SCENE DESIGN FOR WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
The Tempest

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Design

by
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Approved by

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A completely illustrated edition of this thesis is available in the Ohio State University Theatre Research Institute.
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The Scene Design for William Shakespeare's

*The Tempest*

Concept Statement

The scene design presented in this thesis was produced by the Ohio State University Department of Theatre. The show opened on February twenty first, nineteen hundred eighty-four in Thurber Theatre and was directed by Ionia M. Zelenka.

In order to communicate the directorial production concept the following demands were made by the director:

1. The set must provide the capability of overlapping exits and entrances so that the action of the play may be continuous. Sequencing of the scenes must be accomplished without interruption.

2. The set must provide compositional capability for visualization of the power structure which, while dominated by Prospero, is threatened by Caliban. The power of Alonso, among the victims of the storm, mirrors that of Prospero and is threatened by Sebastian and Antonio.

3. The set must provide for the depiction of a
ship in a storm at sea as well as a mysterious island populated by magical beings.

4. The set must provide the capability of sudden and unexpected entrances and exits, special effects and other spectacle.

5. There must be the possibility of establishing specific areas:
   a. the island dominated by Prospero.
   b. a preternatural, ethereal area for Ariel, goddesses and other sprites.
   c. a subterranean, subhuman area for the demon Caliban.

6. Because it is an island locale there should be a semblance of the organic pervading all of the set elements.

7. The set was not to be literal. It should be a formalized abstraction so as to extend the universal statement of the play.

My essential symbol for this production was the tempest. A storm parallels power, anger, and desire for vengeance as well as the ebb and flow of evil and good in the play. It symbolizes Prospero's rage at the beginning and the tranquility after the reconciliation. Specifically my design began with an idea derived from cyclonic movement found in hurricanes and tornadoes. This study resulted in using the image of an inverted cyclone. Here was an
abstract image both of power structure and of constant turmoil. Originally the platforms, ramps and structures entwined in helical circles and rose beyond the proscenium arch. It was thought that Ariel could enter from above and glide down the narrow runways of the helical circles leading from the grid to the platform structures. Because of financial limitations helical runways proved to be unfeasible. Instead the helical runways were reduced to three concentric circular platforms suggesting the abstract image of an isolated island. A bridge was introduced which swept from the top level of the circular platforming in an upward arc to stage right and left entrances. The three inch thick bridge became the major entrances and acting areas for Ariel, the goddesses and the nymphs, thus lending a certain degree of stylization in movement and support for their ethereal qualities. The bridge also served as a supernatural plane from which Prospero and Ariel could invisibly monitor action on the island. The ascending arrangement of the circular platforms provided for the visualization of the power structure. In contrast to the upward sweep of the bridge, Caliban, the servant demon, dwelt beneath the lowest platform. He entered through a trap in the stage.

The depiction of the storm at sea utilized the platforms as the ships decks. The trap became the entrance for the royal party from below deck and the bridge became
the yardarm of the ship's mainsail. The sail was rigged to a counterweighted pipe and flown at the rear of the top platform. In order to provide a rapid transition from ship to Prospero's cell the sail was tripped to release, suddenly fall and be dragged off at the climax of the storm. The falling sail also provided a suggestion of the ship's destruction. The rippling of the fabric as it was dragged off provided a continuing sense of a stormy sea. Functionally it provided a diversion to stage left as Prospero and his attendant nymphs took their place for the next scene.

The bridge provided an ethereal area for the staging of the masque. To provide an opulence and to transport the actors and audience to a more celestial locale, I flew in varying lengths of white gauze. The gauze, painted by various colors of light took on a columnar appearance. These vertical lines established a counterpoint to the curvilinear platforming and lifted the eye beyond the field of vision reinforcing the celestial nature of the masque. Gauze was selected for its lightness which allowed it to move slightly with any disturbance in the air. Coupled with its transparency the gauze completed the vaporous quality desired for the spirit world conjured by Prospero's magic.

The open spaces between the platforms provided additional sources for spectacle:

1. The spaces were sufficiently open to allow for
sudden appearances of the nymphs. In order for the nymphs to take their places unseen so that their entrances could not be anticipated by the audience, masking was required. The masking was built of strips of netting. The resulting mosslike effect further met the demand for an organic sense in all scenic elements.

2. The same spaces provided for the installation of vents for the introduction of fog. At one point the platforms took on the appearance of a mountain top rising through clouds. At other times the fog provided a swampy, humid menacing atmosphere for the Caliban scenes.

3. Access to the areas beneath the levels was accomplished through a second trap in the stage floor.

4. Since sound was a part of spectacle speakers were mounted in the area beneath the platforms.

Functionally, then, the design provided for internal sources for many spectacle effects which aided in the retention of the island image.

Movement in the production demanded strength; the production concept demanded lightness and airiness. In
order to meet these demands it was decided that the structural materials would be stress-skin constructed platforms supported by steel framing. The steel trussed supports did not require cross bracing which allowed space for the movement of the nymphs. The steel supports for the bridge were thin and almost invisible creating the sense of a floating skyway. The platforms were covered with homosote in order to deaden the sound of actors' and dancers' footfalls so that the spiritlike quality of these creatures would be enhanced. Visually the homosote provided a thickness into which deep cracks could be cut. These grooves suggested several scenic elements: arid land, rockiness, radiating lines directing the eye to the pinnacle of the power structure, and in general broke up the flat surfaces of the platforms rendering them more organic.

My design used rear screen projection as the solution to rapid, fluid changes in locale and mood. In order to minimize light spill on the screen a painted scrim hung just downstage of the screen. The scrim was painted in an abstract style suggesting a wave or hillside under a stormy sky. It remained for the entire show and became the backdrop for scenes not requiring projections.

Media applications begin with the storm at sea. Wave images interspersed with lightning bolts swelled back and forth. Images of the necromancy microcosm suggested
Prospero's magic power. Projections juxtaposed against the actor in a pool of light created a magical atmosphere supporting Prospero's use of his magic arts. The island locales were differentiated by using various organic shapes abstracted from vegetation. Unique images were designed for each group on the island: Caliban, Stephano, Trinculo; the royal party; Ferdinand and Miranda; Prospero. These images became recognizable motifs. The imagery for Caliban and the royal party was taken from briars, brambles, thorny plants, twisted vines. They suggested strife, entrappment, violence. A floral motif provided a romantic atmosphere for the scenes with Ferdinand and Miranda. The innocence of the first scene between the lovers was represented in monochromatic color. As their relationship intensified the floral projection became multicolored. Projections for the banquet scene used images derived from the cyclone's spiral. The climactic moment when Prospero changes his mind about seeking revenge and draws the magic circle about him, employed a spiraling galaxy.

The entire effect of the set, the projections, the provision for internal entrances and exits retained the impression of island. In retrospect I consider the set design not only met the requirements of the script and the directoral concept but provided certain embellishments which enhanced the theatrical and magical qualities of the production.
Stage Model
Paint Elevation, First Portal and Sail
Paint Elevation, Second Portal
Paint Elevation, Platforms
Properties Elevation for Banquet Scene
Projection Slides
(Two slides compose one full stage image)

A ship at sea, lightning
A ship at sea, waves
A ship at sea
A ship at sea
A ship at sea

A ship at sea
Transition from ship to island
Ferdinand's first entrance
First island scene with royal party
Caliban meets Trinculo
Projection Slides
(Two slides compose one full stage image)

Ferdinand stacking logs
The banquet
Act IV Prospero's cell
The masque
Caliban plotting against Prospero

Act V magic circle
Reconciliation
Caliban stealing clothes
Production Photographs, A Ship at Sea
Production Photographs

First Island Scene With Royal Party
Production Photographs, Act IV Prospero's Cell
Design Elevations, Floor Plan
Design Elevations, Front Elevation
Design Elevations, Section
Design Elevations, First Portal
Design Elevations, Second Portal
Design Elevations, Drop With Scrim Panel
Design Elevations, Set Decking
Design Elevations, Sail
Design Elevations, Framing
Design Elevations, Legs for A and B Decks
Bibliography


