A SCENIC AND LIGHTING DESIGN
FOR
THE LEO YASSENOFF JEWISH CENTER
GALLERY PLAYERS
PRODUCTION OF
THE KING AND I
BY RICHARD RODGERS AND OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN

A thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

by

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Approved by

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Reference Note

A FULL COPY OF THIS THESIS, COMPLETE WITH THE ACTUAL DESIGN DRAFTINGS, PAINTER'S ELEVATIONS AND COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS CAN BE FOUND IN THE THEATRE RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY THEATRE DEPARTMENT.
Design Concept

Premiered at the St. James Theatre, New York in 1951, The King and I contains a variety of universal conflicts. It explores the age-old "battle-of-the-sexes", the epic strife of new ways conflicting with old values and speaks out against slavery, tyranny and the oppression of the human spirit.

In The King and I, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein reach their finest hour in the American musical theatre. It is a work of intense drama and a gripping musical score. The story is based on the adventures of Anna Leonowens at the Royal Siamese Court of King Mongkut in the 1860's. Though romance thrives within the play, The King and I is not a contrived sentimental piece. Even the ballet is fitted carefully into the plotline to heighten suspense and enhance the thematic impact of the show.

The arts of Thailand offer a delightful smorgasbord of visual inspiration for my design. Its architecture, especially in Bangkok, has been studied by westerners for years and the distinctive silhouettes of its spires, temples and palaces are well known. Some of the best sources of detail come from the early expeditions to Thailand by the westerners including
that of Henry Yule in 1855. Original watercolors and architectural detail drawings by Mr. Yule and his companion artists Colesworthy Grant and Linnaeus Tripe are exact and colorful. They provide storehouses of architectural forms and detail, and give a good view of how Siam looked to the English during the reign of King Mongkut. I have selected their illustrations and drawings as the basis for my design because of the detail and color palette which is enticingly perfect for *The King and I*. Yule, Grant and Tripe's view of Thailand must also parallel that of Mrs. Leonowens since they were firsthand observers of Siam at the same time. In addition to these works, I have utilized photographs of architectural and sculptural details from throughout Thailand to complete my research. The intricate details of the columns, carved motifs and gilded woodwork breathe elegance and provide an attractive background for this demandingly lavish production.

The overall concept behind my design is to create,

\[1\] Henry Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission to the Court of Ava in 1855* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968.)
as realistically as possible, the many required locales within a traditional wing and border setting. My primary concern and greatest challenge in doing this is to develop a design which allows smooth and rapid scene changes. In a show which has a running time over three hours and high dramatic intensity, slow and unwieldy scene changes cannot be permitted. The need for nine different settings complicates the shift problem and points to a unit set solution. As the ensemble numbers are full of quick entrances and exits, this unit set must also provide ways to avoid massive traffic problems. This is especially true for the scenes in which the ladies wear full hoop skirts.

My unit set concept features a full set of architectural portals, drops, plug units, stairs, railings and masking drapes with additional wagon units and furniture. The various configurations of the different locales created by the design provide continuous spectacle and surprises for the audience and give the actors an environment in which they can realize the full power of the script and score while allowing for the required flexibility in scene shifts.

The scenery is architecturally accurate and detail-
ed with the stage floor space left open for the actors. The palace interiors allow room for the large ensemble scenes and yet remain intimate enough for the smaller encounter scenes which generally follow. The wide wing entrances and exits give adequate space for large chorus movements and provide the lighting designer much needed side and boomlight positions in the wings. The minimum 4'-0" width clearance between the portals is tailor-made for the wagon and furniture shifts, and permits easy passage for a hoopskirted chorus.

The portals allow great flexibility in creating the nine scenic locations without the production scale becoming too extensive. The various scenes have an extravagant, ornate and realistic appearance, as much as possible within the budgetary constraints. They will be established as simply as possible by the portals and readjusting the accompanying drops, stairs, railings, wagon units, plugs and properties. Interior and exterior scenes play equally well within the unit wing and border set and shift easily from one to the other. The coordinated movements of the scenery upstage of the black traveler and the ornamental screens downstage takes a crew of ten stagehands and properties people.
This type of shift, although not purely "a vista", is visually enticing. The five rolling screen units, which provide the background to the transition scenes, are each moved into their playing positions by a crew member hidden behind the screen. The resulting effect of the five screens gliding into place under various lighting conditions diverts the audience's attention from the other aspects of the scene change and mystically propels them forward into the next scene. This requires that the movement patterns of the screens be carefully choreographed to make this a magical rather than a comic series of events. A complete scene synopsis, list of scenic elements and a scene shift plot have been included in the next few pages to facilitate a clearer understanding of how all the elements of the unit set work together.

My design also helps to solve a few of the technical problems inherent in the Roth/Resler theatre. Since the grid height of the theatre is only 27'-0"., flying scenery is severely limited. Trip-rigging of drops is virtually impossible due to a lack of available scenery battens, and without borders for masking, even 12' or 13' drops present an interesting dilemma to
the designer. The portals of my unit set provide not only decoration and conceptual enrichment, but also mask the show's drops and electrical lighting positions. The height to the bottom reveal of the portal headers is 12'-0'', establishing a narrow 40' X 12' picture frame for the production and enhancing the feelings of entrapment and oppressiveness found within the rigid Siamese society.
Mood and the time of day are important elements in establishing the environment for \textit{The King and I}. The quality of the light needs to suggest the climatic warmth and oppressive heat of Thailand in the daylight scenes. This brightness of day needs to contrast sharply with the cool relief of the evening.

The presence of light, as with the thematic dualities in the play, needs to be balanced by an equal absence of it. Shadows for hiding, spying and escaping the heat, both thematically and physically, are as important in setting up the correct environment as the shafts of light which cut through it.

Although strong frontal illumination is necessary for some of the larger ensemble scenes, atmospheric lighting is essential for a successful production. The glow of moonbeams and the effect of soft candlelight are some of the more atmospheric moods that will bring this troubled paradise to life via the lightplot. Side-light positions for direct lighting accents and dance lighting need also to be incorporated into the design.
Scene Synopsis

Act I

Scene i  On the Chow Phya, Bangkok Harbor
Scene ii  Intermediate Transition Scene
Scene iii  The King's Library
Scene iv  Intermediate Transition Scene
Scene v  The Royal Schoolroom
Scene vi  Intermediate Transition Scene
Scene vii  Anna's Bedroom
Scene viii  The King's Library

Act II

Scene i  Palace Reception Room
Scene ii  Palace Garden
Scene iii  Royal Theatre of Siam
Scene iv  The King's Library
Scene v  Intermediate Transition Scene
Scene vi  Anna's Bedroom
Scene vii  The King's Library

NOTE: The original libretto lists only six scenes for each act, but for the sake of easy reference I have numbered all scenes to avoid having some of the transition scenes remain anonymous.

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List of Scenic Units

Unit Set Portals:

Main Show Portal
- masks show curtain and first electric
- reduces proscenium opening to 12'0" X 38'-0"

Second Portal
- masks second electric, garden drop and ship drop

Third Portal Legs
- masks downstage edges of Palace Room doors and
  hide slots for the black traveler

Palace Room Portal and Door Units
- depending on plugs in use, form palace interiors

Rear Hall Portal
- masks cyc, Bangkok drop and forth electric
  - adds depth and interest

Drops:

Show Curtain
- used as the act/main curtain

Garden Drop
- used for the Palace Garden scene (II,ii)

Ship Drop
- used for Bangkok harbor scene (I,i)

Bangkok Drop
- deadhung 4'-0" upstage of Rear Hall Portal
Platforming:

Main Hall Platform
- Static unit set platform
- serves as main dramatic palace rooms' entrance

Stair Units (2)
- play center except for the Royal Schoolroom

Budda Platform
- castored wagon unit used in ballet scene (II,iii)

Ship's Hatch Platform
- seating or high level centerstage for (I,i)

Rolling Scenic Units:

Ship Cabin Unit A
- used in (I,i) for Bangkok harbor scene
- struck stageright into the sceneshop

Ship Rail Unit B
- used in (I,i) for Bangkok harbor scene
- struck stageright into the sceneshop

Ship Rail/Baggage Wagon Unit C
- used in (I,i) for Bangkok harbor scene
- struck into the stageleft wing

Decorative Screen Units (5)
- used for transition and Anna's bedroom scenes
Plug Units:

5' - 0" Room Portal Railings (2)

- used to close off outside arches when stair units play in center positions

- struck to behind columns for Royal Schoolroom scene when stair units play at the outside arches.

8' - 0" Room Portal Railing (1)

- used to close the center arch when stair units play at the outside arch positions

- stored behind SRC column when not in use

Library Door Plugs (2)

- hinged to the downstage reveals of the unit set door units and closed for all of the King's Library scenes

Ornamental Door Plugs (2)

- hinged to the upstage reveals of the unit set door units

- closed for the Royal Schoolroom scene (I, iv) and open for the Reception Room Scene (II, i) or when Library plugs are in use

Masking Units:

Three sets of black duvatene legs

- second set of legs is the black traveler used to mask upstage scene shifts during the transition scenes
Floor Treatment:
  
  Black dance floor

Set Properties and Furniture Pieces:

  Statue Units
  -castored units used in King's Library and Royal Schoolroom scenes

  Dais
  -castored on the back side
  -used for King's Library scenes

  Map Board
  -castored unit used in the Royal Schoolroom

  Anna's Bed
  -castored bed used for the two bedroom scenes with the rolling ornamental screens
  -struck stageright into the sceneshop

  Benches
  -used for the Royal Schoolroom and Royal Theatre of Siam scenes

  Gong
  -castored unit used in the King's Library
Scene Shift Plot

Preset:
- All Unit Set Portals deadhung in place
- Show Curtain in
- Ship Drop in
- Ship Cabin and Rail Units on
- Ship Hatch Platform on
- Library Door Plugs closed
- Stairs center
- 5'-0" Room Portal Railings in
- Statue Units on, facing center
- Gong on by stair
- Masking in with traveler open

Act I, Scene i
- Show Curtain out

Act I, Scene ii
- Black traveler closed
- Ship Drop out
- Ship Cabin and Rail Units off
- Ship Hatch Platform off
- Decorative Rolling Screens on

Act I, Scene iii
- Decorative Screens off
- Dais on SLC
- Black Traveler open
Act I, Scene iv

-Black Traveler closed
-Decorative Rolling Screens on
-Dais off
-Gong off
-Stair Units split to outside arches
-5'-0" Room Portal Railings out / 8'-0" Railing in
-Statue Units move center and face downstage
-Library Door Plugs open / Ornamental Plugs closed

Act I, Scene v

-Black Traveler open
-Decorative Rolling Screens off
-Map Board on centerstage
-Benches on

Act I, Scene vi

-Black Traveler closed
-Decorative Rolling Screens on
-Map Board off
-Benches off
-Gong on
-Stair Units return to center arch
-8'-0" Room Portal Railing out / 5'-0" Railings in
-Statue Units return to preset positions
-Ornamental Door Plugs open / Library Plugs closed

Act I, Scene vii

-Anna's Bed on
-Decorative Rolling Screens to bedroom positions

Act I, Scene viii

-Anna's Bed off
-Decorative Rolling Screens off
-Dais on SRC
-Black Traveler open

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Intermission

- Show Curtain in
- Gong off
- Dais off
- Statue Units off
- Library Door Plugs open / Ornamental Plugs open

Act II, Scene i

- Show Curtain out

Act II, Scene ii

- Garden Drop in
- Black Traveler closed
- Statue Units on in Act I preset positions
- Library Door Plugs closed
- Buddha Platform preset behind Black Traveler

Act II, Scene iii

- Garden Drop out
- Benches on SR apron

Act II, Scene iv

- Benches off
- Dais on SLC
- Black Traveler open
- Gong on by stairs SR

Act II, Scene v

- Black Traveler closed
- Decorative Rolling Screens on
- Dais off
- King's Deathbed on SLC
Act II, Scene vi
- Anna's Bed on
- Decorative Rolling Screens to bedroom positions

Act II, Scene vii
- Decorative Rolling Screens off
- Anna's Bed off
- Black Traveler open

Finale
- Show Curtain in
- Set Act I preset for next performance
Gallery Players captures some of the spectacle of "King and I"

"The King and I" is one of those large theatrical museum pieces that was created for a big Broadway stage more than 30 years ago. It calls for lavish production values, a few dozen extras, including a troop of children, and a patient audience with no pressing engagements.

Thanks to a lush, pleasant score by Rodgers and Hammerstein, it prospered on Broadway, returned as a strong movie and has become Yul Brynner's entire raison d'être.

When a local theater group lacks something the size of "King and I," it's asking for headaches. In Gallery Players' current production, problems remain, but many assets are well worth the attention of local theater-goers.

Bill Bugh has directed Gallery's "King" with a lot of reverence that doesn't leave room for very much genuine fun. But the play itself doesn't give any director much choice.

Hammerstein's book for the show is short on humor and long on pathos, while Rodgers' score is mostly sumptuous themes and saccharine ballads. Every so often, the viewer hungers for a little roundness or, if not a belly laugh, at least a loud chuckle.

Instead, we have the autocratic king ruling his disciplined household, butting heads and hearts with Anna, the proper English governess. Most of what "King" has to offer is spectacle.

At times, the spectacle in Gallery's production finds some realization. Most of the scenery by Bjarne Zetterberg is attractive, especially the ornate palace that represents the king's residence. Jeff Holbrook's costuming is colorful and correct.

Dee Cappelli is a polished Anna, becoming more confident and believable as the script gives her more to do. Acting is Ms. Cappelli's strong suit (although her singing leaves only a little volume to be desired), and when she gets to express emotions or handy arguments with the king, her experiencedumann shows.

Phillip Wilson grows in kingly stature as the evening progresses. Wilson uses a curious accent, a bit on the Japanese side, it seems, and his choppy outbursts tend to swallow a number of syllables. But the proof of his performance is whether he dominates crowded scenes, and Wilson usually does.

The supporting players are mostly strong, especially Tammy Persik as Lady Thiang, Nimi Gockenbach as Tuptim, and David Alpern as the crown prince. Both of the above ladies have excellent singing voices.

But in Gallery's production, as in most versions of "King," the kids steal the show. Their entrance, "The March of the Siamese Children," is perfectly staged, bringing a fresh air to what had been a ponderously slow opening.

Later, Anna and the royal offspring stage a wonderful "Getting to Know You" that is definitely the first act highlight. The children range in ages from teen to tiny, and they're all delightful, well rehearsed and in fine ensemble voice.

The second act ballet of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is executed very nicely, although there are no real variations from the original staging.
Gallery Players' 'King and I' worth getting to know

By Rose Humen
Dispatch Entertainment Editor

The lavish, spectacular musical lives in Gallery Players' 'The King and I.' In production at the Leo Yassenoff Jewish Center, this Rodgers and Hammerstein classic has been staged in one of the biggest, costliest community theater efforts of the season.

Gallery Players has whipped up a truly beautiful show. Regal sets designed by Mark C. Zetterberg and rich costumes by Jeff Holbrook make magnificent packaging for the story of the King of Siam and Anna, the English school teacher who tries to civilize his household.

The palace throne room, a mixture of gold and raspberry, exudes elegance. The colorful costumes, a mixture of East and West, are enticing.

PHILLIP S. Wilson and Dee Cappelli play the title roles, both bringing appropriate stubbornness to a relationship that thrives on cultural differences. Wilson has the fierceness and nobility of a monarch; Cappelli matches him with unflagging determination and righteousness.

Both have strong, expressive voices and do well with the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs.

Surprisingly good vocally are Mimi Gockenbach, who plays a princess given as a gift to the king for his pleasure, and Tommy Haras, cast as the king's favored wife and mother of the heir to the throne.

While 'The King and I' is a fine production, it lacks highs and lows. Every scene is played at the same level. The pace ranges from slow crawl to leisurely stroll. Emotional intensity never builds or crumbles.

Director Bill Bighoff may have devised a stately tribute to Rodgers and Hammerstein, but he falls short of making the story real or exciting.

The most memorable scenes involve the king's many children, who are presented to their teacher in a long first-act introduction that gets a breath of freshness whenever one of the youngsters enters. That scene is the show's best.

Their other big number, 'Gettin' to Know You,' is charming and warm. It, too, is in Act I. While all of the children are serious about their roles and concerned about doing their best, David Appen as the future king and Oren Hayon as Anna's son have worked very hard to make their performances as good as any of the adults in the show.

The King and I continues at 8:30 p.m. today, Thursday and Saturday and 7:30 p.m. Sunday in the Leo Yassenoff Jewish Center, 1125 College Ave. The schedule will be repeated next week. Some shows are sold out. For tickets, call 231-2731.
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Production Photograph-
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Production Photograph-
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