Creating the World of Newsies: The Musical

Benjamin Kramer

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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CREATING THE WORLD OF

NEWSIES: THE MUSICAL

by

BENJAMIN KRAMER

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

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
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CREATING THE WORLD OF NEWSIES: THE MUSICAL

Benjamin J. Kramer

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the students committee:

Examining Committee:

_________________________________________
John D. Paul

_________________________________________
Paul J. Hustoles

_________________________________________
George Grubb

_________________________________________
Steven Smith

_________________________________________
Rachael Hanel
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I would like to thank my family for their support during my pursuit of a career in theatre. Beyond those are the people who inspired me to reach this level in my education and the pursuit of my love for theatrical design and the impact it can have.

Frank M. Pope.

Timothy Case

Steven L. Beckel

John D. Paul
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This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts Degree in theatre.  It is a detailed account of the author Benjamin Kramer’s artistic process in producing the scenic design for Minnesota State University, Mankato’s production of Newsies: The Musical in the fall of 2019.  The thesis chronicles the scenic designer’s artistic process beginning with an early production until the end of performances in five chapters: early production analysis, historical and critical perspective, journals, post production analysis and process development. Appendices and works cited and consulted are included.
CHAPTER I

EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS.

This initial chapter will discuss the early production analysis of *Newsies: the Musical*. The show will be performed in the Ted Paul theatre at Minnesota State University, Mankato from September 26-29 & October 2-6, 2019. This production will be directed by Paul Hustoles. George Grubb will serve as both sound designer and technical director, and the costume design will be created by David McCarl. The lighting design will be the work of Steve Smith. B.F.A. candidate Natasha Singh will take on the role of production stage manager for the run of the production. The scenic design will be the work of MFA candidate Benjamin J. Kramer.

In this first chapter the scenic designer will discuss the general plot of the script and lay out their artistic goals for the scenic design of the production. Additionally, the designer will discuss particular challenges they foresee with difficult elements of the production.

The musical is loosely based around the events of an actual historical event where the newsboys (and girls) in 1899 went on strike. That strike was the response to a sudden increase in the price the newsboys paid for the newspapers they sold. These historical events will be covered in more depth in chapter II. This musical centers around Jack Kelly who dreams of a better life outside of the New York slums and the groups of
newspaper sellers he lead collectively referred to as, “newsies.” Jack, a kid but a veteran of selling newspapers, meets Davey and his younger brother. Shortly after Jack takes them under his wing they learn they are going to have to pay significantly more for the merchandise which they already make very little profit for selling. They soon meet a young upstart reporter by the name of Kathrine Plummer, who is looking for a newsworthy story to prove herself to the men who dominate the industry. She is thrilled to discover the charismatic Jack Kelly intends to organize a strike to protest the price hike and take on the newspaper barons of Pulitzer and Hearst. This professional interest soon blossoms into the typically expected romantic subplot interlaced in many musicals. Jack and the other newsboys organize a protest that quickly devolves into a full blown riot. Crutchie, a beloved newsie with a bad leg, is beaten, captured and taken to a horrible orphanage known ironically as ‘The Refuge.’ The riot gives Kathrine the headline she needs and she publishes a story aiming to expose the injustices suffered by this group of mostly children.

While the newsies celebrate their new found fame or infamy, as it were, a photograph of Jack Kelly on the front page earns the attention of another villain by the name of Synder. He is the warden of, ‘The Refuge’ and is not happy to discover Jack is still living nearby after having escaped the prison for children a few years prior. Synder meets with Pulitzer and reveals that Jack Kelly is an escaped criminal wanted for stealing clothes and food from ‘the Refuge.’
Jack shows up to confront Pulitzer who reveals Kathrine Plummer is actually his daughter. Pulitzer offers Jack a bribe to end the strike. Soon after, Jack returns to inform the others of the offer Pulitzer made in return for ending the strike. However, having seen the newspaper, the other leaders of the newsboys show up in full support and are dismayed by Jack’s sudden lack of commitment to the cause. Kathrine arrives to explain her position regardless of her father. She realizes Jack is not the criminal Snyder made him out to be. She discovers Jack stole the food and clothes for the other children and not for his personal gain at all. She works with the newsies to hatch a plan to publish a newspaper of their own. This paper eventually finds itself in the hands of the Governor and future U.S. President, Theodore Roosevelt. He arrives to show his support for the newsie’s cause. With Roosevelt’s backing Jack convinces Pulitzer to agree to buy back any unsold papers from the newsies, putting an end to the strike.

This production presents a number of particular challenges. The scenic designer was given a budget of approximately three thousand dollars for the scenery. This seems to be a rather large budget in comparison to the shows the designer has designed in the black box theater at the university previously. While the plot of this story is fairly linear and doesn’t jump in time or location drastically it still does contain some very specific challenges. Additionally, this production is fiction, but based around true events. In that regard the designer believes there is a duty to represent the actual buildings of New York City at the turn of the 20th century rather than focusing on a single element like the fire escapes that defined much of the original Broadway scenic design by Beowulf Boritt.
As the designer reads through the script there are strong parallels to stories of David and Goliath. The majority of the plot line centers around a group of children taking on some of the most powerful men of the time and somehow winning. Ironically, the business those children were taking on happened to be called, ‘the World.’ This might point the designer to one possible primary description for the design aesthetic of this show; huge. The designer hopes to create a physical space that is large and intimidating from the point of view of the audience. This could be done with creating buildings that stretch into the space above the curtains as though entire buildings were placed on stage. One might also achieve this by suggesting the world extend beyond the proscenium opening of the stage.

Another idea the script put forward was a parallel to the Greek gods on Mount Olympus looking down on mortals, not realizing how their choices affect the lives of all the people below them. An example of this relationship would be Pulitzer, a man who in his time was a god of the news media, making his choice to increase the price of the newspapers, crushing the profits of the children who were already nearly homeless. This made the designer think of possibly representing the world of these rich men by creating a visual parallel to what might be that capitalist version of a temple to the gods. During the 1899 newsboys strike Printing House Square (the epicenter of New York’s newspaper industry at the time) was essentially the Mount Olympus of its day when it came to the mass media hierarchy. The offices of the behemoth businessmen were the real life temples of capitalism. Perhaps the office location of the script could appear more like a
temple to the gods of money. This image comments again on the size and height of the scenery like the previous concept did. These locations could perhaps involve some more subtle religiously based motifs. Perhaps all the pictures in his office are paintings of the greek gods.

Perhaps most importantly, as the designer mentioned before, is the need for the design of this production to represent New York City. Particularly the turn of the century in the city’s history. Many of the iconic buildings audiences would recognize about New York City simply didn’t exist yet. While there was a skyline it was not nearly as tall, nor did it include the Chrysler or Empire State buildings people today might expect. So one must turn to other urban details of the time. One element of visual interest that was a part of almost every building exterior was the fire escape. Previous designs such as the one created for the original Broadway design focused almost entirely on this. However, this scenic designer would argue that while the levels and iron lattice-work that made up the fire escapes were visually appealing, they alone did not define the city of New York in July, 1899. Rather than offering any attempt at realism the original design was an abstraction of a single element present in the time period. There are two sides to the life of New York residents and factual places that are associated with the events taking place during our story. One side is the dirty, poverty-stricken world of the newsies. The other side is the elite care-free existence of the richest echelon of people during the time.

Still, the other major focus of the show is the newspapers themselves. The newspapers were the primary source of current events knowledge. This designer also
considered more abstract concepts where the buildings and other elements of the design were made of newspapers. A possible advantage of this version is that it could turn the entire set into a projectable environment. It would be interesting to watch the locations fade and drift from one place to the next. It would be as if the audience was viewing the production through animated images and headlines on the pages of the New York Sun. However, based on the designers prior knowledge of projection technology, the complexity involved in reliably creating a system of projectors to seamlessly cover a three dimensional space is likely beyond the skill sets, and budget available for this production. Still, the idea of having the rest of the set appear as actual newspapers could still be interesting to explore, even without the use of projections. This newspaper world concept could offer some commentary on a world held up by these newspapers and the men who created them. It could also conversely represent a world held up by the newsies themselves. While it seems relevant when explained in this context, the designer is uncertain the audience would understand the choice and might never go beyond the surface aesthetic to see the real meaning.

On a practical note, painting a large set to look like it was made with giant newspapers would require a great deal of time. This would be, in part, due to having to paint all of the individual letters and words that made sense, and design the graphic layout of the newspapers and making sure they were applied to the buildings properly. While the designer finds portions of this “city of paper” concept to be very intriguing; unfortunately it would need a time frame, skill set and equipment beyond what is
available for the production. Additionally, while the newspapers written on the buildings
could be the very headlines that were created during the newspaper strikes, this concept
doesn’t serve to give the audience what the designer wanted to give them: a set that
clearly places the action in the New York City at the turn of the 20th century.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter will primarily consist of the factual history around which the production *Newsies: the Musical* was written. The designer will discuss the information taken from historical documentation that can be used to give some initial ideas to the visual look of the scenery. The designer will discuss the real-life counterparts to the characters, locations and events mentioned in the script. The designer will also discuss the economic power of the groups involved in the historic strike. Following this, the designer will then discuss the history of the musical itself, how it has evolved from its inception and the effectiveness of the original scenic design for the show.

This period in history is incredibly saturated with major events that shaped our modern world. The historical context of this show begins shortly after the New York City we know today came to be. It wasn’t until 1898 that New York City absorbed the surrounding cities giving rise to the various boroughs such as the Bronx, Harlem, Brooklyn and Queens (Meyers, Young “Newsies On Strike!”). While larger buildings were beginning to spring up, skyscrapers had not yet begun to dominate the skyline of the city. The iconic architecture of the Empire State Building and Chrysler Building would not be complete until nearly 30 years later.
To speak directly to the events which, *Newsies: the Musical* surrounds, it is worth discussing the newspaper industry in the late nineteenth century. But first, to step back farther in 1725, New York City created its first newspaper known as the *New York Gazette*, which really was a means to update British territories on general happenings. In 1733 the *New York Journal* was the first paper to discuss controversial topics, particularly topics about the then New York governor, William Cosby. Because of the infancy of the industry in the colonies at the time, the governor took the founder of the Journal to court. He was charged with liable, because it was unheard of to publicly write something negative about another individual at that time. During the American revolution more papers denouncing other public figures and their leadership would appear (LaFebvre, “Newsies”). This serves to paint a picture that even from the very inception of the modern newspaper, they held a great deal of power and much of the power was gained from the number of people potentially reading them. Additionally this set the stage for first amendment rights and the freedom of the press.

It wasn’t until the 1800’s that publishers began to utilize the idea of the penny press, or selling newspapers for a penny. In 1835 one of the original penny press publications was the *New York Sun*, one of the papers mentioned in the storyline of *Newsies: The Musical*. Benjamin Day, the man in charge of the publication of the *New York Sun* could really produce about 125 four page papers an hour per press which gave the paper a circulation total of about 15,000 potential readers. By the mid nineteenth century they were able to publish about 18,000 editions an hour. However, other
publishers began to catch on to this idea before allowing the *New York Sun* to rule the industry. Also, in 1835 the *Herald* joined the ranks of New York publications selling papers for a penny until raising its price to two cents per paper, the first price hike that would eventually escalate to events that surround the musical (Meyers, Young “Newsies On Strike!”).

In 1841 another penny paper the *New York Tribune* was founded by Horace Greeley who is briefly mentioned in the script for, *Newsies: The Musical*. This publication was founded right about the time an important discovery was made in long distance communication known as the telegraph. This invention transformed modern media because now rather than waiting weeks and even months to hear current news from all around the world, news publications had access to it within hours. In 1851 the *New York Daily Times*, which today is known as the *New York Times*, was the first publication to regularly utilize the telegraph for its news sources (Meyers, Young “Newsies On Strike!”).

Finally, in 1860 a man by the name of Marble Manton enters the picture and creates the major newspaper involved in the story of *Newsies: The Musical*. That paper is known as the *New York World*. It wasn’t until about 1880 that the newspaper would gain its most notable owner, Joseph Pulitzer. Pulitzer along with his rival William Randolph Hearst would become the kings of Newspaper Row. Newspaper Row which went by a number of names including, Printing House Square, or Print House Row was actually a small section of what was then called Park Row that contained the early headquarters to
the New York World, the New York Tribune, and the New York Sun. Around the turn of the 19th century before communication methods had become more effective it made sense for the newspapers to be located near their major sources for headlines. Park Row is located across the street from New York City Hall and not much farther from the main office for the New York City Police Department. This ensured that if any major story happened with city or politicians, those newspapers would be certain to have the latest information.

It is also worth noting that the competition to gain the majority of New York City’s readership gave rise to what would become known as, “Yellow Journalism,” which is a form of journalism meant to sensationalize what would otherwise be less interesting news. The goal of this style of journalism is to attract the attention of anyone not already committed to another news publication. Often however, these headlines, much like Newsies: The Musical, were only based on real events. However the tactic was an effective way to increase readership at the time and few publications avoided using this method at some point (Encyclopædia Britannica, “Yellow Journalism”).

The actual history on which the musical is based will note that on July 18th, 1899 newsboys or “newsies,” declared a strike against the New York Evening Journal, and the New York World, which by this time in history had been purchased by the well known paper magnate, Joseph Pulitzer. Also at the time, the iconic New York newsstand and the vending machines hadn’t been invented as a means of distribution. As a result the large
newspaper companies began to utilize the cheapest and most effective labor source; the growing number of orphans and vagrants populating the streets of New York City.

Without child labor laws being created, a huge component of impoverished children were left with no other options but to support themselves by taking dangerous jobs. For the most part, the stronger adult men took jobs in the factory leaving the easier job of selling papers to the women and children. While some children were forced to live on the street, others were slightly better off because they had a regular bed in a few overpopulated children's shelters that did exist at the time. These types of accommodations usually only consisted of a newsie’s personal sleeping mat or hammock and a communal shower. Rent for this modest accommodation was often around five cents each night. Because the rent was so affordable by children selling papers for one to two pennies each, these facilities became a haven for children making a living “hawking” newspapers as they often referred to the practice of selling newspapers.

One of the best things that happened to improve newspaper sales was keeping up with the headlines of a war. In 1895, just a few years prior to the events this musical is based on, the United States was involved in what we now call the Spanish American War. During this war Theodore Roosevelt would gain a great deal of fame as the leader of the Rough Riders. In 1898 Spain and the United States would sign the Treaty of Paris effectively ending the war. This gave the United States control of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam and sovereignty over the Philippines which many consider to be a major factor in
setting the United States up to become a major world power (Meyers, Young “Newsies On Strike!”).

Prior to the war newspapers were fifty cents for every bundle of 100. Newsies bought as many as they thought they could sell and the better the headlines the easier the papers were to sell. If the newsies couldn’t sell all their papers they had to absorb the cost of any extras. That made it financially dangerous for them to purchase too many papers with a bad headline. However, when the Spanish American War began, the Publishers decided to increase the price of the newspapers from fifty to sixty cents per one hundred papers. During the war the newsies were upset by the price hike. However, because of the public need for information on that war they didn’t have a difficult time moving their product at that price.

This musical and previous iterations of this story would make it seem as though there was only the one major newsie strike. However, there were multiple attempts to better the conditions under which people selling newspapers worked. Strikes took place even before the war, as early as 1881 (Brenner 610). The final straw that inspired the newsies to unite happened when Pulitzer and Hearst refused to return the cost of their papers to pre-war prices which every other New York City newspaper had done. Angered by the attempts of some of the wealthiest men in the nation to make a few more pennies off the backs of the poor and homeless children that filled up their ranks, the newsies united in a strike refusing to sell newspapers for the New York Journal or the the New York World. On July, 18 1899 a group of newsboys in Long Island City, led by a boy
named, “Kid Blink” turned over a distribution wagon for the New York Journal and the strike officially began. Unlike the the musical, Brooklyn and Manhattan newsies would join their efforts the following day. Later a young man by the name of Jack Sullivan would also assume leadership of the union and this was most likely the real life inspiration for the musical’s leading male character, Jack Kelly.

The musical and film version of this story paint the newsies in a couple of false ways. One falsehood was that the newsies were made up of teenage boys. While it is certainly true that the newsies, as history knows them, consisted in part of extremely young children. However, there was no age limit or gender exclusion stopping anyone from selling newspapers. In reality the occupation of “newsie” was one that was held by men and women of all ages. Even so, the majority of the newsies at that time were younger, and often homeless men and boys (LeFebvre, “Newsies”). The second falsehood is that the musical also paints the group of new boys as significantly less violent and much more well mannered than their real life counterparts. There are numerous accounts of newsies marauding around the city turning over and lighting newspaper wagons on fire. The musical makes a number of references to “scabs” or “scabbers.” This was the term given to anyone willing to cross picket lines and sell papers of the Journal or the World. Multiple accounts were given about the newsies violently beating these boys or girls and letting their wounds advertise the result of defying the strikers. There is no record of any of the attacks resulting in the death of anyone. However, these beatings became so frequent that extra police officers were
dispatched to help protect the strike breakers still willing to sell the papers. Still, the violence was not without a limit. Women who continued to sell the *Journal* and the *World* newspapers were left alone because as the union leader Kid Blink said, “A feller can’t soak a lady (sic)” (Meyers, Young “Newsies On Strike!”).

The story of the strike told by the musical overlooks other key details. The real-life arbitration involved in a strike was well beyond the education of the children and men most publicly credited with leading the strike. In reality the newsies sought out help from trained professionals in dealing with powerful lawyers hired by Pulitzer and Hearst. A major rally in support of the newsies was sponsored by New York State Senator Timothy D. Sullivan. It is estimated that nearly 8000 newsies gathered at the Irving Palace Theatre to hear a number of speeches from the union leadership. This theatre is very likely the inspiration for Medda’s Theatre (Meyers, Young “Newsies On Strike!”).

The main people tied to the strike were the real-life counterparts of the various characters of the musical. This musical would have the audience believe that a charming dreamer named Jack Kelly led the strike. In fact the real leader was "Kid Blink," whose name was given to him because of the eye patch he wore over one of his eyes. More closely, and perhaps the inspiration for the lead character’s name, is Jack Sullivan. However there is little evidence to prove whether Mr. Sullivan was a peer of the young boys or one of the adult organizers. Racetrack Higgins is another leader of the pro-union movement that is represented in both the historical and fictional events in the musical. It was common place that the newsies held additional nicknames describing some unique
characteristic about themselves, names like, “Barney Peanuts, Crutch Morris, Young Monix, and Hungry Joe” (New York Times) to offer examples. The character of “Davey” is decidedly a more moral, innocent figure in the musical than the closest real life person. However, while a boy named David Simmons, was indeed the second in command, “Davey’s” nearest historical counterpart, was actually an intelligent, but quick to violence boy prize fighter (New York Times, 8).

As the strike moved forward it did lose some of its original steam. After the success of their rally at the Irving Palace Theatre the newsboys intended to hold a parade to rally support for their cause. However the permitting requests for the enormous parade were denied. Shortly after, rumors spread that Kid Blink and David Simmons had met and accepted bribes from newspaper executives to leave their roles as strike organizers, much like the script briefly touches on in the second act. The union elected an adult newsie as their new leader and Racetrack Higgins became the vice-president of the union (New York Times, 5).

In the end the newsies don’t win their strike. The final resolution was that the prices would remain at 60 cents per 100 papers, but the New York Journal and the New York World would agree to buy back any unsold papers. Having to buy back unsold newspapers eliminated the risk of buying too many newspapers for a bad headline. This would put more pressure back on publishers to print stories sure to sell many papers and would continue to feed the spread of yellow journalism.
The story of the newsies would be adapted by the Disney Film Corporation directly to a movie musical format that followed a similar story arch in 1992. The major difference is that Kathrine Plummer doesn’t exist and Jack’s love interest is Davey’s sister. The adaptation of the musical to the Broadway stage would not begin until 2011. Papermill Playhouse in Millburn, New Jersey was approached by the Disney theatrical branch to develop a workshop production of the musical. The stage adaptation would be helmed by three of the best known names within the theatre community. The music would be written by Alan Menken whose work on Broadway extends over decades and includes famous works like, *Sister Act, Little Shop of Horrors*, and numerous works for other Disney theatrical projects (IBDB.com). The lyrics for *Newsies: The Musical* were the work of Jack Feldman who had numerous credits to his name. Interestingly enough in 1993 he won an award at the 13th annual Golden Raspberry Awards for “Worst Original Song” in the film version of, *Newsies* and would later go on to win the Tony for “Best Original Score Written for the Theatre” for writing the lyrics to the the stage adaptation. The song he won his Golden Raspberry for was “High Times, Hard Times” sung by the film’s version of Medda, the theatre proprietor. That song was removed from the stage play for obvious reasons (IMDB.com). Finally the script was the work of Harvey Feirstein who has numerous film and stage credits but probably is most known for his work with, *La Cage aux Folles, Hairspray*, and most recently the musical *Kinky Boots* on Broadway. His work on the book for *Newsies: the Musical* would go on to be nominated for a Tony for “Best Book of a Musical,” but would fail to win the award.
The original scenic designer of the musical was Beowulf Boritt. His concept for the musical included three, steel, free-standing fire-escapes that soared to be three stories tall. Each unit was additionally fitted with an automation system that allowed each tower to track from upstage to downstage while simultaneously turning a programmed number of degrees. Each portal, or entry point, on the sides of the stage, masking the wings, were also projectable surfaces that contained images of newspapers appropriate to the story and period of the musical. The towers contained retractable projection surfaces that could be hidden when not needed. While the original design is visually impressive, the scenery does little to help establish New York City during the time period of the musical. The designer of this production believes that lack of connection to the historical context of the show to be the largest oversight in the design. The design seemed to rely heavily on the effectiveness of projections to tell the story.
Before even reading this first script it is worth noting my own familiarity with this story. I recall watching the original Disney film when I was younger. In fact it is fairly safe to say that this musical was my first introduction to the genre of musical theatre. Later as my interest in theatre grew, I remember watching the film again and wondering, “How was there not a stage version of this?” At that time I attributed most of that to the fact that there were so many locations it might become quite cumbersome to sort out on stage. Then, I remembered when The Papermill Playhouse announced they were moving into workshops for a stage version. However, I assumed it would follow the movie story line more closely. The biggest difference between the two versions to me is the fact that they turned the film version of the reporter who covers the story into a female role and made her the love interest. It wasn’t until the stage musical became popular that I learned it was all based on real events in history.

In 2013 I was living in New Jersey and was taking the train home from New York after visiting some friends in Manhattan. I sat down in my seat and a few moments later another passenger sat next to me and pulled out his laptop and began to fill out what I recognized as a stage manger’s performance report. It took me a few moments to realize
that he was actually filling out the real performance report for the Broadway Production of *Newsies: The Musical* running at that time. Of all the people I happened to run into on a train I happened to be sitting next to the Production Stage Manager (the head stage manager) for the Broadway show. I asked if he was indeed that person and he confessed and introduced me to the entire stage management team who happened to be sitting across the aisle. I got to ask him a lot about the production. One of the most notable things he confessed was that the show had actually shrunken in size when it transferred to Broadway. I hadn’t seen or been familiar with the show yet so I had little idea of what he was talking about. He mostly told me about the various songs and scenes that had been cut to make the show fit better into the two hour show block that Broadway wanted in order to conform to tourism and union schedules. He didn’t go into much specifically but it was the consensus of the stage management crew that they liked the New Jersey production better.

July 12, 2019

After reading this script through and watching the Broadway production online, I’ve noticed a couple of things about the show. One: I feel like the development of the romance between the character of Jack Kelly and Kathrine Plummer is rushed and I don’t totally believe the speed with which that subplot is driven. Two: The Broadway set design is a little bit too deconstructed for my taste. This was a real event that took place and I feel like Beowulf Boritt’s design while interesting, doesn’t represent the reality of
New York at the time. It relies heavily on an abstraction of fire escapes and projections of headlines and period newspapers.

July 18, 2019

Today I actually talked with the director, Paul Hustoles about the show. Having spent so much time with the show already this summer I came to him with what was actually a fairly developed concept for the show. I know we were supposed to have started this process weeks ago, but weren’t able to while dealing with hiring new faculty and the remainder of the Highland Summer Theater season. Luckily though, the director liked the general idea of my design. Still, he wanted to experiment with a few other things before committing to this version. The major notes from the original rendering was to allow access down the front of the steel structure. He wanted to find an alternative solution to the turntable I had placed in the center of this design. Also, the director wanted some element that would allow actors access on the second level to continue across the entire upstage opening between the two building that do not move. Additionally the director noted the choreographer may in fact need to minimize the amount and design of dimensional stones that were part of the original radial pattern in the show floor.
August 1, 2019

We’ve not had meetings yet as a formal production team. I am a bit worried about this only for the reason that I have heard stories about a previous masters student who designed *Beauty and the Beast* and worked up an entire full color scale model of the finished set design over the summer and everyone felt like they had no input on the final design. That becoming the issue with this show does worry me. While it was not my intention to do that I seem to have done almost exactly that in the interest of keeping ahead on drafting. I don’t think anything major on the set will change at this point, so in that regard it’s done. I’ve started putting the 3D model into drafting plates already just to keep ahead of the curve. It might be foolish to go as far as I have into the drawings should something major have to change in the design process. However, I also don’t want to wait until later and not have any drawings for the technical director to use when he needs them. Most of the design is complete, but I am hoping that not creating a physical model of the set will avoid any feelings of exclusion in the design process. I’ve been accused of designing in a void on past productions, but in this instance it was in some regards needed to not bog down the production schedules.

August 10, 2019

I was looking at this whole concept again and it has just now started to sink in how large this design is. It’s very pleasing to look at. and I think harkens back to the streets of New York City at the time. I chose to incorporate projection screens on the
sides of the proscenium, or stage opening, to really help tie this story to the historical elements of the show. I had also incorporated into the cityscape and jungle-gym fire escapes that stretch across the upstage opening between the other building facades. Then I finally added the little details like the dark steel arch hanging overhead as some ever-present sort of symbol of oppression.

The size of this show is what is concerning me most at this point. Not having started school yet I haven’t gotten any input from George Grubb about the feasibility. I also have not had a chance to ensure that I will have someone working on props and paints for me. I could possibly deal with props on my own, but paints for this are going to be too much to complete on my own. So it would be very helpful to have someone ready and able to lead the painting. I also have the hardest time trusting other shop workers to paint anything beyond a solid color with some awareness of consistency. However that might be different with this year’s group of students.

August 18, 2019

As I continue to work through putting this design into all pages of drafting, it also occurs to me that I am actually not aware of any budget for the scenery of the show. I can tell you that what I have designed, as I expected will be significantly over whatever the budget actually happens to be. If I recall correctly the university will typically allocate around $2,000 to $2,500 dollars for scenery to a show like this. If I was going to comfortably buy my materials for this design myself with no stock materials, I could do it
for about six thousand dollars not including the automation system. I assume we could squeeze close to $1,500 dollars out of materials the school already owns. With roughly $4,500 left over the technical director and I will probably have to figure out some value engineering options to lower the overall costs to an acceptable level. However, no one has told me that this design is out of the realm of possibility for us financially so until I hear differently I’ll assume this is all possible. Since we start meetings soon we should find out. Still, I do wish we could have had one or two summertime production meetings just to ease everyone and my own concerns about how much collaboration is really going on.

August 26, 2019

So we had our first meeting today. Nobody seemed too concerned about how far the design had gone. However the infamous Beauty & the Beast production was brought up again. Honestly, having not made any progress while trying to not get locked into anything final, I find myself not caring if this show gets lumped into this Beauty & the Beast category. I needed to make some progress toward trying to get this sorted out during the summer. Also, as I have mentioned, I do not have the desire to be furiously drafting major portions of a giant show to keep things being built in the shop.

I already had some expectation that I might be the only person working in paints and props. That being the case I most certainly will need more help with painting this show. My goal will be to just power through projects in classes until the the show is open
just to maintain some momentum that I can use to pickup the slack on the other side of this project.

September 2, 2019

The set construction is going well so far. We haven’t gotten terribly far into the actual build yet but there are a few things that do exist. I made my concerns about having help to paint and prop the show known to my advisor and he helped me find a propmaster. Also, Reegan Tolk asked if they could be the paint charge. This was wonderful because now I can focus on just being a designer. However, now that I have a formal charge artist I need to generate a formal set of paint elevations for them to work from. I am happy to do that but this project seems to be slowly growing and not getting smaller. At least there seems to be more help coming with larger things. Our propmaster who hasn’t started meeting with us yet is going to have a large job ahead of him. The show has all the simple props in stock for the most part. What will be hard is having the many period newspapers the show calls for. I had contacted another company a few weeks ago about using their prop printing press and that should be an easy solution so long as we can find transportation. There really aren’t many terribly difficult props we didn’t have a plan for. I’ve created period newspapers before but never in such a large quantity. Doing the newspaper from scratch would be a huge undertaking. There is no way I’ll be able to take away time to layout and print thousands of copies of custom
content while keeping tabs on all other elements of the design. Hopefully we can find some sort of similar papers to help fill up our inventory.

September 5, 2019

Grubb and I met separately from the rest of the creative team to talk about what could be changed in the design to save some money on the set. He agreed that we were far over the budget without making any modifications to details of the design. One of his biggest concerns was the amount of metal used to create the floor of the second level on the fire escapes. I had drawn angle-iron with half inch wide spaces between each piece all the way across. However, my ultimate goal was to have something that wouldn’t stop light totally from hitting anyone standing below. The compromise Grubb and I came up with was to use expanded steel as a deck surface for the second level. Beyond that, a lot of the value engineering that happened was because of blocking issues this director discovered. Those caused some of the steel railings to be simplified.

September 6, 2019

Steve Smith, the lighting designer has been concerned about the height of the fire escape second level. We met and talked about this issue today and ultimately came to a conclusion that we should talk about it in the next production meeting, and that I’d take a look at it on my own. I’m worried this might be too late to be figured into anything that would actually save money. Parts of Smith’s concerns are easily fixable. I have no
Issues raising the height of the arch because it is better for lighting angles. Making the height of the fire escape lower alters the architectural levels and how much of the “bridgeway” we see in the open door on the flying wall units (Fig # 21). I personally like the extra height again speaking to the historical New York which was at the start of the skyscraper boom. I’d like to leave it if possible, but if it really does have to change, it can. Luckily, because I took a great deal of time setting up my drafting document in Vectorworks (computer aided drafting and rendering software) altering this shouldn’t be terribly difficult. This was really a great example of something that would likely have been resolved had all of the team met earlier on in the process.

September 9, 2019

What I found out today was that I totally misread the conversation Smith and I had the other day about the height of the fire escape. It became clear to me in the meeting that a choice had been made and the height would be lowered down a foot to accommodate the lighting angle. To be clear, it is not the lighting designer’s demand at all. A quirk of our space is that tall sets are hard to light above 8 feet high. The angles the light can be shot from are very limited based on the locations of lights for a show. This has, up until this point been the most frustrating issue during this process. It was also not very hard to fix in the drafting. Ultimately, I figured this was not a big enough of an issue to remain inflexible about.
September 12, 2019

A few days ago I noticed a large amount of luan (thin sheets of wood typically used to cover a theatrical flat) show up in the loading dock near the scene shop. I couldn’t think of another show that we were building that needed such a large amount of luan. So I asked Grubb what it was for and he told me it was to skin (cover) the walls for the musical. I had a sinking feeling that was what it was all for. I however, had noted in my drafting that those walls be skinned with a pre-formed brick pattern that would ultimately do eighty percent of painter’s work for them. Not having that texture and color built into the flats has easily doubled the paint job for the show. Initially we were planning on tackling a very complex floor and taking our time with that while doing some minor toning on the buildings and trim. I was pretty perturbed for a moment, but figured there had to be other ways to create a realistic brick wall texture. I spent lunch watching some poorly filmed but informative interior design videos online that eventually offered a reasonably efficient solution. I laid out a brick pattern with tape and mixed up a stucco-like texture to paint over the rest of the surface which included the paint. Once nearly dry I removed the taped pattern to reveal alternative textures that require very little paint to realistically resemble brick.

September 20, 2019

The construction phase of this production is way behind. I’m not sure I know what to pin-point as the cause of the slow progress. Perhaps that is because I worry it
might point somewhat in my own direction. This show has a lot of details, you can spend days working on elements of this design that might not have the largest visual impact and be left feeling like you’ve gotten nothing done with your day. The various elements need the other elements to be in place, or close to being in place, for other things to work well. Not to mention Minnesota State Mankato just doesn’t have a lot of welders (both the machines and the people) working in the shop to quickly deal with a show involving this much steel. Today is the first technical rehearsal with scenery and we maybe have 85% of the fire escape in place and the two projection walls up. The rolling fire escape wagon is also working and the pit has only recently been lowered in preparation for installing the pit deck. We open in six days. It’s not much time but it’s doable. We are having all day building calls both days this weekend. Tolk and I are basically going to be ready with paint or painting the floor or any newly finished piece of scenery.

September 22, 2019

The weekend work call went well. Fewer people than I would have liked to see showed up. I’ve had to split my mind in half again to give some more guidance to my floundering propmaster. He is trying, but unfortunately seemed content to email someone and wait for a response when hunting things down verses being proactive about it. So searching out things like connections for newspapers and other props have taken much longer than they should have. He also doesn’t give himself time to really hunt down these props. Our props storage area is a mess. and he would come in to resolve notes
minutes before his call time as part of the cast. Regardless, as we approach the end of the road on this show I barely have the energy to add propmaster back to my growing list of roles. However, after this weekend the end is very much in sight.

Having sat in technical rehearsals all weekend I have noticed something that helps get me through these long last work calls. This is a really good show. I’m scared to see some theatre because it’s just like watching a Frankenstein. It moves and looks like a theater production, but it’s not alive, it has no soul. This show does give one that feeling of excited anticipation. It doesn’t feel squeaky clean yet but it does, in spite of all the setbacks, feel very polished.

September 25, 2019

Tonight is the first real crowd for the show. The corporate preview is actually more interesting to me because it seems to be an even spread of demographics all seeing the same show at the time of day it was designed to be seen. We aren’t done with the set, but nothing huge has yet to be finished. Just adding a few bits of trim and some other minor details. The audience really loved the show. They stood shortly into the intermission. I did overhear a student telling a friend that she, “…liked the history part of it.” Which I feel like I contributed to in some form when you look at the big picture.
October 6, 2019

Today is closing day of *Newsies: The Musical* at Minnesota State Mankato. I am happy to say of the three projects I have designed in graduate school this is likely my favorite. I found the show very satisfying. I heard another MFA student describe the show as a very unified production, meaning everything felt like it belonged with the other parts. I made a number of compromises but not so many that we arrived at what I would still describe as very close to my original design. Things change in live theater all the time and I can’t say, outside of my first few naive adventures in set design, have I ever expected a design to come out just exactly how I drew it. I want it to be very close, but most designs need to grow with the process. What I appreciate about this show is, though it was plagued with completion issues, even two days before opening with a million things to do the director could still make a request for a large sign, and the designer and the technical director could sort out how to create it and have it for the next rehearsal. Many other productions I have worked on lose their ability to execute extra notes like that at the end when the scenery has been so behind.
CHAPTER IV

POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS:

In this chapter the scenic designer will discuss their general thoughts about the production, including ways the set design both helped or hindered the story being told. The designer will also discuss the success of the process to complete the design. Following that the designer will discuss whether the production fulfilled the goals of the director and set designer.

Initially, one should acknowledge the ability to use all of the set. There were a variety of levels that allowed for many options for interesting pictures to be staged on the set. The most useful scenic element in the design was the free standing mobile fire escape unit. The Broadway design and even some local high school productions have typically utilized a similar scenic piece and often multiple ones. The Broadway production used two of them. This unit was so useful one could see a production being created using only one or two of these mobile fire escape units as the set. However, in the opinion of the designer of this production, these other designs do not achieve much in the way of representing the factual history this musical is based on.

Still, one must look at the other scenic elements that were created as part of this design. Alone, the fire escapes used as part of the Broadway design say little about remaining visual elements of the time period such as building details and construction
materials. So the designer of this production felt it necessary to involve more of the architecture of New York City at the time.

The scenic buildings rising up and into the rigging above the stage certainly gave the impression to the audience that the buildings were larger than they appeared to be. However, the designer wished they had continued into the wings further as well. While they were detailed and added much to the set, if audience members were to sit in the far outer seats near the stage, the building facades that flanked the stage ended abruptly. Still, with all the scenery in place the set offered a feeling of being on a street when walking on stage. Additionally the large arched girder hanging between the projection screens above the main playing space offered a visual connection from the projection walls in the foreground to the building facades in middle ground. The fire escapes allowed for some great framing moments the director used to illustrate images of the action taking place on the street while Jack argued with Pulitzer in his office.

The designer had originally intended for the single mobile fire escape unit to be used as the “paper window” where the newsies would go to purchase their papers to sell. However, the director had other plans to utilize that piece of scenery in alternative ways. One solution the director developed removed some of the need for another large unit to establish the “paper window” which we would now establish via a wooden cart pulled onstage by the cast. The designer thought this was very useful for keeping the action of the play moving without having to watch a large piece of scenery or potentially two, be maneuvered around the stage and potentially into one another. The cart in
combination with the gate and projections, did a nice job to fill out the Print House Square scenes visually. However, the mobile fire escape unit may have became over used for some scenes. By the time it enters serving as the Refuge in act two, it had lost all definition to the designer. The only time it became interesting was when the action shifted to the upper level during intimate scenes with Jack and Kathrine.

The most effective aspect of the design was the use of height. The height of the scenic elements in combination with the lighting, allowed audience members to feel like they were lost amongst the rooftops of the city. All of these visuals were helpful in serving the designer’s original goal to represent the city at the time. The ways this design utilized size was also done in order to abstractly suggest a David versus Goliath juxtaposition: the newsboys against the giants of the business world. Originally, there was an attempt to allude to a temple of capitalism in the office of Mr. Pulitzer. The original design for that space included two extremely tall gothic stained glass windows that would be lowered in from above the stage to replace the building wall that had just flown out. However, these were cut after being built due to not being properly communicated by the designer so they could be incorporated into the scene shifts.

The least effective quality of the set was probably its cleanliness. While it was never part of the designers original plans to make the set feel dirty it became apparent to the designer by opening that it felt a bit too clean. It seemed too out of place that all these children should be rolling around on streets all day without a speck of dirt anywhere on the streets. The designer does not believe the stage needed to be covered in
dirt, or anything that extreme, but perhaps one should have created some random puddles and have some dirt that had dried into the corners of the buildings and curbs. This could have better united the costumes to the set.

Additionally, the director staged a scene which prompted some regret with the scenic designer. After leaving the cellar with their illicit newspaper we see a number of newsies with lanterns scattering papers all over the city. The visual of that moment was powerful enough that it made the designer aware that they had ignored the potential for some practical lighting elements. Using lanterns or lamps attached to the buildings could have really brought the level of detail to a higher place. It might have been interesting to watch Weisel, one of the villains, and his minions light a lantern to signal they were open for business, or perhaps some sort of overhead fixture that flew in to make the deli feel more interior.

The most poorly executed portion of the design were the newspaper props. It wasn’t until after the production closed that the designer was made aware of a company that makes the prop newspapers for this show and others. The designer struggled with communicating to the propmaster what a vast quantity the show would need. The designer had hoped too much that the propmaster’s involvement as a cast member would make the importance of those props clear. This turned out to be an issue in general since even after the campus newspaper offered up their old stock, most of what we finally received were color prints and thus would not be appropriate to the period for the show. Early in the process the designer did try to point out that this was an area that would
likely be troublesome as the designer had little knowledge of how to create such a huge number of props. Ultimately, the designer believes the mistakes in those props were quickly forgotten within the rest of the world of the show. What was most frustrating for the designer is that rather than locating enough papers once, the designer and propmaster had let them appear in the prop stock slowly and sporadically. Then once they finally had the props they were severely sub-par in quality. The bundles were small and unimpressive compared to stacks of papers that could be used as seats or steps to higher levels of the set, like the creative team had hoped in early meetings. However, because of the state of the actual scenery the designer was needed to lead crews to get the set painted as soon as new pieces were built. Ultimately it was frustrating for the designer to keep having to avert their attention from other potential weaknesses to fix this prop issue that should have required a day or two to resolve.

Ultimately, the design appeared to have been successful. The designer believes this design was very unified across all the design fields. This created a very polished show that seemed like it could run for some time in the right location. While the technology of the projections pushed the limits of that unity at times, they never took one completely out of the world. The projections did offer a clear way of delivering that historical layer to the story we were witnessing.

The designer did feel like this set design really took no risks. It wasn’t some out-of-scale political cartoon, or a clever metaphor for some major commentary in the show. Nor was it really a reimagining of the original design. Without the historic layer added to
the design by the projections, the design is exactly what it set out to be: a set design for
the hit Broadway show, Newsies: the Musical. Overall it’s quite a well executed design
and does nothing to hinder or confuse the story. The transitions were smooth and nothing
looked unfinished or like it shouldn’t have been there. However the design does little to
help us interpret the story in some unique way. It simply told a singular, direct story.

Success behind the scenes might be a totally different story. This was a learning
process on making concessions and holding on to some artistic integrity. The building
process was littered with alterations and oversights that steered away from various
researched elements in the show. The designer was aware the design would be far over
the original budget. The technical director and designer met to discuss the options for
lowering the cost as much as possible. The most financially helpful alteration made was
to cut the steel angle iron on the deck of the second level of the fire escapes. Instead;
expanded steel was used to create the deck. This was the only major money saving
change we made to the design that was intentional by all parties. Other money savings
were a result of not noticing a detail noted in the drafting for the show. Communication
was the biggest hurdle for the designer to overcome here. Either they were
misunderstanding another team member, or their own attempts at communication would
be misinterpreted or overlooked due to the pace at which the build had to move forward.

One of the largest miscommunications of this project also serves as the best
examples of compromise and maintaining artistic integrity. In the submitted drawings
given to the technical director the designer had indicated that all the building facade
surfaces were to be covered with a pre-formed and painted faux brick paneling. However this note was not seen by the technical director in time. When the designer made the technical director aware of the oversight the technical director noted it would have been a significant addition to the budget, and one the budget couldn’t absorb at this point. Not having the bricks already formed and painted in the facing of the flats meant that the designer and the paint charge had a huge new job to incorporate into their schedule. What was originally supposed to be a paint job revolving mostly around a floor had to now include three twenty foot walls with various bits of ornamentation. The final compromise was to use tape to mimic the pattern of the mortar between bricks and then apply a rough brick texture over that pattern. Removing the tape to then exposed the three dimensional brick pattern now formed into the wall, without an impossible amount of labor involved. The designer was curious if there was something that could have been done to ensure this note wasn’t overlooked. After talking with the technical director the designer learned that there is really no such thing as over explanation of details in drafting. After looking over the drawings again the designer understands that while the note regarding the finish on the buildings did exist, nothing else really called specific attention to it. It may have been clearer to keep this note, but additionally draw in some representation of the texture on the elevation drawing itself. (Fig#21) The latter option is the solution the designer will likely adopt in future situations.

Despite all these various issues to overcome the designer really appreciated that everything was clearly an honest mistake and not some attempt to cut corners. Whatever
the alternative solution was the designer was always supported with labor and expertise. The designer and those painting the set also really appreciated the shop allowing paint and texture to be applied flat before the final installation. So while communication was a struggle in some ways it forced communications to be clear. The designer never felt like he couldn’t ask questions about the execution of the design by the technical director. Nor did the designer ever feel like the technical director was pushing for cuts in order to get the set completed.

The director and designer both agreed on the goals for this production with regard to telling the history of the strike. That being a fairly open goal, it allowed the designer the ability to really hone in on the designer’s personal design goals in a way that would support the director’s goals. Because the designer and director chose to utilize projections to add much of a historical layer the scenic design itself was able to focus on specific details like the corner stone patterns at edges of the buildings or the lettering across the top of the metal gate that lowered in for some scenes. While the design was not a major risk aesthetically, the design’s success was the clarity with which it allowed the story to be told.

Also, on a note of personal success the designer feels this production was probably the smoothest proscenium musical they have designed. Typically the designer struggles with trying to coordinate too much scenery and finds himself stressed out watching the scene changes all throughout the run. Given the amount of time the cast had to work with a finished set, the final product was well beyond what one would see at
many theaters. One patron even noted to a cast member that Minnesota State Mankato’s production of, *Newsies the Musical* was better than the performance they had seen at a local regional theater.
CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

In this final chapter the designer will discuss the development of their process in terms of what has been learned from the experiences they have had since attending Minnesota State Mankato. The designer will discuss the major concepts learned that are most directly applicable to their design process since beginning their coursework as part of the curriculum for Master of Fine Arts candidates emphasizing scenic design.

Immediately upon the designer beginning their graduate education at Minnesota State Mankato they were enrolled in a number of courses with direct ties to the design process. Perhaps the most directly related was Scene Design I. While this class was primarily a general review of techniques the designer had learned during their undergraduate studies, the coursework offered a chance to explore other techniques and designing in a larger diversity of audience configurations. The designer had no experience designing in the round or arena audience configuration. The designer used the projects in Scene Design I to explore these types of spaces. The designer would attempt to stage, *Rhinoceros*, a play by Eugene Ionesco as a project in the round. From this project the designer took away lessons on keeping scenery low to the ground in the central playing space. Additionally, the designer explored keeping sight lines open while creating larger and more dimensional scenic elements such as house facades near the
boundaries of the space. Perhaps the most important thing learned in this exploration is that often shows designed in the arena or round configuration are heavily dependent on the floor treatment since this is the most effective and centrally located way to address a concept where the audience is already going to be focused.

Another course the designer enrolled in was Portfolio Seminar. This class was particularly valuable in regard to documentation of the work a designer puts into a design. The participants in the class discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages of a variety of methods for displaying one’s work. During the various reviews of the designer’s work that took place throughout the semester they discussed the clarity and organization of production documentation. The primary lesson the designer took away from this course was the idea of carefully assessing how imagery may be perceived by those not already familiar with the designer’s work.

In the following semester the designer was enrolled in Styles and Ornamentation. The focus of the class was to educate the designer on various periods of design ranging from the subtle differences between many of the ancient architectural and decorative styles to more modern work. The coursework also continued on to discuss the design elements that define later periods such as the Rococo, Gothic, Art-deco, and Art-nouveau styles. The major goal of this course was to help the designer solidify specific period design choices, and avoiding unintentional anachronisms.

This same semester the designer was also enrolled in Lighting Design I. Some of the course work was review from both the designer’s undergraduate studies and
experience gained during previous employment. However the designer saw a great deal
of value in the methods taught in regard to determining what the professor called photo-
metrics. Photometrics are the mathematical calculations used to determine the proper
instruments and placement of various fixtures to properly light both people and scenery.
This was valuable to the designer in regard to allowing the scenic designer to determine if
the physical space they have designed can be lit effectively or in the way the director and
lighting designer would hope. What was also helpful was the lighting color theory and
differences from typical color theory for painting.

The designer also had the opportunity to take Advanced Theatre Drafting. The
hand drafting portions of the class were almost entirely review or slightly expanded from
the drafting taught during the designer’s undergraduate studies. However prior to this
class the designer was mostly self-taught in the use of the computer aided drafting
software, Vectorworks. This course was able to fill in some major gaps the designer felt
were present in their knowledge base of the program. Three dimensional drafting or
modeling in using computer aided drafting, was a capability the designer knew very little
about. In addition to learning a great deal more about creation and manipulation of the
three dimensional drafting and modeling methods, the most valuable aspect learned from
this course was the use of “Viewports.” These are the conduit by which the designer can
take a three dimensional drawing and instantly create live, or automatically updated,
views of the object such as an elevation, plan, section or orthographic projection view in
a formal design drafting document ready to give a technical director to generate their own
working drawings. The designer has taken this skill set and adapted it to be able to more efficiently create detailed design packets without having to draft individual sheets for each element.

The Advanced Theatre Drafting course itself did not include rendering in the Vectorworks software. However, the course did fill enough gaps in the designer’s knowledge that they were able to learn on their own many of the more advanced rendering techniques such as those seen in Appendix C. Utilizing this technique has allowed the designer to fully visualize a design in a digital space. Vectorworks being part of the lighting design world as well, allowed the designer to learn to incorporate basic concepts from their lighting design course to visualize potential issues the design might cause with lighting. The designer has taught themselves the additional skills to apply both custom textures the designer created in separate image editing and creation software such as Adobe Photoshop, as well as applying dimensional, translucent, and reflective textures to the various scenic elements modeled in the software. This technique has been incorporated into almost every scenic project the designer has worked on both professionally and within the university setting.

The designer was also enrolled in Scene Design II which focused more specifically on the creation of complete designs ready to be realized. Again much of this class was review but some aspects of how to properly notate details in drawings were cleared up. However, the designer wanted to take the projects as an additional opportunity to explore designing more complex productions in the arena configuration.
In this class the designer chose to work on a theoretical production of, *West Side Story*, being produced in the round. The designer chose this as a project because, to the designer’s knowledge, the large scale musical, *West Side Story*, is not often produced in the round or arena configurations. In this particular project the designer went with a more Brechtian approach by taking special focus on the floor, and space overhead. Brechtian theatre is designed to acknowledge we are in a theater rather than anything realistic. The goal of the design was to create a floor that, through the use of colors and concentric turntables, showed the mixing of the two family groups which the conflicts of the show are centered around. Additionally, the designer wanted the space above the playing space and audience to be a sculpture of sorts that represented New York City during the period.

More recently the designer was enrolled in Advanced Scene Painting where they were essentially offered the opportunity to continue practicing various paint skills through class-based studio style projects. The designer took most from the importance of having the right amount of moisture as the key to most techniques like using a lot of water to paint a transparent shadow or getting the right consistency to paint clean letters for text. Also one must take away the better understanding of what a designer is actually asking a paint charge to do. The expanded knowledge gained about the processes that are involved in scene painting will allow the designer to become a more reasonable designer to work with.
Sound design was also part of the designers course work. In this class the designer was guided through all of the basic processes involved in realizing a fictional sound design for a space. As a scenic designer who also enjoys sound design it served as an opportunity to hone that skill set further. The designer gained a significant amount of perspective from hearing the others in the class react to the choices of the designer and other classmates. Sound design rarely has much of an impact on the scenic design of a show, the class offered some insight into ways sound could amplify the feeling of an environment. Examples of that might be things like hearing dripping water and echoes in a cave. The designer also noticed much time was spent talking about sounds typically made by inanimate objects. Particularly the sound of locks, doors creaking, footsteps, which also made the designer consider there are places that can be created or at least suggested using only sound.

One of the final courses the designer would take is Theatre Management. This class offered a range of knowledge about not only the theatre making process, but also the theatre administration process. While the designer had some previous knowledge of production management from past employment this class offered to fill in many gaps and also explain and elaborate on the cross-over that takes place in the academic theatre structure versus the professional regional model the designer had worked in. This was particularly useful for the designer who does hope to find employment in this area at some point in their career.
In addition to course work the designer also had the opportunity to realize the design of a previous season’s production of *1984*. In that production and the designer’s experiences on the 2019 production of *Peter and the Starcatcher;* the designer had continued to learn and refine the clarity of technical design drawings. In addition the designer has continued to refine the clarity and specificity of their communication with other production team members in order to ensure the best possible outcome.

Working on the scenic designer’s thesis project has been an illuminating experience all its own. This musical was the designer’s original introduction to musical theatre of any kind many years ago. Being allowed the opportunity to design the world in which this story plays out has been a goal of the designer for a long while. The process was an immense challenge in communication. But the result was, in the designers opinion, an effective design for this musical. The final design for this show was relatively attractive. However, it went no further than to provide a totally appropriate backdrop for the story to unfold in front of.
APPENDIX

RESEARCH IMAGERY

FIGURE #1

FIGURE #2
FIGURE #6

FIGURE #7
FIGURE #10
CONCEPTUAL RENDERINGS

FIGURE #14 - 1st Rendering

FIGURE #15 - Early Alternative Rendering B
FIGURE #18 - Final Rendering A

FIGURE #19 - Final Rendering B
DRAFTING EXAMPLES
FIGURE #20 - Early Ground Plan (Screen Shot)
FIGURE #23 - Building Facade Paint Elevation Plate
MODEL PHOTOGRAPHY

FIGURE #24
FIGURE #26 (Pulitzer’s Office)
FIGURE #27 (Roof tops)
FIGURE #28 (Newsies Strike - Medda’s Theatre)
FIGURE #29 (Deli)


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