A SCENIC DESIGN PROCESS FOR A PRODUCTION OF NOISES OFF

A Thesis
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By
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ABSTRACT

Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* was a theatrical production presented by The Ohio State University Department of Theatre during autumn quarter of 2008. This thesis is a documentation of the scenic design process for this production. *Noises Off* was performed in the Thurber Theatre located in the Drake Performance and Events Center.

The first chapters are descriptions of the production situation and collaboration with the rest of the design team. Script analysis, concept, design approach, and production process are then described. Finally, I provide a self evaluation of the entire process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you to Sarah, Elli, and Vic for providing advise, support, and friendship over the past three years. Many thanks to my parents, sister, and husband, Chad for all the love and support they've given.

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CHAPTER 1: The Producing Situation

The Ohio State University Department of Theatre produced Michael Frayn's Noises Off in Thurber Theatre in The Drake Performance and Event Center. It was presented October 30-November 2, November 6-9, 2008.

Thurber is a proscenium style theatre. The proscenium opening is 22' high and 35' wide. Upstage of the plaster line, the stage is 38' deep. The apron of the stage is 3' deep before becoming an orchestra pit elevator which is 8'x34' at its widest points. It can extend 7'11” below the level of the stage. There are doors on both sides of the proscenium. Downstage of the proscenium the stage extends off stage approximately 22'6”x11' on both stage right and stage left. In this area there are eight movable calipers, four on each side of the stage. The wing space stage right is 18' and the wing space stage left is 35'. Thurber Theatre has a counterweight system with 33 line sets. The first 7 are a single purchase system operated from the floor while the remaining are double purchase and operated from an elevated fly rail. The battens are between 6” and 1'6” apart and are 56' long. The soft goods stock consists of 10 pairs of black velour legs, 5 black velour borders, a full stage white cyclorama, a full stage black scrim, a grand drape, and a red curtain. The scenic studio is located offstage left. The spaces are separated by a 21'-6”x15'-10” door. The booth from which the show is called and lighting is operated is
located at the back of the house on the second floor. Sound is operated at the back of the house. The continental seating arrangement in the house can seat 600.

The production team for *Noises Off* consisted of professor Mark Shanda, producer; associate professor Maureen Ryan, director; Megan Corbin, undergraduate assistant director; Marysha Sarris, undergraduate costume designer; Matt Hazard, graduate lighting designer; Dan Mayer, undergraduate sound designer; Chad Mahan, staff technical director; James Knapp, staff production coordinator; Brandon Curtis, undergraduate stage manager; Alyssa Ellis and Andrea Schimmoeller, undergraduate assistant stage managers.

Unlike most productions that are built during the school year, this production was to be built in the middle of the summer by Mahan and a small carpentry crew. Because *Noises Off* is such a physical show, the decision was made that it would be easiest for the actors to begin rehearsing on the set immediately when rehearsals began the following school year. At the first production meeting on May 13, 2008 Ryan distributed her director's concept. The set budget was $3,500 and $1,800 was allocated to props. My preliminary designs were due on May 27 with a more finalized design due the following week. The final drawings were due August 4. The build began August 18 giving 5 weeks to build before the actors began rehearsing. It was planned that finishing touches, such as molding and painted detail, would be gradually completed during the following weeks before the tech process began with crew watch on October 22. *Noises Off* opened on October 30, 2008.
CHAPTER 2: Synopsis and Script Analysis

Michael Frayn is a British author and playwright who was born September 8, 1933. After graduating from Cambridge in 1957, he worked as a newspaper columnist for the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Observer*. Frayn has written plays, novels, and translated several of Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's plays. Many of his plays are comedies that focus on family situations and insights into society (Britannica).

Michael Frayn's farce, *Noises Off*, is a play within a play. It begins during the final rehearsal of the production *Nothing On*, the second act takes place backstage in the middle of the run, and the final act takes place at the end of the run.

*Noises Off* began as a one-act called *Exits* produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on September 10, 1977 in London. Michael Codron, a producer, commissioned a full length version. This version opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1982 and underwent significant rewriting (Frayn, *Noises Off*, 8).

*Noises Off* premiered on February 23, 1982 at the Savoy Theatre in London and ran until 1987. It opened on Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on December 11, 1983. Both productions were directed by Michael Blakemore with set and costumes by Michael Annals. It was revived in London in the Lyttleton Theatre on October 5, 2000 and again on Broadway on November 1, 2001. Both those productions were directed by
Jeremy Sams with set and costumes by Robert Jones. In 1992, a film version directed by Peter Bogdanovich was made starring Michael Caine and Carol Burnett.

As the curtain goes up at the beginning of *Noises Off*, we see a 16th century English country home. Although it is a very old converted posset mill, it has been renovated with modern conveniences and is very comfortable. A posset mill is a mill where a drink of hot milk mixed with beer or ale, called posset, is made. This is the set of the play within the play called *Nothing On*, a show that opens the next day before touring the country. The first character the audience meets is Dotty Otley who is playing Mrs. Clackett, the housekeeper, in *Nothing On*. While she is trying to relax on her day off, she is interrupted by Roger Tramplemain, played by Garry Lejeune, and Vicki, played by Brook Ashton. Roger is in the real estate business and Vicki works for Inland Revenue. Thinking the house would be empty, Roger brought Vicki there to be alone with her, so they go upstairs to the bedroom. Philip and Flavia Brent, played by Frederick Fellowes and Belinda Blair, arrive. They are the owners of the house who have been in Spain for not paying their taxes and Philip begins to become concerned that they will be caught by Inland Revenue. Unaware that anyone else is in the house, Vicki and Roger become alarmed when they hear voices. Roger and Vicki alternate trying to find the source of the voices and hiding from them. A burglar, played by Selsdon Mowbray, then breaks into the house through the window and begins gathering up items to steal. Roger runs into the burglar who he believes has done something with Vicki, who he can not find. Roger then runs in to Philip who he believes to be a sexual pervert that has taken Vicki because Philip was in his underwear after he spilled poison himself which ate through his pants.
Vicki returns and runs into Flavia who believes that Vicki is there for Philip. Vicki and Frederick both end up covered in bed sheets and Roger mistakes them for a sheikh and his wife that were supposed to come look at the house. The real sheikh appears who looks remarkably like Philip. The sheikh is actually played by Frederick while Tim, the stage hand, stands in for Philip. Chaos ensues. The act ends with Vicki being reunited with her father, the burglar. This is a summary of the first act of Nothing On. This is the only act of the Nothing On that is ever seen.

The first act of Noises Off is a rehearsal, so the summary above is often interrupted with problems. From confusion about blocking and props to nose bleeds and lost contacts, the rehearsal is a disaster. Selsdon, who is continuously getting lost, is an alcoholic that can't remember his lines. The simple plot proves to be too complicated for Frederick. If things weren't bad enough, Garry and Dotty are in a relationship and Lloyd is having an affair with both Brooke and Poppy, the stage manager which adds further complications to the late night rehearsal.

Act II takes place a month later. The set has turned 180 degrees and the show is watched from backstage. At this point, Dotty and Garry have broken up. Garry spotted Dotty and Frederick together and Garry is overcome with jealousy. Brooke claims she has nervous exhaustion and is threatening to leave the show. Lloyd arrives to try to convince Brooke to stay. The play continues on the on stage side of the set much like in the previous act. The audience views backstage, where there is chaos. This act is full of mixed up props, incorrect entrances, and bloody noses. Garry is angry with Frederick and Dotty, Dotty is angry at Garry, Brooke and Poppy fight over Lloyd while Belinda just
tries to keep the peace. They get through the act, but not without resorting to physical violence and sabotage. At the end of the act, when Poppy manages to get Lloyd alone with her, she reveals that she is pregnant.

Act III takes place at the end of the run of Nothing On. This act is viewed from the on stage side. This act is supposed to look like the scene rehearsed in Act I. At this point in the run, Belinda and Dotty have been fighting over Frederick. The act begins with Mrs. Clackett entering and dropping her prop, a gooey plate of sardines on the floor. The simple act of dropping the plate is an indicator of what will follow in the rest of the act. The sardines create a slippery spot on the floor which is a hazard for everyone who walks by it. Act III is full of flubbed lines, broken props, and bungled entrances. A fight even breaks out between Dotty and Belinda. Frederick and Garry both end up falling down stairs. Nothing On reaches a low point when three different burglars enter. Both Tim and Lloyd try to cover for Selsdon when he cannot be found. Selsdon eventually arrives and all three of them try to play the same part, reciting the lines in unison. Belinda tries to cover for the mistake and says that Lloyd isn't really a burglar, but a social worker who comes to tell them what to do. She wants Lloyd to fix the mess they had created but he becomes parallelized with stage-fright. Belinda says that they should just get through it for doors and sardines. Chaos breaks out. In an attempt to create a happy ending, Poppy is pushed on stage in the Sheikh's robes which they call a wedding dress. They perform and very brief wedding ceremony between her and Lloyd and call out for the last line to be delivered. When Selsdon forgets his line, everyone calls for the
curtain to come in. As the curtain comes down, it gets stuck and the cast has to pull it
down manually until the curtain rips and falls on them.

_Noises Off_ is a farce. Farce is a kind of comedy in which the humor is a result of
physical acts (Wilson, G4). It's all about slamming doors, silly props, and prat falls. It's a
play that shows an audience that sometimes what happens backstage is more entertaining
than what's on stage.

_Nothing On_, the play within _Noises Off_, is a sex farce. A sex farce is a comedy
with a lot of physical action and a number of sexual rendezvous. They include lots of
props, doors, double entendres, and women, like Brooke, running around in their
underwear. Having the play within the play of _Noises Off_ be a sex farce adds to the
confusion, and therefore, comedy of the play. Too many doors and too many props create
confusion for the actors in _Nothing On_. For example, when the actors forget their props
off stage or when Selsdon gets lost and everyone goes searching through all the doors for
him, there is much confusion on stage. _Noises Off_, illustrates that if there is apparent
chaos on stage, it is very possible that real chaos exists back stage.

It's a play about relationships and how they change over time under differing
circumstances. In Act I, the entire cast gets along. With the exception of Lloyd,
everyone is pleasant to each other. In Act II, the relationships begin to fall apart. Garry
and Dotty are at each other's throats. Brooke is angry with Lloyd although she still
continues to fight over him with Poppy. In Act III, relationships fall even further apart as
Dotty and Belinda fight over Frederick. The characters in the play are caricatures of real
people; sometimes even more so than the characters the actors are playing in _Nothing On_.

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Lloyd is a self absorbed womanizer. Brooke is a bimbo, but if it wasn't for her, they
never would have gotten through the play once they reached the end of the run. Her
inability to improvise forced the rest of the cast to at least loosely follow the script.
Belinda is a maternal people pleaser. She continuously tries to fix everyone's problems,
which generally causes more trouble than there was in the first place. Frederick is an
apologetic actor with low self esteem. Garry is an overly jealous, inarticulate man.
Selsdon is a drunk. Often under appreciated, Tim and Poppy are abused stagehands.
Poor Dotty is just a has-been actress trying to save money for her future.

The text is written in a similar style to many of Frayn's other comedies such as
Donkeys' Years and Balmoral. It features lots of repetitious language.

Lloyd: And you leave the sardines.
Dotty: And I leave the sardines?
Lloyd: You leave the sardines.
Dotty: I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines. (Frayn, Noises Off, 13)

Frayn also tends to employ physicality and props in his comedies. The physical nature of
them causes a lot of confusion and problems for the characters in the play, providing
humor for the audience. In Act III not all of the props were placed where they should
have been. In Belinda's attempts to repair the performance, she moves some of the props
around to where they are supposed to be placed. Unfortunately, she moves them at the
wrong time. When Vicki says that Roger's bag is gone, the bag is actually sitting on the
table right in front of her. Vicki says the bag has reappeared and Belinda takes the bag
away.
It is an ingeniously written script, often with multiple things going on at once. This is seen especially during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} acts. The plots both on stage and off are intricately woven together to great comic effect.
CHAPTER 3: The Director's Concept and the Design Approach

In the director's concept, Ryan states that *Noises Off* is about uncertainty. She says that “life, like farce, is ruled by chaos and uncertainty (Ryan).” In the middle of the chaos on stage, no one is certain what is going to happen and many times they aren't certain how they should proceed with the play. They just have to push on and hope that they can have a happy ending, an important feature at the end of comedies. They try to achieve this happy ending by having a “wedding” at the end of the play. But the audience won't get the comedy if the technical aspects aren't right. If the doors are not located properly then the action as it is written in the script will not make sense. For example, in Act II Frederick and Brooke must enter simultaneously through the bedroom and closet doors. They are both wearing bed sheets that Garry tied together, so neither of them can go through the doors. If the doors were spaced too far apart or were not located next to each other, the bit would not work.

Ryan's approach to the set was to not reinvent the wheel; the scenic elements that have been proven to work in the past would work for us. For the “on stage side” she pictured a set that “needs that special something that lets us know as soon as the curtain rises that this is not an environment that will house very serious goings on.” It was extremely important that all the necessary doors, stairs, furniture, and window were all located appropriately and could be easily seen by the entire audience. Although the play
Noises Off is a play that was very difficult for me to read particularly because I had never seen a production of it performed. It was difficult because in Act II each page of the script is divided in half to separate what is going on “on stage” and what's going on “backstage” simultaneously. In trying to read two things at once, it is very easy to get lost and even miss much of the humor that I knew was there. I was able to watch Peter Bogdanovich's film, which made the action of Act II much clearer. Once I began to understand what the action was in the script, it gave me a much better idea of what I needed to produce as the scenic designer.

After reading the script, the first thing I did was create a list of the necessary doors, furniture, stairs, and props. I then began looking at research of 16\textsuperscript{th} century English country interiors. My main sources were Elements of Interior Design and Decoration by Sherrill Whiton, The Elements of Style by Stephen Calloway and Elizabeth Cromley, and various internet sites. The research consisted mostly of half-timbered structures. Buildings that are constructed this way often have angled roof lines and beams that appear to be placed in whatever random way the carpenter thought was necessary. I wanted to keep that aesthetic by making the tops of the walls angled and creating a somewhat irregular beam pattern. Placing the beams this way would give the set a disjointed effect. I wanted to create a set that represented controlled chaos, which is what Nothing On was meant to be. Behind the scenes ends up not being so controlled. Doing research for the “off stage” set in Act II was significantly more challenging. I had
difficulty finding resources that showed the back of a set. I had to rely on *Backstage Handbook* by Paul Carter and my own knowledge of how scenery is constructed to design it. In keeping with Ryan's wish to keep the play contemporary and traditional, I wanted the “backstage” to be built with traditional stagecraft. This meant it would be made entirely out of wood, not steel, which is typical in stagecraft today. This also helped give the “backstage” a more unified look.

That “special something” that Ryan wanted the set to have, as mentioned in her concept statement, I decided should be tackiness. Cheesy, tacky things are funny so this would add another level of humor to the production. I chose to do this by taking things that could be attractive in small doses, like flower arrangements or stencils, and overdoing them. An additional thing I had to consider was who actually designed the room. Within the play of *Nothing On*, the character of Flavia was probably the one with the most control over how her house looked. I also had to think about who the designer was for *Nothing On*. I had to consider the skill and taste level of this imaginary person and the kind of person they think Flavia is. Flavia seems to be a woman who would want a cozy country cottage that is very comfortable. In this production, the designer's idea of cozy is cluttered and over designed, meaning everything matches in an obnoxious way. This helped develop my idea of what tacky meant for the design. In my view, the designer of *Nothing On* had an unsophisticated level of taste and thought the room was beautifully designed.

Another interesting thing I had to speculate about was the company as a whole that produced *Nothing On*. How much money, time, and experience did they have? I
think they had a decent amount of money, much like the scenic budget for our production of *Noises Off*. This amount of money is more than many shows receive, but much less than many touring shows would get. I think the build crew had sufficient experience, and were able to build a sturdy, well constructed set. Although it states in the script that Tim had been up for two days finishing the set, I think there was adequate time before that to construct the set. The technical aspects were on time, it was just the rehearsals that lagged behind.

![Initial Sketch Acts I and III](image)

**FIGURE 1: INITIAL SKETCH ACTS I AND III**

My first meeting with Ryan concerning the set was on May 16\textsuperscript{th}. I presented several sketches to her. I was able to get quite a bit accomplished by this point because everything needed is described thoroughly in the script. Ryan liked the direction the design was going stylistically. She favored one of the ground plans and gave me a few
notes on the locations of some of the doors to make them work better for the action of the play. The original sketches for Acts I and III represented half-timbered interiors. After speaking with Ryan and my academic advisor, Dan Gray, some wood paneling was added on the first floor underneath the gallery to break up the space and provide some variation on the walls. It also gave the downstairs a more formal feel than the upstairs hallway. During these meetings, I also changed the directions of one of the staircases in Act II to make the traffic patterns flow better. Originally the staircase went directly downstage perpendicular to the wall that the bedroom and closet doors were on. I changed it to be on a diagonal so that the staircases and landing created a loop.

Shortly after this meeting, I met with the technical director, Chad Mahan. We worked out a way to shrink the size of the second floor to reduce the need for posts to support it. I wanted to keep them to a minimum on the “on stage” side. They would have
been too much in the way of the actors because there was not as much space for the actors to move around on that side. I didn't mind having supports on the “off stage” side. On any real set they probably would have been there. They also created another obstacle that had comedic potential by getting in the way of the actors.

FIGURE 3: PRELIMINARY SCENIC DESIGN SKETCH ACTS I AND III

At the production meeting on May 27, I presented a detailed sketch of the set. By this point I had exaggerated the “roof line” more to add interest so the line wouldn't be so straight. This detail showed my idea of the set looking disjointed. I also made the beam pattern more random than I had previously. This added a bit more of the quirkiness that is found in many half-timbered buildings. It also broke up the walls in a visually pleasing way. I began adding more details, such as pictures on the walls and more detailed paneling in the doors. The floor was either going to look like wood or stone which was
common in my research of 16th century design. Wood seemed to me to make the most sense, but since there was already so much wood on the set, I wasn't sure if that was the direction I wanted to go. Ryan suggested adding a landing of some kind on the first level. Adding a landing in front of the front door and window make this area more of a feature for the audience. This is important because all the characters in Nothing On except Mrs. Clackett are first introduced to the audience through either that door or window. This gave me the idea to make the landing look like stone and the rest of the floor resemble wood.

![FIGURE 4: REVISED PRELIMINARY SKETCH ACTS I AND III](image)

The response to my design was generally good, but the position of the doors on the first floor needed to be altered. In this version, the study door was directly underneath the closet door and the bathroom and servant's quarters door were too far stage left. I decided to move the study door to sit under the stairs. I was concerned about
doing this because it was going to make that door significantly shorter than a standard door was a safety concern. Moving that door to the right, made it possible to shift all the other doors and the window further stage right. Moving that door resulted in a sight line problem. About a third of the audience would be unable to see the door when the set was “backstage.” At a later meeting with Mahan, I solved the problem by moving the front door and window wall. Instead of it being directly under the closet and bedroom wall, it was moved about a foot to make the angle between that wall and the study door more shallow.

At the May 27th meeting, we mostly discussed the “on stage” side, but we briefly went over the “backstage” side, which was going to be more muted and toned down. It would look like Hollywood flats for the walls and standard platforms for the second floor. Hollywood flats are constructed with the rails and styles on their edge instead of their
face like traditional soft flats. Rails and styles make up the support structure on the back of a flat. They are also hard covered which makes them stronger. Hollywood flats were necessary because soft flats would have shaken too much with all the door slamming and actors running up and down stairs. The stairs were to be open staircases, designed to be fairly easy to see through.

At this meeting we began discussing how the lights were to be hung. The first and third electric were accessible, but the second one was not. Mary Tarantino, the lighting design professor, suggested the set could split apart. Once the final ground plan was drawn, I discovered that all the electrics could be accessed fairly easily if the set was turned 90 degrees. Given this, I decided not to split the set apart. The set could turn as one large unit.

At the next production meeting on June 3rd, I presented a color sketch of Acts I and III and color research for Act II. For the on stage side, I wanted to go with bright, cheery colors, to support the comedy. I knew I wanted to have three different wood tones- one for the doors, a second for the beams, and a third for the stairs and railings. I wanted to use warm colors for the rest of the walls, so I decided on a yellow. For extra bursts of color and some added gaudiness, I added floral stencil borders and floral arrangements above some of the doors. I wanted the backstage side to look like slightly distressed, toned down unpainted building materials.

We talked about what needed to happen with the orchestra pit. Gray suggested we have the pit up to give the actors more space. We decided that it would be down at the level of the house in Acts I and III. It would have steps on it so Lloyd could more easily
get on stage from the house in Act I. In Act II the pit would be up to create more space for the actors.

Mahan asked if Ryan wanted to see the set change. She said that she preferred not to see the change. She wanted each act to be started with the curtain going up and end with it closing to give the change a cleaner look. Mahan said that it would be a tight fit for the set to turn without hitting the main curtain, but it would be possible. With such a large set, it was going to be a challenge to rotate it so that it wouldn't break the plane of the main curtain, without pushing the set too far upstage.

At this point, everyone left for summer break. We didn't have another meeting until June 26, when I presented my model and a more refined version of the set design. Marysha Sarris, the costume designer, also presented her costume research. She presented contemporary research, but nothing too trendy, in keeping with Ryan's desire to give the dated play a contemporary feel.

I made several changes to the set since the last time we had met. I had replaced the wood paneling with wallpaper. Because the paneling was fairly dark, it was starting to feel a bit oppressive. Wallpaper still broke up the space like the paneling did and it allowed another place to add in tacky details. I added masking behind all the doors and included a small backdrop that would be placed behind two cut out bushes that could be seen behind the window and front door. All the masking would be removed for Act II, leaving only the bush cut-outs. I had also decided that the caliper areas could be used for exits into the “house” and “dressing rooms” in Act II.
Shanda brought up that the bare wood on the walls in Act II could be a problem because the color of wood is similar to Caucasian skin tones. I began thinking about giving it a back painted look, since the set would likely have been be back painted and fireproofed. Shanda also suggested that I break up the straight lines of the set by adding a curve to the landing platform.

The next production meeting was not scheduled until July 17th. In preparation for that meeting, I began looking at some of the smaller details. Because there was such a large difference in the tone of the show in Acts I and III, I needed to be able to show scenically how much of a mess the actors were in by Act III. I decided the best way to do that was to add details such as the pictures skewed and the floral arrangements crooked.
and distressed. There were so many things that already needed to happen during the scene changes, these details needed to add minimal work for the crew.

There were still small adjustments that needed to happen with the doors and walls to make sure the sight lines were good for everyone in the audience. To solve the problems, I made slight adjustments to the size and angles of some of the walls. For example, I made the wall the dry bar was on slightly smaller to enable the angle of the servant's quarter door to become shallower.

It took me a while to figure out how I wanted to paint the “backstage.” I had never back painted a set before, so I had never seen one first hand. I decided to paint all the walls a dull green. It is a very different look from the front, but I used a lot of green as an accent color there, so the color palette for the whole show was cohesive. The dark color also allowed the actors to stand out visually in front of it. All the walls were to have labels stenciled on them along with labels above all the doors. The steps, railings, and platforms were to be painted to look like an unstained wood that was darker to show that it had been a bit worn and to keep the actors from blending in to it. All the doors were originally going to be the same wood grain as they were on their fronts, based on what was seen by the audience when the doors swung open. As that changed, I decided to make some of the doors different on their back sides as if trying to save money, the company performing *Nothing On* used doors from previous shows. This also added variety and broke up the expanse of green wall. I decided to paint the stage floor to look like wood planks.
Mahan and I had talked about hanging two sets of masking backwards for Act II to enhance the backstage look. We had some old sets in our stock, so we could use those. I liked the idea that the masking was a bit worn because, like the crooked pictures in Act III, they reflected the emotional state the cast of Nothing On was in a month into the run.

I also wanted to have a “main curtain” all the way upstage for Act II. Part way through the act, the curtain rises as Nothing On begins. Mahan ended up finding a large red curtain in our stock which worked great for us, but was not large enough to be used for the downstage curtain that falls at the end of the show. Mahan and I discussed the problem of the downstage falling curtain. We both doubted it was going to work because we didn't have a curtain to use and a curtain that large would have been very expensive. There were other ways to end the show on a comical note without having to rip down the curtain. As an alternative, Mahan and I suggested that the curtain could get “stuck” and
the actors try to pull it in the rest of the way. Perhaps an actor could get stuck on the wrong side of the curtain and get “lost” trying to find their way backstage.

The large size of the turntable caused problems. The turntable platform could not cross the plane of the main curtain. This gave about a 13'x27’ acting area which was not large enough for room to move comfortably around the sofa. I wanted to make the scene changes as easy as possible for the crew by having a turntable large enough so all the furniture could ride on it. To make it so the actors had enough room to be as physical as they needed to be, the platform would have had to be even larger which would have made the platform extend beyond the plane of the main curtain. Mahan suggested that we shrink the size of the turntable, which had been a strain on the budget because it was so large. This change made it so the platform would consist of just the small landing and under the staircase on the “on stage” side. All but one of the walls could still be attached to the structure. This provided four additional feet downstage because the acting space could extend downstage of the main curtain. It solved the space issues beautifully with very little sacrifice. The set changes would take a bit longer, but we had a relatively large crew. There also had to be a hole left in the turntable on the “backstage” side of the study door so there wouldn't be a step up as soon as an actor walked through it. I thought this might look a little strange, but after looking at it in my three-dimensional Auto CAD model, I saw that it wasn't very noticeable. As well as solving the space issues, the smaller turntable also solved the problem of the short study door since another 8” was gained.
As Mahan was working on construction drawings, he came across a problem that I hadn't noticed in my section. The top of the off stage right wall on the “on stage” side had a very steep angle. It was so short on the downstage side that anyone standing on the escape stairs behind it would be able to be seen by the audience. The solution was to make that angle at the top of the wall shallower.

Once the build began on August 18th, a few more problems arose that contributed to the evolution of the design. I will discuss these and the production process in the next chapter.
The final set design for *Noises Off* consisted of a unit set of eight walls and three staircases on a turn table. There were seven doors and one large window on the walls. On the first floor of the “on stage” side of the set from stage right to left was the study door, a window, the front door, the bathroom door, and the door to the servant's quarters. Three quarters of the way up the staircase on a landing was another bathroom door. On the second level from stage right to left there was a closet door, a bedroom door, and a doorway to the attic. Because of the complicated blocking in this show, it was very important that the doors were placed specifically. In Act III Mrs. Clackett drags the phone out the study door. The phone breaks after a tug of war with Roger and he throws the phone base in the downstairs bathroom. Philip and Flavia enter a few moments later from the front door. They carry the phone with them and say that they wonder how it got into the garden. They attempt to put the phone back on the table, the cord, which is still plugged in, is not long enough. They follow the cord that had gone out the bathroom door and back through the front door. Many of the gags, like this one, depended on the precise placement of the doors.

This build process was an unusual one. Because of the physicality of the show, the actors needed to work on the actual set as soon as possible. The set was to be mostly finished by the time rehearsals started at the beginning of fall quarter, which meant it had
to be built in the summer. I was to come in during the last two weeks of the build to paint
the show, but was not in the shop every day during the build as I would normally be when
taking classes. I came in periodically to check progress, answer questions, and discuss
problems. The set was built by technical director, Chad Mahan, Chris Zinkon, and a
small crew of graduate teaching associates: Victor Shonk, Elinore Loomis, and Kal Poole.
Sarah Sugarbaker came in later in the process to paint.

On August 18th, the build began with the construction of the platform for the
turntable. Construction of this unit went quickly, so the turntable was in place and
spinning very soon. After that, all the walls that sat on the turntable were built and put in
place. Next the stairs and upper level platforms were built and installed. Once that was
in, the walls that sat on the upper level could be put in position. Once this main structure
was in details like doors, railings, and moldings were put in place.

Once the build had started, we discovered a similar problem that we had with the
far right wall at the intersection of the two far left walls. The audience would be able to
see the tops of the heads of someone standing behind the walls on the landing. This was
a very easy fix. We found the problem when I had come in to place all the three-
dimensional timber trim. Since the trim went along the top perimeter of the set, we just
adjusted the molding there so it sat about six inches above the wall. This way, only an
extremely tall actor could have been seen over it.

The last two weeks of the build, while smaller details were being put in place, the
painting began. The walls were a two color yellow scumble with a two color sponging
over the top of it. I added a little joint compound to the scumble colors to give the paint
some thickness to try to simulate the texture of old plaster walls. On the paint elevation, there was a bright yellow wash that went over the walls around the beams and in the corners of the wall. After seeing the walls painted yellow in full scale, I realized that was the wrong choice. I changed it to a deeper golden yellow that would look more like aging. That warmed things up significantly and helped break up the bright yellow. The rest of the “on stage” side was either wood grained or wallpapered. The “backstage” side walls were painted a relatively washy dull green with a dirty brown wash in the corners to age them. The platform and stairs were a light wood grain with a brown wash for aging.

There were several changes that were made during the build without my knowledge. The backstage stairs were supposed to be made out of 2”x12” stringers with 2”x12” treads. They ended up being made out of oriented strand board and 2”x4” on 2”x12” stringers. This made them more solid looking than I would have liked. The result was they couldn't be seen through as well, but they were very sturdy. All the toggles and rails of the walls were supposed to be made out of 1”x4”. They were made out of 2”x4”, which looked a bit bulky. This change was made due to budget concerns. The 2”x4”s were actually cheaper than the 1”x4”. Since most of the audience would be fairly far way, it ended up not making that big of a difference. It also was a good change structurally because it was such a physical show and the set was used for so long, the extra strength may have saved the walls from getting too damaged. There was also an odd box that was added under the top of the “on stage” stairs. A small portion of the wall jutted out underneath the steps. It needed to be there for support, but I think that if I had
been aware of the problem, we could have come up with a better solution that would have
given the necessary support and would have looked more like it had been designed.

The biggest problem that arose was the masking that went behind the doors in
Acts I and III. The masking on the first floor was fairly straight forward. The hardest
location to mask was the sky behind the window. It took a little adjustment to figure out
exactly where the opening needed to be for entrances, but we worked it out without too
much difficulty. The biggest problem was on the second level behind the bedroom,
closet, and hallway. If the masking walls behind them were tall enough so the audience
in the front row couldn't seen over the top of them, those in the back of the auditorium
would be able to see the masking over the top of the set. One option was to just have the
masking be seen over the top of the set, but I knew there had to be a better solution. I
knew the audience would have to see something over the top, but it needed to be
something that looked intentional. My first thought was to have it look like the roof line
of the rest of the house, or even roofs of nearby buildings, but I thought that might look
confusing. I also thought that small reveals could be made on the tops of the doors and
masking, but that probably would have kept light from reaching the doorways.

I proposed that the top of the masking be turned into trees tops that were outside
the house. It would tie in the trees that were seen through the window with the rest of the
set. I was going to paint those walls green anyway, so I thought I could make them look
like walls at the bottom of the flat and then fade up into leaves at the top. To balance the
trees over the center of the set, I added one over the walls stage right and left. I proposed
the addition to Ryan and she liked it aesthetically.
Another problem we ran into was dealing with the servant's quarters door wall. It was the only wall that was not sitting on the turntable, so it was not as structurally strong as the other walls. Mahan and I had at first discussed completely detaching the wall when it rotated, moving it separately, and then reattaching it. He later found that it would be possible to turn the set with the wall attached which would save the crew some time during the scene changes. To do that the wall needed to be made more self supporting for the turn. Mahan constructed a 2”x4” leg with a large caster on the bottom of it that attached to the off stage side of wall. A brace was then attached to the leg and the side of the back staircase to keep the wall from moving around. Another 2”x4” was added as a brace at the bottom of the wall that provided more structural support when the set rotated. This brace was on a hinge, which allowed it to be folded up after the scene changes so it would not be in the way of the actors. Luckily, because that wall angled upstage during the second act and it was fairly dark upstage, this somewhat large addition pretty much disappeared from sight during the show.

As classes began, so did weekly production meetings. On September 23, Sarris presented her costume renderings. There was a lot of color and texture in them. Sarris had made a conscience effort to not have anyone in a costume the same color as the primarily yellow, green, and brown set. The actors were going to visually pop off the set very well.

The next meeting was on September 30th. Rehearsals had begun and Ryan told us at the meeting that with the exception of Lloyd and Selsdon who were British, the actors would be playing Americans that were playing British characters. Tim and Poppy would
be American, as well. At the meeting, Hazard presented his preliminary lighting design ideas. His main concern was that everything was visible and bright, as this is a comedy. Act I was going to be warm and bright. Act II was to have the appearance of being dark while being light enough to have everything seen. Act III was to be similar to Act I, but a bit cooler. At this meeting, sound was also discussed. Speakers were to be placed upstage so that an “audience's” laugh could be heard during Act II as if there was another audience watching Nothing On.

In early October, Elinore Loomis, a fellow graduate scenic designer, and I painted the stage floor. I wanted it to be wood grained to look like a fine, straight grained plank floor. It was, however, a very large area to grain and because rehearsals needed to be on stage as much as possible; it was necessary that the paint treatment be very quick. We rolled on a golden yellow base coat. With a very large brush, we brushed on a glaze in the direction of the wood and then ran a push broom through it to get a more distinctive grain. Downstage of the proscenium, we painted in lines of the wood planks. We didn't need to bring the lining any further upstage because it was difficult to see this detail from the audience's perspective. The technique ultimately worked very well and we got it completed relatively quickly.

Once rehearsals had started, Ryan was concerned about the cut out trees outside the window in Act II. We both really liked them visually; they provided a fun detail when we were “backstage”. However, they were getting in the way of blocking. In the end, we mounted them on the sky backdrop, so they could remain in Acts I and III but be easily removable for Act II.
I had the additional job of being the props master as my graduate teaching associate position. On one hand, it was very difficult wearing both hats because the show is so prop heavy. On the other hand, because there was so much set dressing and furniture that needed to be considered, I didn't have to communicate to another person about what Ryan and I wanted. This meant more time to provide the props because I wasn't spending any time having meetings to explain what props were needed. When classes began, much of my time was filled with getting hand props, furniture, flower arrangements, and other set dressing to add the tackiness to the set.

Another challenge that was a combination of set and props was how to deal with the multiple glass window panels that needed to break during the performance as the burglar tried to rob the house. My first thought was to buy a resin break-away glass product that could be poured into a mold to make the window panes. I first saw this technique in my props class the previous year. On top of being much too expensive, they were far too fragile and would have broken before they were supposed to under the stress of all the slamming doors. It also broke into a fine powder that would have been difficult to clean up quickly. Mahan and I discussed simply having a Plexiglas panel that could be popped out of the window mullions. It was a solution that was very cheap and easy for the actors to manage because it required no clean-up.

In the production meeting on October 14th we decided that the set would revolve manually and be visible to the audience. The change needed to happen partially because of the budget; the motor to drive the turntable was going to end up being too expensive. Also, because of where the pivot point of the turn table needed to be, the set was breaking
the plane of the main curtain when it rotated, which meant the curtain had to be raised to make the scene change. To incorporate the movement into the action of the play, it became a simulation of a theatrical load-in with the characters of Poppy and Tim doing most of the visible work.

Since the set was built in place, there was no official load-in. Paper tech was scheduled for October 22. Hazard and Mayer gave their cues to stage manager, Brandon Curtis. I was there in case any questions arose for me. The first technical rehearsal was on October 23. We planned on getting through Act I and doing the set change the next night at second tech. There was a change of plans at the end of the evening when we decided to run the scene change. Even though the crew had not been prepared to do so, they managed to get through it. During the scene change we discovered that the tree masking wall on the second level was too heavy to carry down the stairs and could not be flown out because of the location of an electric. Over the next few days we found that the tree tops could be made slightly smaller, so a portion of them could be walked down the stairs and the larger portion could be flown without interfering with the electrics. The rest of the technical and dress rehearsals went fairly smoothly. During this week I continued doing small paint notes and to added more set dressings.

While moving from seat to seat during rehearsals, I noticed a problem with Act II. There was a black scrim at the back of the stage. Behind it, there was a system of lights on several pipes that acted as front of house lights when the set was showing backstage. The lights ended up illuminating the scrim so that it became transparent. The audience was able to see the back wall of the theatre when it should have looked like the darkness
of an unlit auditorium. Mahan proposed lowering the sky drop to provide enough
darkness behind the scrim to mask the back wall. It did not work because the sky was so
light in color that there was a lot of light bouncing off of it, and the clouds painted on it
could be seen. We managed to find a few old black borders. We tied them to the pipes
the lights were hung from and that solved our problem because it looked like there was
only darkness past the window.

*Noises Off* opened October 30th. The run went pretty well, with minimal
problems. A consistent problem from the first day of rehearsal through the run of the
show was the set and props getting broken. Since actors were on the set from the first
rehearsal and this was a very physical show, things began breaking immediately. Many
days, we would come in after a rehearsal and have to fix something that was broken,
making it very difficult to move on to new tasks that needed to be completed. Even
though we started building long before school began, many details were not finished. It
was these details that needed to be pushed back because a door got broken, or a hole was
put in a wall and those things needed to be fixed for the next rehearsal or performance.
For example, in Act II there is a moment when Brooke looses one of her contacts, which
she does repeatedly throughout the show. She runs into the wall as she is pushed on
stage. During a rehearsal, the actress playing Brooke accidentally kicked a hole in the
wall next to the front door. The next day, before we could move on to anything else, that
hole needed to be fixed so it couldn't get any worse. To prevent it from happening again,
a small piece of 2”x4” was placed over the hole and painted to match the wall. Many
times we would not even know that something was damaged, so once we found it, we had to change our schedule on the spot in order to fix it.

This concludes the production process. In the following chapter, I will discuss the evaluation of the performance, and more specifically, my scenic design.
In this chapter I will evaluate the process in general and more specifically, the scenic design choices for *Noises Off*. I will also discuss my growth as a scenic designer, through this production, and over the past three years at The Ohio State University.

At first, I was very nervous about working on *Noises Off*. There were so many things that had to be on the stage in order for the action of the play to happen and I was worried there wouldn't be a lot of room to make it look different from any other *Noises Off* set. The basic plan of the set ended up being very much like other productions, but that is what works best for the show, so that is what it needed to be. I got to be creative making it look garish with all the treatments and set dressings that went on it.

The scheduling was really difficult, especially in the beginning. Since I had to have a fairly complete design in a matter of just a few weeks, I felt very rushed. I didn't feel like I had enough time to research as much as I wanted. Luckily, once the school year ended, I got to slow down considerably and really got to think about the design.

At the end of the technical and dress process, I wasn't really sure what I thought of the show or the scenic design. Once you hear a joke over and over again, it will eventually not be funny anymore. I had been staring at the set so long, I really couldn't get any perspective on it anymore. However, when I went to see the production as an audience member, it was a much different experience. It was much funnier, partially
because I had a few days off from it and partially because as the audience laughed, it fed energy to the actors. The audience genuinely enjoyed our production which made me feel really good about how the show turned out. Unfortunately, the show was not reviewed by any of the local papers.

There were a few things that I would have like to have changed. I wish we didn't need to move the bushes behind the window. Although it helped the action in Acts I and III, there wasn't quite as much depth as you looked out the window because the bushes and the sky were on the same visual plane. I could have added visual depth with some perspective painting on the sky beyond the window, if time would have allowed. In Act II, they would have added funny shaped silhouettes that could have been incorporated into the comedy of the show. In the end, it was better that we changed them so that none of the actors got injured on them. It is very important in scenic design to be aware of actor safety. They must not only be safe, they must feel safe. If they are worried about injuring themselves, it becomes more difficult for them to concentrate on their role in the production.

During dress rehearsals, Kearney suggested that I put larger pictures on the stairway wall. I wish I was able to do this because they would have looked more substantial next to the large wood beams. In Act III it was difficult to notice the crooked pictures because they were so small. Unfortunately, because of time and available picture frames in stock, I wasn't able to switch them. There were so many other notes that had to get done because they affected the action of the play, that changing out all the pictures had to be pushed to the bottom of my to do list. There also could have been more set
dressing on the walls (i.e. more pictures, china, larger flowers.) Additional clutter would have made the set even more tacky and humorous.

The beams should have been painted a lighter color. The contrast between the wall and the beams was so high that it was a little jarring. They also should not have been cut with straight edges along the perimeter of the set. All the other beams had irregular edges that softened their line. That should have been continued to the top of the set.

I was not satisfied with the tree masking paint treatment. The bottom of the tree masking should have had a paint treatment that resembled wallpaper that faded up, possibly even introducing a new color. I had tried a technique using lace as a stencil to create a wallpaper-like pattern but it didn't end up working. The pattern bled underneath the lace and was indistinct. I would have liked to have had enough time to either make that technique work or figure out another technique. It finally did not matter too much because those walls weren't seen that often.

A larger wallpaper scale on the lower level in Acts I and III would have been great. The one I used was about the same scale as the stenciled floral border. A larger pattern would have introduced a new texture and been more prominent. One with a larger scale was not readily available and affordable, so I would have had to create a series of stencils or use fabric to give the look of wallpaper. I'm not sure that our paint schedule would have allowed that the paint treatment, and fabric is much more expensive than the wallpaper I had chosen.
Although a very small note, I would have liked to have painted grass on the bottom of the sky behind the door and window. This detail was originally on the paint elevations, but this was one of the first things I was willing to give up because of time constraints. It couldn't be seen that often and there were already bushes out there, which gave a sense of ground and the outdoors.

In Act II, I had painted labels of the doors with stencils. In a show like *Nothing On*, it would have been necessary for the doors to be labeled so everyone would make the correct entrances. The lettering ended up being too light to see. I made them a purple that I thought would stand out against the green, but because the light in that scene was so blue, it made them disappear. I should have made them black, but I was afraid to make them too dark.

The clouds on the sky drop could have been more realistic. Even though *Nothing On* was a play produced by a company that did not have a great deal of money, it was still a professional show and they would have had plenty of money for a well painted drop. It was the first time I had painted clouds on a large scale and I never got my technique down. In the end, it was alright that they were cartoon-like. Because they were idealistic looking clouds, that ended up working with the over-designed nature of the set. The show does not call for a completely realistic set. The characters are quite quirky, so it was alright that the clouds were as well. Because the trees were in front of them, they couldn't all be seen anyway.

I was able to work within my budget of $3,500 fairly easily. Although we didn't have enough money for some things, none of those things were really necessary to make
the set work, like the motor for the turntable. The budget even helped me make better
design choices, like making the turntable smaller.

Despite these issues, the set turned out really well. It was very clear as soon as
the curtain rose, that nothing serious was going to happen in this environment, which is
exactly what Ryan and the design team set out to create. I managed to get a nicely
composed set on both the front and back. The set served the action well. Act II,
especially, had nice traffic patterns available because of the circular formation of the
staircases and landings. This was not an easy task, as any time I would make a change
that would improve one side, it would have a negative effect on the other side. This
happened as I dealt with the study door, as I discussed in chapter 3. As I improved it on
the “on stage” side, it got completely hidden from a large section of the audience on the
“back stage” side. I ended up being able to make everything work well on both sides.

Despite Acts I and III looking very different from Act II, they all looked like a
cohesive show. This is largely because of a very tight color palette. I made a conscience
effort to put quite a bit of green on the “on stage” side so that the green in the second act
wouldn't look like it came out of nowhere. Both sides also had similar lines. This is
partially because they are the same walls, so the silhouette was the same. In addition to
that, the stiles and rails that showed the construction of the set when backstage mimicked
the beams in the Acts I and III.

The color palette was very cohesive. The on stage side was able to be very warm
and sunny in the first act and a bit darker and cooler in the third to represent the awful
state of the play. The dark, cool second act was a nice contrast to the other two. There
was an appropriate amount of tackiness to make the set funny. This was important to the production because it added another level of humor. It was believable that someone would have actually lived at the posset mill, but it was clearly not a serious place.

There was a lot of great problem solving done by the entire production team. One solution that I am most proud of was the trees. They looked great and appeared as if they were part of the design from the beginning, not like they were there to fix a mistake. They added another level of dimension to the set against the clouds in the background. They also helped frame the set in the same green that could be seen through the window below.

The structural supports at the underside of the platform were visible above the front door and window. Instead of hiding them by covering them up, I decided to have them built out to look like beams. This is very likely the kind of visible construction that would have been used on a half-timbered house. It added a nice detail while leaving room for some additional effects. Small lights and the telephone ring sound effect could be hidden between the beams. Covering this area would not have allowed these effects.

Working with Ryan was a good experience. From our very first meetings, she knew what she wanted from the set in terms of how the space was used and how it looked. Although it was difficult to feel creative with a set that has so many necessary elements, Ryan pushed me to get creative with all the little details, which I had a lot of fun doing. Early on, she made a point of telling me that she was very happy with how it was looking. That, along with her excitement at seeing the set in the theatre for the first
time, gave me the confidence that I was going in the right direction throughout the process.

Another important relationship I had was with Mahan. In such a physical show, the structure of the set is very important, which meant I had to rely on him to let me know what was and was not possible because he has much more experience in carpentry. He was willing to offer up suggestions when we were brainstorming, but was supportive of my final decisions.

The design team all worked really well together. Like me, they all had to consider who the designers were what their skill level was and their sense of taste. This unified all the design aspects because we all had similar ideas about what the company was like that produced Nothing On. I don't recall any disagreements between designers and we were all very supportive of each other.

I was very happy with Hazard's lighting. Act I was so bright and cheery while Hazard made Act III look drab and cool, which was necessary for the plot. Despite minimal changes to the set, the third act looked so different because of a cooler light that made everything look a bit sad. Act II was supposed to be in a dark backstage, but because the light was blue, it only looked dark and was actually very light so everything could be seen. The upstage lights that acted like front lights in this act really gave the sense of being backstage and cast a great shadow on the floor through the window.

Costumes designed by Marysha Sarris looked great with set and lights. They made the actors visually pop off the set with an absence of set-colored costumes; no yellows, browns, or greens were used. All the costumes were all a bit quirky, to show the
eccentricities of each character and to make it clear that the clothes were costumes. All the actors in Nothing On are never seen in their own clothes except when Brooke puts her coat on.

The sound, designed by Dan Mayer, had lots of appropriately silly sound effects. One of my favorite parts of the show was when the curtain went up in Act III. Hearing the funny intro music and seeing a discombobulated set was a great way to start off the act.

On the whole, I am very satisfied with how the process developed. It was not without its issues, but overall, it went very smoothly. This production was the first time I really felt that I was capable of successfully completing a scenic design without needing quite as much guidance from my professors. Doing a majority of the design over the summer really affected this. For the first time, I really felt as if I was on my own and it raised my confidence significantly as I was able to successfully work on this production. It made me aware of all I had learned over the past few years and made me feel ready and comfortable to leave school and enter the professional world.
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APPENDIX A: THE DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT
Preliminary Director's Concept:

World of the Play
It is clear to me after my recent dive into Michael Frayn's Noises Off that this play, as silly as it seems, was actually an early exploration of the same ideas posed in his very serious drama, Copenhagen. The final line in Noises Off “When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a good old fashioned plate of . . .” echoes the primary exploration of Copenhagen. In Copenhagen, Frayn tests the Principle of Uncertainty put forth by Werner Heisenberg, which in my overly-simplistic summary states that answers are unknowable; all is uncertain, especially human motives. It is the core of Uncertainty at work in Copenhagen that makes the play so chilling. In Noises Off, it is the comic premise that fuels the laughs . . . blah, blah, blah. The details of all this are really neither here nor there, and I'm still sort of working through them, and I think they'll inform the production in interesting ways, and maybe I'll write a paper when I get it all figured out. . . but for now . . .

Here's the reason for watching/doing this play, and I quote . . .


Selsdon – When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a good old fashioned plate of . . . (161)

Yep, we're serving up a big old plate of comfort food. (How much did you pay for gas on your way into work in today? Need a Snickers Bar?) The worldview Frayn is serving up for us with this metatheatrical buffet is that life, like farce, is ruled by chaos and uncertainty. (Aha!) We get through it all by keeping track of the doors and the sardines. But, when uncertainty is the order of the day and chaos ensues; when we lose track of those doors and sardines, we have to make it up as we go along, and hopefully we can still forge our way to a happy ending.

I like this worldview. It completely embodies the spirit of Comedy, which is one of rebirth and perseverance. That's why classical comedies always end in marriage and that is why pregnant Poppy dawns her “bridal gown” at the play's end. The company of Nothing On is comprised of seasoned actors, and they know how to bring this farce of a farce to its proper comedic conclusion.

A feeling of perseverance and rebirth will do us all some good in these troubled times. But of course, our audience will be completely blinded to this pleasant vista if we don't get it technically right. It is a farce: doors and sardines.

The Setting
“The wheel was invented, and it was good. Respect the wheel” M. Ryan
In the metatheatrical world of Noises Off, the setting for Nothing On is a renovated 16th Century Posset Mill. One of the Curtain Up reviews stated of the recent London Revival
“Robert Jones’ set is exactly right: cluttered, overly stuffed and rather tacky.” (www.curtainup.com/noisesofflond.html). We have to believe the setting, but it needs that special something that lets us know as soon as the curtain rises that this is not an environment that will house very serious goings on. There are seven doors in our set and two levels. On the bottom floor from SR to SL we have a door to the study, the front door, the bathroom door and the service quarter’s door. On a landing near the top of the stairs we have another bathroom door. On the upper level gallery we have from SR to SL a linen cupboard door and a bedroom door. The hallway upstairs continues with a doorless exit to a corridor that gives access to all other rooms in the upper part of the house. The doors need to open and close almost silently for the action on stage to be believable. Doors open and close with characters standing in close proximity to a door they aren’t supposed to be aware of opening or closing, so the latching/unlatching of the doors must be quiet.

There also needs to be full length widows in the living room through which the multitude of burglars can “break in”. Three panes of glass must be able to be popped out from the mullions. The windows also serve to allow the audience to view onstage action in Act II when the set is reversed. In the living room there needs to be a phone table by the sofa with a phone that has an extremely long receiver cord and an exceptionally long cord-that-you-plug-into-the-wall cord. There is a TV which poor Mrs. Clackett has been trying to sit down and watch while enjoying her plate of sardines and which the burglar attempts to steal. There needs to be a table in the vicinity of the front door and a table outside the bedroom door. It might be handy to have one of those behind-the-sofa tables. In the living room there is also a sideboard that doubles as a bar. One of the tricks in the setting is motivating DS action. Much happens by the door, above the sofa, on the stairs and on the balcony. We need to pin down the DS corners of the groundplan to help motivate DS action.

The above setting serves for Act I and Act III. In Act I, we are at the final dress of Nothing On. Everybody loves everybody, and Lloyd has been loving everybody too much. It is late and a potential all-night-dress is in store. Staging issues that need to be addressed in Act I concern Lloyd who gives direction from the house, and then comes on stage. I’m uncertain what to do with Lloyd yet. Is he someplace in the house? Do we just hear him on the microphone and then he comes onto stage through the house? Poppy and Tim enter stage from the wings. Do we need a separate entrance to heighten the sense of coming from backstage? Selsdon who has been “sleeping in the stalls” comes through the house and addresses the company from the house. The entrances through the house are perplexing to me given the consistent aesthetic distance the play demands.

In Act III, 12 weeks have passed and we are at the final performance of Nothing On. To quote Tim, “Our long and highly successful tour is on its very last leg. Its very last leg.” (134). Dotty and Belinda are at each others throats over their beloved Freddy, and the whiskey bottle has been passed around liberally. Dotty limps into the Act. The business at the top of this Act with the phone and the slippery sardine spot dictates careful placement of the sofa, and a clear sightline to the door for all the initial phone business. The door handle comes off the linen cupboard door. Roger/Garry falls all the way down the stairs,
so the stairs need to be padded and carpeted. Mrs. Clackett tries to cover Freddy’s tremendous offstage crash by smashing things from the sideboard, and I’m open to other set gags in Act III in terms of other pieces of architecture malfunctioning or falling apart.

In Act II the set is rotated 180 degrees. We are backstage at the theatre. One month has transpired since the dress rehearsal of Act I. To quote Tim again: “This is getting farcical.” (74). Lloyd has come to cure Brook’s “nervous exhaustion”, but he must hide his efforts from Poppy. Poppy needs to tell Lloyd that she is pregnant. Dotty and Garry are fighting because Dotty spent a late night with Freddy. Belinda is jealous of Dotty having been with Freddie. Freddy is generally oblivious and squamish. Selsdon is enamored of whiskey. Tim is sent in search of flowers for Brook that keep getting given to the wrong woman. It gets prickly (yuck, yuck).

The action we see is primarily a pantomime and the dialogue we hear is what is being performed in the Nothing On. A bit of the action on the Nothing On set should be visible through the living room windows. Other backstage items include chairs for the actors, the SM consol with microphone, the prop table, a fire bucket and fire ax. There are two doors backstage; one leads to the dressing rooms and one to the auditorium. This Act depends entirely on impeccable timing, and physical shtick. The coordination between the visible action and the dialogue are imperative. We must hear the “on stage” dialogue that underscores the pantomime.

We need to be very careful about sightlines in Thurber. All entrances must be visible to all the audience. This is difficult in the space, but it is integral to the design.

**Period Setting/Costumes/Lights**
The play was originally produced in 1982, but was recently revived in 2000. The play is dated by the lack of current technology present in it. Nobody really has phones with cords anymore, and people carry laptops instead of boxes of files. There is no mention of email; there are no cell phones on stage, etc. However, the play is really timeless. There is no reason to give it a period setting. Think English tradition and classic lines.

In terms of the costumes, we never see the characters, with the exception of Lloyd, Tim and Poppy, in anything but their Nothing On costumes. Who designed the costumes for Nothing On? How good was the costume designer? Are the costumes tasteful or not?

The lighting is very realistic in nature. It comes from practical sources on stage, but there is no business built in around the lighting, and no turning on and off of lamps or switches. Obviously, there will need to be more light “backstage” than there would be in reality in order for us to be able to see the action. Every nuance of facial expression is essential in all three Acts.
PLATE 1: SET GROUND PLAN ACTS I AND III

See Accompanying File
PLATE 2: SET GROUND PLAN ACT II

See Accompanying File
PLATE 3: SET SECTION PLAN ACTS I AND III

See Accompanying File
PLATE 4: SET SECTION PLAN ACT II

See Accompanying File
PLATE 5: SET PLATFORMING

See Accompanying File
PLATE 6: DETAIL ELEVATION WALLS A-D

See Accompanying File
PLATE 7: DETAIL ELEVATION WALLS E-H

See Accompanying File
PLATE 8: DETAIL ELEVATION STAIRCASE 1 AND 2

See Accompanying File
See Accompanying File
PLATE 10: DETAIL ELEVATION BUSHES, TREES, AND BAR

See Accompanying File
APPENDIX C: PLATES
PLATE 11: RESEARCH FROM *ELEMENTS OF INTERIOR DESIGN AND DECORATION*

PLATE 12: RESEARCH FROM ST. MARY'S HOUSE AND GARDENS
PLATE 13: RESEARCH FROM ST. MARY'S HOUSE AND GARDENS

PLATE 14: DOOR RESEARCH FROM *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE*
PLATE 15: WINDOW RESEARCH FROM *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE*

PLATE 16: FLOOR RESEARCH FROM *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE*
PLATE 17: AUTO CAD MODEL ACTS I AND III

PLATE 18: AUTO CAD MODEL ACT II
PLATE 19: PAINT ELEVATIONS ACTS I AND III WALLS

PLATE 20: PAINT ELEVATIONS ACT II WALLS
PLATE 21: PAINT ELEVATIONS STAIRS

PLATE 22: PAINT ELEVATIONS WOOD FLOOR
PLATE 23: PAINT ELEVATION STONE FLOOR

PLATE 24: PAINT ELEVATIONS SKY AND BUSHES

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PLATE 25: PAINT ELEVATIONS TREE AND WALL MASKING

PLATE 26: PRODUCTION PHOTO: ACT I