is filming a second moment at the end of the first act. This would not be done professionally, but instead would be filmed by Rosenberger. The plan would be to film from the line "…you're not alone, you're on T.V." That line is delivered by the character Rosie right before she leaves Albert to clean up the mess on The Ed Sullivan Show. This scene involves a large portion of the cast and will work best if we do it during a regularly scheduled rehearsal. It is likely that the best time would be during first dress rehearsal, assuming that costumes are in a good place.

One change we talked about for the set was removing the railing from Kim's second story room. After we talked it through, we realized that we would be able to maintain safety by placing furniture pieces that will help support the actors on that platform. Additionally, Grubb had offered a solution for the tables this week. While in the production meeting he remembered a table that would work for the Shriners scene.
March 23, 2018

Rosenberger and I have compiled all our found footage for the opening television sequence. We have a bit more than we need and will need to reduce it to our favorite movements. Our goal with for this portion of the show is not only to tie in the television element but also to set the mood for the audience. The 1950s can seem like a whole other world, especially to the younger members of our audience. It is our hope that this will prep them for the language and behaviors that were common at the time. We also think that it will be a fun way to introduce *Bye Bye Birdie* and transition into the filmed first scene.

One of the projections I have been working on is an opening credits scene. Rosenberger and I agreed that it could be fun to do the turn and smile look that was popular for introductions in the 1950s. We are planning to film these little moments while publicity photos are taken. The four leads will already be in costume and it should be a quickly completed task. The next step will be timing it to the overture. It is all coming together to be something cute. I think the audiences will love it.

March 25, 2018

I am starting to get a bit nervous about the number of projects reaching completion on the set. Meza has been doing well with props, and I have been helping where I can. Hollenbeck and I have had a conversation about her progress. As a developing paint charge she has a lot of potential and I would like her to gain confidence
and cultivate her skill throughout this experience. She has asked me to assist her and I of course agreed and have begun taking on more projects with Hollenbeck.

However, I am still not seeing enough forward progress on the set to give me confidence. Some of the major set pieces we are missing include the "Telephone Hour" drop, the kitchen wall, the television false proscenium, and Maude's bar. By extension, there are also several units that are built but are not completed to the point at which paint can be applied. This week we go into technical rehearsals and the set needs to be in a better position.

March 28, 2018

Rosenberger and I filmed the two-second intro videos tonight at rehearsal. I think that they are going to be a great addition to the opener. They will be added to the opening credits in the opening television sequence. We will be looking to have everything compiled for the opening sequence in the next day or so.

There are still a lot of set units that I am waiting to get paint on. A lot of these units require detail work. Missing pieces of the set continued to be delayed leaving less time available to finesse them, which means a lower quality product. Compounding this problem is that the general paint budget has exhausted its annual contingency. I have compromised on many colors on the show to utilize the options we have in stock. Even with these color adjustments the original design still comes through. I am hopeful that there will be a big push from the scene shop in the next few days and that I will have the opportunity to finish the remaining paintwork this weekend.
March 30, 2018

The set has had a major setback today. Going into technical rehearsals, the set still needed quite a bit of work. One of the units expressly needed was the "Telephone Hour" drop. The completion of this drop was needed for actors and the lighting designer's focus. While the drop had been painted for weeks, the assembly had only recently begun. Finally, the drop was set to be hung this afternoon.

In the last minutes of the day, Grubb and all available shop staff gathered around the drop and began raising it up to its full eighteen-foot height. It was about two thirds of the way up when it became clear that the top was bending back in a way that was not working and was potentially unsafe. Conceding that they would be unable to hang the drop this way, Grubb ordered the group to bring the unit back down. The drop was brought down faster than expected catching a student underneath. Thankfully the materials were light, and the student wasn't hurt.

Due to the fact that *Bye Bye Birdie's* first technical rehearsal was set to begin in an hour and the drop was resting on stage, the drop required disassembly and re-evaluation in order to adjust for the structural issues. Instead of taking a more detailed approach to the deconstruction, which would have maintained the integrity of the materials, Grubb chose a method that damaged the drop. The technical director instructed the students to break apart the pieces with their feet. In the process, pieces were broken, there were footprints on the painted side, and all the pieces were left with jagged edges. After the crew completed the break down into small enough pieces, they moved the drop to the slightly lowered orchestra pit. See figure 4.7.
April 1, 2018

This weekend Meza, Hollenbeck, and I made a big push to finish everything we could. April Reed and Henry Anderson also assisted us. The focus was on projects for paint and props that we could bring to completion. Notably absent, however, was the technical director and the shop crew. The lack of progress made in carpentry stunted progress, as many surfaces were not prepped for paint or had not been built yet. The kitchen does not have any cabinets. Maude's bar is missing. The "Telephone Hour" drop remains in the pit. Rosenberger is rightfully frustrated with the situation. As it stands, we are not giving the actors enough time to practice with the scenery. Rosenberger said that she expected the cabinets and the drop to be ready by Monday's rehearsal.

When I approached Grubb about the areas of concern, he said that he would start on Monday. I explained the current status of the set to Rosenberger, and she encouraged me to concentrate on the responsibilities that I can manage and to leave the carpentry to Grubb. As time runs out, I have begun to look for corners that can be cut. With only three days left before we have an audience, it is unlikely the set will have the desired level of completion.

April 2, 2018

This morning I set up a meeting with Paul J. Hustoles to discuss the status of the show. I explained the mishap with the drop, and how far behind the scene shop had become. The drop as I explained to him to the best of my knowledge, could only be redone at the cost of all new lumber and utilizing every skilled painter we have in the
department. After I had finished catching him up with *Bye Bye Birdie's* shortcomings he asked what he could do to help. I replied that I needed permission from him to work in the school after eleven at night, the curfew for the building. I also told him that I would need extra help with paint in the coming days and that I would appreciate any help that he can send my way.

I had also shared these sentiments with Rosenberger and my classmate, Reed. Both women decided to go out of their way to share my situation with the students in the theatre and dance program. This afternoon, I was humbled by the response I received. Several students came in to help with paint today, and many more expressed their interest in coming in later in the week. In the two years that I have been in this program, I have never seen anything like it. I am so grateful to these students for going the extra mile. I hope that everything will come together, and we can give them a show they deserve.

By the end of the workday, progress had definitely been made in paint. After rehearsal, I stayed only to work on the details. Some of the painting that remains requires advanced skills and comfort working with heights. As I am comfortable working in those conditions, I volunteered to finish those projects. It is not a problem for me to take on these tasks, it just means that I must do them at a time that I am not overseeing the less experienced workers.

Carpentry did not match the progress made in paint and props. Neither of Rosenberger's requests to have the drop and the kitchen cabinets ready for tonight's final dress rehearsal were met. There was an effort to hang the portions of the drop, and it was a relief to see that progress. However, Rosenberger expressed that if the drop was not
completely up by tomorrow, it would likely have to be cut. This would be an incredible
disappointment. That moment in the show is iconic, and to leave the stage barren would
completely shake the audience out of the moment. I am hopeful that we will have the
drop by tomorrow.

April 4, 2018

We have our first audience today with the majors' preview, set aside for students
within the program to see the show. The set still isn't where I would like it to be. The
drop does exist, but it is missing a lot of the physical trim that helped shape the look. The
look of the drop is also inadequate. Currently, it is in a state that is completely unfixable
with mere paint touch-ups. The repairs on the structure have not returned it to its
previously smooth surface. The kitchen cabinets are also in rough shape. They must be
finished in time to be painted tomorrow. I decided for the sake of clarity to give the
technical director a list of priorities for tomorrow in the order of their importance.
Tomorrow is our last chance to get it right.

April 5, 2018

The day started out well with the technical director responding positively to the
structured list. However, communication broke down later in the day. One of the notes
was a request to close off the bottom right cabinet. This note had confused him because
originally there had been a shelf in that location. The day before I had cut the shelf due
to time constraints. Hoping to focus on the most important tasks of the day I pointed out
that it was the highest priority to have the drop reach completion. The technical director explained that he had people to work on the cabinet. I reiterated that the drop must be the top priority for the day. Grubb was not entirely receptive to my explanation of the priorities shared by the director and myself at the time. To end this conversation, I told him not to worry about the base cabinet, that I would take care of it.

Reaching the point of the drop nearing completion we started to run into another problem. Because the drop's initial painting had occurred weeks prior, some of the colors had gotten lost in the shuffle. I had to mix several colors moments before handing them to a painter. Not all of them were perfect matches, but they were acceptable from the audience. By the end of the day, the drop looked as good as it could under the circumstances. Admittedly, it still appeared a little crushed, and I did not have the time to paint out the footprints. Thankfully they were not visible more than a few rows back in the seats.

I watched tonight's preview and the audience seemed to really enjoy it. The acting was delightful and funny. The projections went over well. The television false proscenium worked to set the mood of the show. Although the scene shifts were shaky, the set served its purpose. I know that I have done all that I can.

April 14, 2018

Tonight, the show closed and was struck. I am happy to have had the experience of doing this show with this cast and crew. Now that the process is at an end I know that I have grown from this opportunity.
CHAPTER IV

POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the designer will compare the initial concept expressed in the first chapter's pre-production analysis and the realization of the project. The realized set design will be examined for quality and achievement, as well as the success of this designer's goals.

From the beginning, Melissa Rosenberger's concept for *Bye Bye Birdie* was fun and music. All other elements were intended to support those ideas. In that endeavor, the show was a definite success. The audiences reacted positively, and most performances ended in standing ovations.

The set supported Rosenberger's concept by providing a variety of opportunities for levels and space for dance numbers. One such success was the movement of Maude's set pieces as they shifted from one area of the bar to the next. The transitions, while a bit slower than ideal, were certainly smoother than they would have been without the rotation of the units. Moreover, the use of the tables worked incredibly well. Another success of the set's flexibility was the number "A lot of Livin to Do." The ability to remove all of the scenery left the entire stage open for dance opportunities. Rosenberger was able to make a fun large group dance that looked great from all angles.
Humor was boosted by well-placed props and smaller set pieces. The Sweet Apple train station had a ticket book with a sign that said, "Gone Fishin." The tightness of the MacAfee home added to the humor of the entire neighborhood invading their house for "A Hymn for Sunday Evening." Kim's room was plastered with posters and Conrad Birdie Memorabilia. Macaria Meza found quality props to incorporate into the design. The golden key to the city was nearly three feet long. Most importantly the actors were able to play with the set and push for the jokes.

Another factor that had an impact on the design was the budget. The 2017-2018 season at Minnesota State University, Mankato was filled with large sets. *Bye Bye Birdie*, being the last show of the season, felt the strain of a depleted set, paint and prop budget. The designer is not allowed access to the budgeted expenditures and cannot say whether the set was able to keep costs down or not. It can be said however that the design kept monetary concerns in mind, and in each choice tried to keep costs as low as possible.

The reuse of the Ragtime set certainly had some drawbacks. The shape of the set was pre-determined by using the boxy set pieces. Moreover, the size of the set increased beyond what was originally desired. Some of these issues are side effects of other choices, but the build of the show perhaps would have gone smoother without a pre-existing structure. There are many positives to that design choice, however. The cast was able to receive those set pieces earlier and become more comfortable with them. Having each unit fitted with casters ahead of time saved on labor. The design met its function and worked as units that were able to be repurposed.
The areas in which this designer had more control, were fiscally tight. Props came in under the reduced budget. Early on, the stringent budget created both a challenge and a goal. Within those confines, unique solutions were considered. All props that could be pulled and fixed in-house were. Free options were sought out, like the telephones that were lent to the show. When the money did have to be spent it was tightly controlled. The stools for Maude's bar room had proved to be difficult to find. Those that were available were far too high in cost. By modifying cheaper self-assembly stools, the props budget saved several hundred dollars.

Additionally, paint tried to use only the colors available and many were reused. The show proved to be fun and bubbly. One of the ways this was reflected in the set was the color scheme. It reflected the color palette common in the time period and was consistent throughout the show. The house was mostly in yellows, greys, and teal. This color choice was also reflected in the television false proscenium, and the MacAfee home in the "Telephone Hour" drop was yellow. The courthouse was shades of grey and teal. The ice house also was comprised of yellow and grey. The only instances that strayed from this color scheme were colored differently with purpose. An example being the patriotic drops on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

One last way costs were reduced was the choice to film the first scene of the show. That choice spared the production from creating a separate set that would never be seen again. Plus, True Façade Pictures was generous enough to donate their services. Overall, filming was a total success. Although the process was long, and the end product wasn't perfect, the audience responded positively to it. The television idea was a
response to the script and worked well with the director's concept. It gave a shape both to the set itself and to the story that was being told. Filming the first scene and prepping the audience with the commercials and introduction helped draw them into the world we wanted them to enjoy. The only aspect of the projections that felt lacking was the fact that there was nothing to draw the audience back in after intermission.

Another area in need of improvement was the construction of the set. Part of producing a show at Minnesota State University, Mankato is understanding the limitation of the labor provided. In an attempt to make the build process smoother and less costly this designer chose to reuse existing structures, but that choice had consequences of its own. Although the design choice had a logic to it, it neglected to take into account the skills of those involved. The technical director stated that facing a steel structure with luan was difficult. As the most experienced carpenter in the scene shop, he is likely to best be able to execute the choice. Unskilled students learning the craft of construction are often employed to fashion the units of the set at this university. The technical director's hesitancy to build the set with these specific sets of challenges may be attributed to the inexperience of the workers available. Unfortunately, his concerns were expressed too late in the process.

It is important to note, that although there was a major issue with bad seams on the reused *Ragtime* units, brand new units such as the Maude's units were also lacking correct construction. So much so that the two pieces that were meant to fit together perfectly, instead had a one-inch gap between them. The doors on the units were found at
the last minute and proved to be an issue throughout the run of the show. Lastly, these same units that included absolutely no steel had seams with equally unacceptable gaps.

The biggest issue in process seemed to be communication. From early on there was a problem with attendance at production meetings on the part of the technical director. Additionally, although this designer was readily available there were few instances that problem-solving on the set involved a conversation between the technical director and set designer. Frequently there were conflicts when this designer asked for something to be improved or changed to more closely reflect the design.

On the whole, the design itself was in line with the desire of the director. Working with the goal of fun in mind was inspiring. It can be easy to get bogged down with trying to make everything perfect. Bringing something fun and different to the stage is a privilege that is not afforded every design. With the project's requirements met, this designer feels proud of the show's achievements. This designer looks forward to implementing what she has learned in future projects.
CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

The fifth chapter will examine the growth of this designer. The first focus will be on previous professional experience as a theatre artist. The following will be the development and improvement made while at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Finally, this designer will assess how the completion of their Master of Fine Arts will propel them forward in their future pursuits.

The first spark of interest in the theatre for this designer was at the age of ten at Chanhassen Dinner Theater’s production of Oklahoma. From the experience of that one production, a connection with the art form began to grow, through which avenues of theatre to explore was unclear. High school offered a limited introduction to theatre work, but the primary source of involvement was acting.

It wasn’t until enrolling at South Dakota State University that a direction began to become clear. While working on a Bachelor of Science in Theatre many new experiences were available. This designer was involved with every aspect of theatre from lighting to acting. However, her primary interest focused on scenic painting. Quick to understand the techniques, this designer was given many opportunities to work on painting projects and before long took the lead as the paint charge. Moreover, the shows produced required plenty of paintwork allowing for chances to improve her skills.
Upon graduation, this designer was accepted into the Milwaukee Repertory Theater Scenic Painting Internship program. Guided by Jim Medved, new skills were developed, and old skills were improved. At Milwaukee Rep, the interns were treated as a part of the team. Work was done alongside the professionals and their finished product would be on stage for the completed production. Throughout the nine-month season, the scenic painting team polished this designer's talents to pursue a career as a professional scenic artist.

Immediately following the internship, this designer found work at Iowa Summer Rep. The University of Iowa sponsored the company. Working as part of a six-member team was a broadening experience in terms of what a group of that size could accomplish. The painters worked together on three theatre productions and an opera over two short months.

After a year, Geva Theater Center in Rochester, NY hired this designer. Apollo Weaver was looking for an Assistant Charge Artist for the upcoming season. Accepting this job changed the trajectory of this designer's career. Working there presented opportunities to interact with some impressive theatre professionals as well as work on challenging shows. At Geva Theater Center this designer was able to produce her first professional shows as the charge artist, Tinker to Evers to Chance and The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee.

After working as the scenic charge artist at Chautauqua Theater Company that following summer, this designer began looking into the possibility of scene design.
Having so quickly turned to scenic painting during undergraduate school, there were gaps in the necessary skills. It became clear that the best option would be to go back to school to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Scene Design at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The first semester was a hectic transition from working professionally to the world of academics. Within weeks the first set design for the designer was underway. 

*Frankenstein 1930* was being directed by Heather Hamilton and featured the interesting concepts of being an all-female production performed in the round. Unaware until it was too late, the responsibilities of paint charge and props master also became the responsibility of the set designer. Having never worked under similar circumstances, including the added responsibility of puppet designer, the process was a bit overwhelming. Hamilton, who was confident in the minimalism of the set had suggested that it would be a good opportunity for the set designer to build the puppet of Frankenstein's Monster.

One of the more frustrating aspects of the design process was the paperwork. The tools that one uses to communicate with the design team were not yet ready from the designer. Drafting and rendering techniques were still in the developing stages and needed drastic work before they could be useful. These novice skills were addressed in the Scene Design I class, and this designer worked to improve them. Thankfully by the time the next set design went into production significant development was evident. 

While *The Library* was in production, this designer was enrolled in Scene Design II. While in the advanced level scene design course, projects assigned had the intent to push skills to the next level. Additionally, this designer had the support of a props master and
a paint charge for The Library. There was clearer communication between the director and the set designer and a strong vision came through into the final product.

*Little Women: The Musical* saw an improvement in communication due to significantly better drafting. After reading several books on drafting this designer was able to improve the ability to communicate her vision of the set. However, there is room for improvement in terms of speed and accuracy. Also, by the time *Little Women: The Musical*’s production process began this designer had completed the Scene Design I, Scene Design II, and Drawing and Rendering Classes at Minnesota State University, Mankato. These classes provided added experience with the support and guidance of professors John Paul and David McCarl. Specifically, they focused on the tools needed to communicate design concepts, and as a result, this designer has seen improvement.

Classes like Dramaturgy and Theater History II taught by Hamilton and Director Designer Communication taught by Paul J. Hustoles, emphasized the importance of research. Dramaturgy focused on the overarching concept of the show, while Theater History II gave historical context to the shows produced. Director Designer Communication touched on how to explain research and concepts to the entire design team.

In the spring semester, while working on *Bye Bye Birdie*, this designer was also concurrently attending the Drafting class. Although many of the skills learned in the class could not be applied to the show because of when the paperwork was due, many of the early classes helped simplify what this designer already knew. This class taught by
George Grubb has since helped take this designer to a new level of drafting with the concept of 3D drafting. Another class that directly influenced the design for *Bye Bye Birdie* was Styles and Ornamentation. The class focused on the evolution of art and architecture, and so much more. Taught by Paul, this designer learned to really examine the products we use every day. When looking at the 1950s this proved to be very useful.

Finally, that spring semester gave this designer a chance to learn about the financial side of the theatre from Hustoles in Theatre Management. This class, though more focused on administrative management, was immediately applicable when dealing with the financial constraints of the show. Additionally, this semester was a review in the theatre history in the Theatre History I class, also taught by Hustoles.

The experience of this designer as a scenic artist was also used twofold. First in the co-teaching of the Scenic Painting class. Second, while working in the paint and props area of the assistantship provided by the university. Through these opportunities, skills are shared with those from diverse backgrounds. Another part of the assistantship is the scene shop. This work has supplied an opportunity to improve carpentry and welding skills. All these experiences can provide opportunities to perfect teaching capacities.

In choosing to attend Minnesota State University, Mankato's theatre program, this designer has set her career on a path toward becoming a successful set designer. Over the remaining semesters, there will be major improvements and milestones. Graduate school affords the time to focus and hone skills for the future. The goals for this designer of
better drafting and rendering, better communication, and a portfolio that highlights her skills are all achievable in this program. Through hard work, at graduation, this designer will be ready to re-enter the workforce as a set designer.
APPENDIX A

DRAFTING

Figure 1.1: GROUND PLAN IN ACT I SCENES III, VII, AND ACT I SCENE I
(Not to Scale)
Figure: 1.2: MAUDE’S UNITS
(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.3: TELEPHONE HOUR DROP
(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.4: TELEPHONE HOUR DROP
(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.5: MACAEEF KITCHEN

(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.6: COURT HOUSE AND MACAFEE HOUSE
(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.7: MACAFEE HOUSE AND PHONE BOOTH
(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.8: ICE HOUSE AND SMALL PIECES
(Not to Scale)
Figure: 1.9: TELEVISION FALSE PROSCINEUM
(Not to Scale)
Figure 1.10: SET PIECES ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY JOHN PAUL FOR RAGTIME,
DRAFTED BY JARED SOFTSTALL
(Not to Scale)
APPENDIX B
RENDERINGS

Figure 2.1: MAUDE’S UNITS

Figure 2.2: MACAFEE HOUSE
Figure 2.3: ICE HOUSE AND COURT HOUSE

Figure 2.4: TELEPHONE HOUR DROP
Figure 2.5: TELEVISION FALSE PROSCINEUM
APPENDIX C

PAINT ELEVATIONS

Figure 3.1: MAUDE’S WALLS

Figure 3.2: MAUDE’S WALLS
Figure 3.4: MACAFEE KITCHEN

Figure 3.5: MACAFEE LIVING ROOM
Figure 3.8 TELEPHONE HOUR DROP

Figure 3.11: MAUDE’S SIGN

APPENDIX D
PROCESS PHOTOS

Figure 4.1: CONCEPT SKETCH TELEPHONE HOUR DROP

Figure 4.2: TELEPHONE HOUR DROP READY FOR PAINT
Figure 4.3: FILMING SCENE I OF *BYE BYE BIRDIE*

Figure 4.4: SET DRESSING ON FILMING SET
Figure 4.5: PENN STATION CLOCK IN PROCESS

Figure 4.6 ED SULLIVAN DROPS IN PROCESS
Figure 4.7: TELEPHONE HOUR DROP POST COMPLICATIONS
APPENDIX E

PRODUCTION PHOTOS

All Photos taken by Erin Wegleitner unless otherwise credited.

Figure 5.1: TELEVISION FALSE PRO

Figure 5.2: "TELEPHONE HOUR"
Figure 5.3: MACAFEE HOME

Figure 5.4: KIM’S BEDROOM (Photo Credit Amanda Dyslin)
Figure 5.5: MAUDE’S BAR SIDE AND TELEPHONE BOOTH

Figure 5.6: MAUDE’S SHRINER’S SIDE
Figure 5.7: MAUDE’S EXTERIOR

Figure 5.8 THE ICE HOUSE
Figure 5.9: SWEET APPLE TRAINSTATION (Photo Credit Amanda Dyslin)

Figure 5.10: PENN STATION
Figure 5.11: COURTHOUSE

Figure 5.12: THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED


