THE CONCEPTION AND PRODUCTION OF THE SCENERY DESIGN FOR A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

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by
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* * * *

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NOTES

A fully illustrated copy of this thesis is available at the Jerome Lawerence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, located on The Ohio State University campus, 14th floor, Lincoln Tower.
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CHAPTER I

A Midsummer Night's Dream in Performance:
A Brief Production History

Since it's first production as the wedding celebration
for Lord Derby and Lady Elizabeth Vere in 1595, A Midsummer
Night's Dream has ridden a tide of diverse artistic
interpretation and staging. Romance, poetry, music,
eroticism, lust and passion have all taken their turn at the
forefront of production as the primary themes of
Shakespeare's comedy. Production styles ranging from
spectacular pageants replete with music to those of
theatrical simplicity filled with carnival devices and
frightening magic have graced the stage since A Midsummer
Night's Dream's debut. Perhaps this diversity has made
A Midsummer Night's Dream one of the most frequently
performed Shakespearean productions of all time.

By the end of the 17th century A Midsummer Night's
Dream had become a splendid vehicle for baroque stage
machinery. One may venture that the text easily became
secondary to the visual images of the play. Charles Kean's
rendition of the comedy at the Princess's Theatre in 1856

was staged as a grand spectacle employing a series of ornate, painted drops and two dimensional scenery to depict the play’s numerous locales.²

Viewed as a celebration of love and romance, A Midsummer Night’s Dream readily moved into the musically oriented productions. Many modern productions have revived the musical score of A Midsummer Night’s Dream written by Felix Mendelssohn during the mid 1830’s.³ The tradition of the use of masque and spectacle continued into the beginning of this century,

"By the time Herbert Beerbohm Tree came to stage the play early in this century it was only appropriate to carry its romanticism yet further, translating it into a vision of an enchanted wood with real water flowing in the stream and real rabbits hopping across the greenward."

Not until Harley Granville-Barker staged A Midsummer Night’s Dream at the Savoy Theatre in 1914⁴ did the play come into its anti-Romantic tradition of staging. Looking beyond the romantic themes of the play artists and directors began to examine the power of illusion and fantasy in the human experience. Peter Brook’s 1970 Royal Shakespeare


⁴Lieter 465.

Company production led the trend of exploration into the theatrical and erotic production styles of the decade. 

Subsequent productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream have continued the anti-Romantic trend of production style frequently exploring the darker, more erotic and sexual implications in the text. Modern stagings of A Midsummer Night's Dream such as the Mark Lamos 1988 production at The Hartford Stage and the New York Shakespeare Festival's production under the direction of A. J. Antoon blend both the romantic and carnal images in A Midsummer Night's Dream. These productions do not attempt to fully explain the themes in Shakespeare's text. By including both romantic and carnal images in the production they leave the final interpretation of the play's meaning to the viewer.

Future productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream will either revert to the romantic style of production or plunge deeper into the investigation of the pathos of human courtship and sexuality. One thing is certain, that A Midsummer Night's Dream will continue to stand the test of time as one of Shakespeare's thematic masterpieces.

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4 Lieter 16.
5 Holmberg 16.
CHAPTER II

Discussion of Production Concept

During June of 1989 the director, Ellen Newman, supplied the design team with a written director’s design concept. The following is a discussion of the written and verbal input provided by the director and is a summary of Ellen Newman’s production concept for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Thematically the director’s production approach to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* focuses on the comparison and contrast of the human and supernatural worlds within the play. This intent is evident in the director’s choice to double-cast the roles of Theseus/Oberon, Hippolyta/Titania and Philostrate/Puck. The contrasts between the two worlds in the play are shaped by the director’s central idea or concept: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is about romance in all its facets -- Courtship, pursuit, escape, conquest, young love, mature love, friendship, honor, admiration, worship, jealousy, power, lust, passion and reconciliation are all explored in the confines of Shakespeare’s text. Each of the three major groups of characters identified by Ms. Newman
focus on certain aspects of romance.

The court makes up the first major group of characters. Their conflicts symbolize the struggles of young love. These courtiers' relationships primarily deal with courtship, pursuit and conquest. As Theseus sets out to woo his conquered bride, Hippolyta, one cannot ignore the power play in which the couple engages as the Amazon Queen comes to terms with her captor. Meanwhile, Helena, Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius grapple with the idealistic stirrings of first love. Their pursuits are flavored by passion and jealousy. The young lovers are thrust further into a state of enchantment as they are bewitched by the wandering Puck.

The fairies comprise the second major group of characters. The forest monarchs, Titania and Oberon, combat each other in fits of jealousy and sexual lust. The maturity of Titania and Oberon's relationship is made apparent by their mutual admiration of each other's sexual and physical power. The ritualistic reunion of the fairy king and queen signifies that the bond between these characters has been established over time. This mature type of bond is only beginning to be formed by the couples of the court.

Puck and the members of Titania's fairy train personify the more reverent aspects of love and romance. These characters bestow upon their masters admiration and awe, thereby adding to Titania and Oberon's magic. Puck, in
particular, idolizes his master and turns a blind eye to Oberon's faults. In the same fashion the fairy train is highly protective and indulgent of their queen's folly, joining in Titania's wooing of Bottom to please her fancy.

A love of chaos separates the characters of the court from the characters of the forest. The young lovers attempt to flee the restraints of their structured world but find they are ill-equipped to survive outside the comfortable court of Athens. Thrown into chaos by the feud between Titania and Oberon over a changeling boy, the inhabitants of the forest join in the night's games with abandon. When Oberon captures the changeling boy and frees Titania from her spell the fairy world regains its' tranquillity. Yet with the lingering images of the night one cannot help wonder when Titania and Oberon's world will again be thrust into chaos. It is important to note that each group achieves the harmony of their parent world. The royal couples return to the familiar luxury of their home while the fairy king and queen put the forest and its magic to sleep.

The third major group of characters, the rude mechanicals, are also caught up in the romance of the days' events. Pride, coupled with their admiration for Theseus, leads them to prepare a play in honor of the duke's wedding feast. Not far behind the rude mechanical's philanthropic gesture is the lure of wealth and notoriety. The
opportunity to perform for the duke and his court provides the rude mechanicals with a chance to escape the day to day routine of their lives. These men show friendship and genuine warmth towards each other, a quality less abundant in their royal counterparts.

Rather than pinpointing a specific period Ms. Newman cited artists Maxfield Parrish and Gustav Klimt (artists noted for their depiction of Grecian motifs) as sources of visual inspiration. The costume designer was asked to capture silhouettes from various romantic periods focusing on the late 19th - early 20th century Greek revival look popularized by artists Maxfield Parrish and Alma-Tadema. Scenically, Ms. Newman asked to emulate the color saturated landscapes of Maxfield Parrish’s fairy tale illustrations. The fanciful color and large scale organic forms would create a magical, and sometimes foreboding forest. Superimposed on the Parrishian color and form Ms. Newman asked for darker images like those in the works of Gustav Klimt to create a sense of danger and chaos in the forest.

Addressing the need for multiple locales Ms. Newman asked for the visual separation of three distinct playing areas. The first, Theseus’ palace, exterior or interior to be used in the opening scene and the wedding feast. Second, the mechanical’s home base, not in the forest, suggesting Peter Quince’s workshop as a possible locale. And third, the forest. Ms. Newman requested the forest contain a broad
playing area raked downstage to the orchestra pit with multiple levels in the guise of hills or promontories.

General impressions stated at the initial production meetings included adjectives describing the court as rigid, linear and massive. The overall mood would be one that reflected the strict moral and societal codes of Athens represented in the text. Ms. Newman also requested some change or softening of the linear qualities of the environment for the more festive atmosphere of the wedding feast in the final act.

Ms. Newman’s descriptive adjectives of the forest included cold, inclement, wet, misty, foggy and mossy. The prevailing mood be suggestive of the exotic and sensual nature of the fairies. Ms. Newman also requested multiple entrances and exits, hidden holes and caves, as well as a number of nooks and crannies be provided to establish the opportunity for concealment and surprise with fairies movement in the forest. Titania’s bower was to be soft, lush and filled with flowers and moss that the fairy train would collect for her bed. Because the moon is a dominant image in the text Ms. Newman asked that it be present in the stage picture and travel across the sky.

These considerations discussed by the director and the design team began to shape the production style into a classical and romantic genre much like the foremost mentioned spectacle staged by Charles Kean. By pulling the use of
spectacle into a three dimensional stage environment the production design would also draw on the theatrical, sculptural stagings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that have predominated productions from the 1970's to the present.
CHAPTER III

Statement of Design Concept

The production design for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* reflects the director’s focus on the romantic images of the text. The scene design also will aid the director by reinforcing the dualistic relationship between the human and supernatural worlds through the creation of two visually diverse environments. The heightened sense of reality called for by the director shapes the overall style of the production. The production style is neither strictly Poetic Realism or Romanticism. The physical manifestation of the world of the play relies on an established use of theatricalism and the impressionistic interpretation of color, shape and form.

Identifying the givens, or textual references to the environment, was the first consideration in creating the world of the play. Time, place, activity, socio-economic status, religion and prevailing psychological mood combine to shape the visual environment. Outlining these basic considerations of the three locales requested by the director provides a common understanding of the approach for
the scene design of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Theseus' court serves as the first locale requested by the director. Ms. Newman's request that the era of the play maintain a timeless quality eliminated the need to establish a strictly historical representation of Athens in a given period. Act I action occurs sometime during the late morning or early afternoon. A great hall within Theseus' palace serves as the location for Helena's confrontation with her father. The activity is limited in the opening scene because the struggle between the characters is philosophical, rather than physical. Theseus' palace is a place of wealth and beauty. However, the space is not cluttered with the trappings of success and power. Cool and austere, the palace reflects its ruler's personality. Theseus' Act I, scene 1 references to the, "cold, fruitless moon" and his decree that Helena should, "endure the livery of a nun" should she refuse to marry Demetrius, characterize Theseus' reverence and respect for the laws of Athens and it's ruling goddess, the moon. The prevailing mood is one of tension and restraint. The rigid laws of Athens govern the characters actions and the weight of the law on them is imposing. The palace setting must establish a feeling of awe as a visual metaphor for the action by being static and massive in it's architectural form.

During the wedding festival in Act five Theseus' palace
becomes a more inviting environment. The time is four days later, the evening following the nuptial ceremony uniting the three couples. After their wedding feast duke and his court relax and enjoy the antics of the rude mechanicals' play free from the troubles of the previous night. On the occasion of the duke’s wedding the court shows itself in splendor, contrasting the austere beginnings of the play. The prevailing mood is relaxed and festive as the final act shows a glimpse of Athens in a less restrictive mood.

Peter Quince and his companions first meet to rehearse their play outside the palace. Ms. Newman’s request was that the mechanicals first meeting place be Quince’s workshop. Ms. Newman’s concern was that the mechanicals not be in the forest so the revelation of the forest would happen at the top of Act II. Because the locale of this particular scene does not influence the action of the play the scene designer requested that the director consider a less specific locale to free time and budget for special effects. Ms. Newman agreed that the mechanicals first meeting place could take place somewhere less specific than Quince’s workshop. Ms. Newman suggested that the less distinct locale could perhaps be where the workmen gather for their noon meal. Hand props of lunch sacks and food would establish activity as the dominant element of the scene. The mechanicals’ dress, adorned with tools of their respective trades, places them with the working class.
The mood is light-hearted and festive in contrast to the somber mood of the opening scene. Act IV, scene 2 the mechanicals return to this locale when their search for Bottom goes unrewarded. The return to this locale also eases the action back into the human world before the total transition into the palace for the wedding festivities.

The mechanical's second meeting place, where Bottom is transformed into an ass, takes place somewhere within the forest. At the end of Act I Bottom states, "At the duke's oak we meet." The action of Act III, scene 1 calls for Titania to waken from her drugged sleep and charm the transformed Bottom to her bed. It is clear that Titania's resting place and the mechanical's rehearsal space are in proximity to one another because the mechanical's flight from the transformed Bottom wakens Titania from her sleep. The time is twilight, the approaching night adding to the mechanical's fear of Bottom. Costume again separates the mechanicals and the fairies socially. The mood shifts from festive to frightened and back as the mechanicals flee from their rehearsal and Titania spirits Bottom to her bower.

The forest serves as the locale for the rest of the action of the play. The majority of the action takes place at night, or in this case, the perpetual twilight associated with the midsummer night. As discussed previously a unit set will serve the multiple locales of the action. The
progression of the action deeper into the forest to be marked by the introduction of additional foliage. The activity of the scenes played in the forest varies. Large, kinetic chase scenes between the young lovers in pairs and as a foursome, dance oriented movement of the fairies in large groups and couples, intimate scenes between both groups and the hunting party of the court in Act IV, scene 1 must all be accommodated within the space.

Shaping all types of action in the forest is an inherent sense of magic about the environment. The scene designer determined that this magic manifests itself by the forest becoming a character. As a servant entity the tree becomes a source of power for its fairy rulers. Titania and Oberon create obstacles for the outsiders by summoning the tree to mislead and obstruct the intruders' chase by dropping its branches in their path. The tree is also an important symbol in the monarchs' relationship. The tree stands sentinel over Titania as she retires to her bower. Oberon is able to ward off the protection of the tree while he casts his spell on the sleeping Titania. And the couple's reunion takes place in the protective branches of the tree. Oberon and Puck exert their control over the forest environment and the elements. Oberon and Puck are able to call up fog and storms to help unravel the tangle Puck created between the lovers.

While each of the three major groups of characters
appear in the forest only the fairies belong in the environment. Ms. Newman requested the costume and scene designer collaborate to establish this idea visually. While the moods within the forest range from anger to passion Ms. Newman asked that the entire setting have a general feeling of enclosure and foreboding. The audience should be aware from the very beginning that the young lovers are lost in an unfamiliar part of the forest struggling to be reunited and find their way home.

Capturing a timeless quality for the production required concentration on the universal themes in the text. A primary theme brought to the forefront of the production by the director's decision to double cast major roles is the sense of duality between human and supernatural characters. The human characters embody logic and order while their fairy counterparts embody whimsy and chaos. Drawing these parallels scenically presents the designer with two different challenges. One, drawing each world separate and clearly so that the audience can see how characters react in and outside their environment. And two, providing the director with the opportunity to visually draw the worlds together and hold them up for comparison. Creation of a scene design that served both directoral purposes while maintaining a sense of unity with the other design areas were the scene designer's objectives for this production of A Midsummer Night's Dream.
CHAPTER IV

Design Solutions

This chapter outlines design solutions including the development of floorplan, solutions for masking and addresses use of special effects. Also included is a discussion of the design elements selected to achieve comparison and contrast between the environment of Theseus' palace and the forest.

A major part of the production process was spent in conference with the director formulating the floorplan. Allowing ample room for the actors without distancing the audience from the action was Ms. Newman's first concern. Using the orchestra elevator as the locale for the palace eliminated the expanse between the audience and the proscenium. In addition, the orchestra pit was lowered. Adding levels to this playing space made a smoother transition into the raked stage of the forest. A series of semitransparent panels between the palace and the forest separated the spaces and served as a visual metaphor for the thin layer of reality that separates the human and supernatural worlds. Hung in a staggered pattern the panels were intended to be utilized as entrances and exits for the
actors. This eliminated the need for all entrances and exits originating from the extreme left or right aprons. Columns on either side of the proscenium provided seating areas during the mechanicals’ scenes and gave mass to the palace setting.

The decision to use only one tree on stage to describe the forest environment was arrived at by the scene designer. Focus on the single tree rather than a forest full of trees reinforced the tree as a scenic element integral to the action. The premise of shifting battens of jute foliage to change locale within the forest developed as the scene designer and the director discussed the incorporation of the tree as a character that would interact with the actors. Hanging foliage from the tree which would fly throughout the action, reshaping the acting areas onstage provided needed variety to the unit setting. The designer suggested that the director could consider the tree and its branches Titania’s bower. This relationship between the tree and Titania tied the actor symbolically to the space. The director determined that Titania’s character would possess the ability to reconfigure the tree’s shape through the use of gesture. This concept further united the character with the environment. The symbiotic relationship between the fairies and the forest will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter discussing the evolution of design elements.
The concept of a simplified, organic jungle gym, if you will, was carried into the multi-leveled stage floor. A large ridge traveling across the stage at a slight angle upstage of the tree created a sense of enclosure and provided an elevated acting space with a variety of entrances and exits. The ridge and connecting platforms increased in height after consultation with the director to avoid creating a pastoral setting with no dynamic vertical movement patterns. A slide, resembling an earthen embankment, wrapped stage right of the tree provided access to off and onstage areas. A tunnel and slide stage center punctured the mass of the ridge and provided the fairies with a quick entrance or escape. Connected to the upstage ridge a large promontory stage left developed into Oberon's lookout over the forest. The director's placement of Oberon's scenes with Puck in this area tied his character to the space and gave Oberon a visual feeling of power and omnipotence. The promontory was given two onstage accesses. The first, a series of irregular platforms and footholds, were designed up the face of the hill. The second, a sweeping staircase, was placed at the extreme stage left side. The director determined through movement patterns that Oberon and Puck could maneuver both paths with familiar ease. In contrast, the young lovers' movement suggested their use of the hill created a physical obstacle that hampered their chase.
The division of the forest space was planned to create constant points of reference by tying Titania and Oberon to their respective areas of the stage. The significance of this decision on the visual focus of the action was threefold. First, tying defined territory to each character heightened the visual impact when Titania and Oberon invaded each other's area. Second, the premise of the forest being strictly the domain of the fairies heightened the disorientation of the young lovers as they stumbled through the obviously unfamiliar environment. By using the entire stage area the lovers movement provided visual variety in terms of the overall movement pattern of the piece.

Thirdly, as Titania and Oberon reunite the director planned to break down the established territorial lines. Through the use of choreography, that encompassed the entire stage, during Titania and Oberon's courtship dance the director restored tranquility and introduced visual unity to the forest.

Masking of the stage area became a particular concern for the scene designer. Not wishing to introduce straight-edged black masking into the organic forest environment the designer chose to construct side masking out of same semi-transparent fabric as the dress panels dividing the palace and the forest. By using the same fabric in both playing spaces the designer achieved a sense of visual unity for the production. Fabric utilized for the hard edged panels
separating the palace from the forest were shaped into irregular edges that blended more readily into the forest foliage. The problem of disguising the lighting instruments was treated by semi-obstructing their view from the audience through the use of foliage borders of the jute material selected to create foliage textures for the trees.

To help create a sense of magic and surprise in the forest, in addition to the slides, several other scenic devices were used as special effects. Two trap doors were placed onstage out of view of the audience. One stage right directly behind the tree and one in the stage left hillside.

A rope suspended from the grid upstage and stage right of the tree provided Oberon and Puck an alternative exit from the ridge. To help create the sense of dewy wetness requested by the director two small water puddles stage right and left where placed in the stage floor.

Four major theatrical devices were employed onstage to create magic in the forest. To create the sense of dampness one smoke machine and the two dry ice foggers were hidden in the scenery. As previously discussed, large panels of jute foliage were used to semi-obstruct the view of the lighting instruments. Jute panels falling to the floor in front of Titania's bower, stage center and on the stage left staircase created physical obstacles for the young lovers as they pursued each other through the forest. Choreographed gestures by Titania and Oberon initiated the flying of these
panels. This theatrical choice defined the fairies as the controlling force of their world through magic. The scene designer placed a star drop upstage of the set behind a full black scrim to create a feeling of additional visual depth in the sky. Because of time restraints this effect was later achieved by the use of gobos cast on the rear projection screen. The rear projection placed at the upstage of the scrim position provided the lighting designer, C. Todd Brown, an opportunity to reproduce the vivid sky washes to which Ms. Newman was attracted in the works of Maxfield Parrish.

The scene designer combined the use of line, shape, form, color and texture to create the overall mood and atmosphere for the human and supernatural worlds in the play. A discussion of the use of each of these elements of design in their respective locales by the scene designer will clarify the design choices made for the production. The objective of the scene designer was to create two unified, but separate worlds with a romantic overtone to reinforce the comparisons between the behavior of the human and supernatural characters in the text.

To reinforce the rigid, restrictive attitudes of Athens the architectural lines of Theseus’ palace where limited to straight planes. Flat staircases leading into the lowered orchestra pit established the rectilinear quality of the environment. Columns framing the proscenium arch remained
devoid of any fluting or engraving to soften their cylindrical appearance. The simple capitals and entablature introduced tightly controlled, curving lines into the design achieving a stately, static form. Staggered, vertical hanging panels gave a sense of depth and oppressive height to the environment.

Blending into the rigid lines of the palace steps the curved edge of the rake introduced the predominantly curved lines that characterized the organic environment of the forest. In order to avoid the use of straight lines or edges in the forest the designer gave all staircases, levels and ramps broken or curved edges. Although the rock texture chosen to give the set an illusion of height was vertical, the lines of the rock where broken and jagged to avoid creating an ordered linear pattern to the surface texture. Jute line used to create the tree foliage was braided, knotted, twisted and frayed to eliminate the inherent linear quality of the material.

Constructed, geometric shapes of Theseus' palace were employed to suggest the well ordered society of Athens. To unify the palace with the forest the scene designer repeated the rock motif in the forest at the base of the columns. Incorporating selected organic shapes into the design of the palace softened the transition into the forest. In addition, the placement of organic shapes in the otherwise rigid environment suggested a link between the latent,
unrestricted foundations of each world. During the Act IV wedding scene large curved draperies framing the action were added bringing the worlds closer together by introducing non-geometric forms into the environment.

The forest consisted of repetitive organic shapes and forms. The designer chose to create a strong silhouette for the forest to achieve a prevailing sense of foreboding in the forest. The silhouette was reinforced by backlighting the scenery. The tree was based on a combination of simplified realistic sources and geometric shapes inspired by Klimt's use of geometric pattern. Tree bark, branches and foliage were developed to closely resemble those of a weeping birch. Metallic tin can lids dotted the vines to give the tree sparkle and variety.

Working in collaboration with the costume designer, Joan St. Germain, to create a vocabulary of forms for use as decoration on the set and costumes ensured that the fairy costumes resembled the forest foliage. Tying the decorative motifs of the fairy costumes to the forest was a key step in making the fairies an integrated part of the physical environment. Disseminating sketches of design sources early in the production process reinforced the convention of using geometric shapes in the court and loose, organic shapes in the forest that gave a strong visual unity to the entire production.

The choice of color palette for the production was a
collaborative decision on the part of scenery and costume designer. Limiting the palette of the palace and the court to creams, peaches, roses and grays with metallic accents the set and costume designer distinguished the court members from the mechanicals. The clean, austere qualities of the color choices captured the desired atmosphere for Theseus' palace. Taking the scenery palette several values lower than the costumes ensured that the actors would not be lost against the scenery. Deepening the palette of the court also related the mechanicals' costumes of deeper earth tones into the selected palette. Darkening the palette also ensured that the floor color would be dark enough to eliminate excess bounce light on the forestage.

The forest palette included an expansion of the established palette of earth tones to include vivid blues, greens, violets and fuschia. The resultant color range was similar to that of the majority of Maxfield Parrish's work. Colors for the foliage were also inspired by the rich, vibrant colors Parrish used in such works as "The Mill." The enhancement of color by the scene designer was intended to create a more romantic, expressive environment. Discussions with the lighting designer on the use of saturated, dance lighting in the forest supported the decision to use an impressionistic sense of clear, vibrant color throughout the forest.

Maintaining the use of smooth, glossy textures in the
palace locale carried through the convention of keeping the space elegant and austere. The rich, warm, marble floor veined in gold set off by alabaster columns completed the use of rich textures to visually describe the duke's palace.

Layered textures of vines, moss, flowers, bark and rock created an impressionistic representation of the forest. Although the all environmental elements were based on real, organic textures interpretation of the organic textures throughout the production became exaggerated to create a theatrically romantic stage picture. The lace like overlays in texturing of the entire forest set softened the ominous silhouette of the tree and cliffs enabling the lighting designer to achieve a more pastoral type of image for the young lovers wooing scenes. The blankets of moss and flowers gathered by the fairies to line Titania's bower continued the use of layered textures. The organic elements from dissimilar environments combined to create a new reality in the fairy world. Another example of this heightened or exaggerated reality are the magic pansy and herbs Oberon uses to cast his spells. The plants were designed to be iridescent and sparkle in the light while maintaining their physical resemblance to real pansies and herbs. Basing the textures in the forest on ones that exist in the "real" world outside of the forest draws a parallel tying in similarities between the two worlds. Use of related elements established the magical quality of the
forest verses the predictability of the court.

Creating a believable environment for the world of the palace and the world of the forest for this production relied on forcing the contrasts between locales by the use of line, shape, form and texture. Use of theatrical elements and a limited color palette in both worlds achieved a unified production picture through collaboration with the lighting and costume designers. By pointing up the individual qualities of each environment the scene designer's objective was to set up an intrinsic system of visual contrasts and comparisons to help aid the audience in their discovery of the duality between the human and supernatural worlds represented in the text. The romantic tone of the entire production desired by the director was achieved through the impressionistic use of form, color and light.
CHAPTER V

Production Journal

This chapter includes a discussion of the problems solving involved in loading the production into the theatre space and the development of textural processes for the scenery.

Rigging the hanging scenery was first on the agenda for installing the set into the theatre because the first five line sets of the stage house do not come in to the floor. Once the raked floor of the forest was installed adjustment of the hanging scenery would be time consuming not to mention difficult. Communication with the director two days prior to load in required the addition of a wedding drape for Act IV. This addition forced the panels separating the forest from the palace to be hung on consecutive lines sets eliminating the entrances between the panels as originally intended. All jute foliage panels for the trees that had been completed were hanging before the load in date. Texturing, painting and hanging of additional jute panels continued until first dress. The technical director’s plan to pre-hang as much as possible before the load in date enabled the preassembled rake and forestage to be installed.
in time for the actors to rehearse on the stage ten days before opening.

With the rake installed and the secondary platforms and staircases following in short order the next large scenic units to tackle were the tree and water puddles. The tree structure was welded, installed and ready to be covered with texture in roughly two days. The scenic dope and burlap covering of the tree took place over the course of two days allowing time for the mixture to dry before evening rehearsals. The progression of the water puddles was slowed by the priority of hanging the masking for technical rehearsals and covering the floor with homosote to reduce the drum effect of the rake.

With the floor covered and the slides and all escapes completed the next major step was to texture the rock surfaces of the forest. Mark Shanda, the technical director, suggested that the rock be made of soft foam strips that could be easily mass produced and adhered to the platforms on a base of poultry netting. The spray mounting of the foam surfaces took approximately one day and allowed ample time to carve and detail the texture before painting. The resulting texture was easily painted by a series of sprays and painted highlights. The most attractive aspect of this texturing process was that the finished surface was actor friendly, not clinging to the sheer fabrics used by the costume designer or protesting with loud squeaks if the
actor accidentally kicked the surface. The one draw back was that the surface took nightly maintenance because the adhesive did not stand up on the most rigorously used areas of the set.

Texturing of the jute panels became an ongoing, tedious process. Each line was frayed, braided or knotted to create a variety of textures. Some lines where woven into others forming woven nets and webs. Although the process was time consuming the final product achieved the desired, lacy quality for the tree. The time required to achieve this effect was allowed because of the relatively fast techniques of texturing the tree and rocks.

To smooth the transition between the levels of the rake a ridge was built of strips of homosote creating a slight bridge between the levels. This extra layer eliminated the hard edge of the facing and gave the forest floor a more convincingly earthen appearance.

By first dress the majority of the set had been either base or finish painted. Texturing of the floor with moss, flowers and ferns had began at this point. Some unexpected finish work on the palace floor and additional trim to finish the edge of the stairs was required. Delay in installation of the columns framing the proscenium occurred because of the floor touch up. The columns did not arrive until final dress and were not fully textured until opening day.
Early completion of the hand properties for the production and the extra man hours the designer received from the scene studio crews, graduate designers, faculty and staff members working on the production made technical and dress rehearsals a fairly stress free process. Without the time, talent and suggestions that helped mount this production the final week of rehearsals and build could have been much more difficult. Thanks to the support staff in the studios the scene designer was able to concentrate on fine tuning the set dressing during the two days before opening.
CHAPTER VI

Concluding Remarks

This chapter is a summary of the effectiveness of the proposed design solutions and a self evaluation the designer's execution of the scene design process in the areas of time management, communication with the design team, artistic growth and fulfillment of production responsibilities. Focus will be put on the major success and failures of the designer to successfully mount the thesis production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Upon completion of the production design for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* three major questions confronted the designer to establish the success of the design objectives and their execution. First, was the distinction between the human and supernatural world clear? Second, did the design capture and enhance the romantic elements in the text? And third, did the entire set facilitate the action of the play in an effective manner?

The transition from the human to the supernatural worlds in the play was successful in that the reality of each world was believable on an individual level. Unity of the production design was achieved by introducing common
elements into the forest and the palace such as masking materials and the use of common foliage as set dressing in both worlds. In retrospect the palace seemed too austere and would have been more integrated into the total design with the addition of greenery to the columns framing the proscenium.

Creating a romantic environment was most easily achieved in the forest. The flowers and lacy set dressing on top of the strong structural silhouette of the scenery allowed the mood to shift from foreboding to enchanted quite easily with the shift of lighting direction. Perhaps the most ineffective scene was the wedding scene. The backdrop of the forest symbolically set up the statement of the duality of the worlds but the additional set props failed to achieve the desired sense of relaxed luxury the designer wanted to capture for the scene.

The floorplan reflected the initial time investment spent on the layout of the acting space. The multiple levels in the set provided the director with a wide variety of stage pictures in both environments. Ample entrances and exits from the space provided variety and dealt effectively with the mechanics of getting a cast of thirty on and off stage quickly.

The pitfalls of the space were the water puddles, the swinging rope and the relationship of the forest rake to the proscenium. The water puddles seemed like a good, useful
element to tie the actor to the space but in execution were too small to make an effective statement. The swinging rope could easily have been eliminated or more similar devices should have been added. The presence of only one rope made the movement jarring and out of place with the rest of the well integrated movement on the set. In an attempt to bring the forest rake closer to the audience the middle level was shortened and the rake was reoriented to the proscenium. Foreshortening the middle level made this playing area less effective than originally intended. The reorientation created a parallel relationship to the plaster line. Had the original angle relationships been maintained the movement center stage would have been less lateral.

Lighting also played a role in the decision to change the orientation of the rake to the proscenium. To get the spread of the tree branches between the electrics and still clear sightlines to the playing area upstage of the tree reorientation of the rake became a necessity.

Providing sketches and the model for the director and the production team in a timely fashion proved to be a manageable endeavor that allowed a quality finished product. Completing the design draftings took considerably more time than expected to avoid redrawing plates. This may have slowed production in the first week due to the delay time needed to order materials. Procrastination in placement of the show's paint order delayed painting of the jute
hangings. One evening work session was required to complete the work so the jute could be hung the following morning.

Constant consultation with the director and costume designer helped keep the perspective on the importance of certain design choices and reinforced the design decisions made early in the process. The lighting designer was considerably less available for consultation. His unavailability made the solving the replacement of the star drop with gobos an unwanted interruption during technical rehearsals.

Daily meetings with the stage manager, Timothy Allwein, and the Scene Studio Manager, Ron Cannell, helped keep abreast of changes and made the day to day problem solving of the production very easy. Mark Shanda was able to coordinate his talents and those of the studio staff by gauging when projects would be ready for finish detail and painting. In all the production process was the most educational aspect of the design because of the valuable lessons learned from going through the execution of the design. Learning step by step what information had to get to whom in order to get the show through the studio in a timely fashion.

The effectiveness of the designer in the execution of the design can be measured by the lessons learned from the process. Above all be prepared. Organize and work ahead as much as possible. The few times spent waiting to work on
something could have been spent completing minor tasks, in particular the completion of the properties. Remain flexible about options for achieving a finished product. Never underestimate the value of found materials. Much of the textual material involved in dressing the scenery came from stock sources and was many times better than the first solution. And most importantly if you stay calm, everyone else is likely to stay calm and enjoy their work. Never forget to say thank you. A tremendous amount of personal and artistic growth happened during the production process for A Midsummer Night's Dream. The failures were well worth the positive lessons that resulted in the fixing of the problems. The entire process from initial production meetings to completion of the design reinforced the need for the tremendous amount of organization, collaboration, energy and thought that is required to fully realize a design.
Figure 1: Floorplan, 1/2" = 1'-0" scale, reduced
Figure 2: Section View, 1/2" = 1'-0" scale, reduced
Figure 3: Tree and Rock Detail, $1/2\" = 1'-0\"$ scale, reduced
Figure 4: Cliff and Rock Detail, 1/2" = 1'-0" scale, reduced
Figure 5: Tree Hanging Layout, $1/2'' = 1'-0''$ scale, reduced
Figure 6: Masking and Tree Border, 1/2" = 1'-0", reduced
Plate I. Photograph of Design Model
Plate II. Production Photograph, Titania's Bower
Plate III. Production Photograph, Oberon's Lookout
Plate IV. Production Photograph, Mechanical's Rehearsal
Plate V. Production Photograph, Lover's Chase
Plate VI. Production Photograph, Titania and Bottom
Plate VII. Production Photograph, Titania and Oberon's Reunion
Plate VIII. Production Photograph, Wedding Feast
Plate IX. Dressing Detail, Tree, Foliage, Flowers
Plate X. Visual Resource, Maxfield Parrish, The Mill
Plate XI. Visual Resource, Maxfield Parrish, Allah's Garden
BIBLIOGRAPHY


