Scenic Design and Projection Design for Ragtime, the Musical

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Abstract:
Ragtime, the musical (book by Terrence McNally, music by Stephen Flaherty and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens) for my Thesis project allowed me the opportunity to design in the large proscenium setting of E. Turner Stump Theatre. Particular challenges for this show included the devising of a unit set, the effective use of the fly space, the relationship of scenic design with the music, and the capturing of the specific architecture of the historical time period in order to visually support the stories. Since Ragtime is close to an opera and so much of the story and passing of time is sung in the song, I used a series of carefully researched and designed images as projections on various surfaces of the stage unit. The majority of the audience at KSU is largely students who are several generations removed from this time period. My job was to make the historic elements come alive visually with minimal changes in scenery. I researched turn of the 20th century architecture and specifically local Ohio architectural vernaculars to find the design elements that met these criteria.

Subjects/Keywords: Theater; Ragtime; Scene Design; Projection Design; Design
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Sample Search Hits | Sample Images
68. Projection concept 4a 4b 4c 4d 4e 4f 4g 4h 4i 4j 4k 4l 4m 4n 4o 4p 4q 4r 4s 4t 4u 4v 4w 4x 4y 4z 5a 5b 5c 5d 5e 5f 5g 5h 5i 5j 5k 5l 5m 5n 5o 5p 5q 5r 5s 5t 5u 5v 5w 5x 5y 5z 6a 6b 6c 6d 6e 6f 6g 6h 6i 6j 6k 6l 6m 6n 6o 6p 6q 6r 6s 6t 6u 6v 6w 6x 6y 6z 7a 7b 7c 7d 7e 7f 7g 7h 7i 7j 7k 7l 7m 7n 7o 7p 7q 7r 7s 7t 7u 7v 7w 7x 7y 7z 8a 8b 8c 8d 8e 8f 8g 8h 8i 8j 8k 8l 8m 8n 8o 8p 8q 8r 8s 8t 8u 8v 8w 8x 8y 8z 9a 9b 9c 9d 9e 9f 9g 9h 9i 9j 9k 9l 9m 9n 9o 9p 9q 9r 9s 9t 9u 9v 9w 9x 9y 9z 10a 10b 10c 10d 10e 10f 10g 10h 10i 10j 10k 10l 10m 10n 10o 10p 10q 10r 10s 10t 10u 10v 10w 10x 10y 10z

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Preliminary Design Meeting

I presented some initial ideas at a preliminary design meeting in mid October 2011, I presented images which resembled hand applications. Much later in the process, and after much discussion with Martin Simonsen (Technical Director), we determined to use muslin as our best solution. widths at just under $40 per yard for the wider one and was excellent for projections. One odd suggestion for making a screen was to use wax paper! It is inherently flame retardant fabric. White poly silk takes light well with some translucency. Allegro cloth comes in three colors, which offered me some design flexibility. theatrical gauze would allow too much light through. A sample of 8 cloth that I obtained was Chamelion cloth. This came in 12' and 15' side legs and a window fly also for projection of imagery were the next segments to emerge in my design. A particular window image (see fig. 23) from the director's vision on certain scenes could be different, our frequent communications allowed my design to be in line with van Baars vision and intention. The song in Ragtime is the primary medium for telling the story. Because realistic scenery was too cumbersome to work well for such quick scenic changes, and projected imagery could change and flow seamlessly with the action of the score for inspiration as I worked and pondered the scope of the musical. The songs in Ragtime are the primary medium for telling the story. Because realistic scenery was too cumbersome to work well for such quick scenic changes, and projected imagery could change and flow seamlessly with the action of the score for inspiration as I worked and pondered the scope of the musical. The songs in Ragtime are the primary medium for telling the story. Because realistic scenery was too cumbersome to work well for such quick scenic changes, and projected imagery could change and flow seamlessly with the action of the score for inspiration as I worked and pondered the scope of the musical. The songs in Ragtime are the primary medium for telling the story. Because realistic scenery was too cumbersome to work well for such quick scenic changes, and projected imagery could change and flow seamlessly with the action of the score for inspiration as I worked and pondered the scope of the musical. The songs in Ragtime are the primary medium for telling the story. Because realistic scenery was too cumbersome to work well for such quick scenic changes, and projected imagery could change and flow seamlessly with the action of the score.
colored postcards from the era. They reflected the nostalgia the director wanted to evoke in our production and were well received (see figures 46-52). When I returned to the process after an interruption due to an unexpected personal tragedy, these post card images became my visual anchor for the style of the projected images. The final projection images I created for the production were colored and designed very specifically and were highly influenced by both the postcard research, and the color palettes of costuming and lighting. In mid October I gave a Power Point presentation, which demonstrated projection ideas for some of the scenes (see figure 52-54). This presentation became an important jumping off point for my later work with costume designer Kathleen Kovarik and lighting designer Dave Krupa. We shared our research. 9 Final Set Design Process In November, Simonsen, the Technical Director, informed me of budget issues with the preliminary design, which I immediately discussed with van Baars. Together we looked at adjustments to the set that could bring down the costs. The elimination of the stage right stairs and replacement with a ladder save cost and worked well for the staging of the firehouse. We also sacrificed the curved proscenium truss. The purpose of the proscenium truss was to create the sense of roof on the arcade shaped space. Columns decorated with a lion head supported it. By keeping truss work on the upstage legs, I was able to imply the ceiling structure that had been cut. By repeating the lion and column combination, I was able to create a sense of depth. Finally, looking for more savings and structural stability, Simonsen suggested that we forgo the metal and use wood, a hard wooden stud wall on the upstage under the platforming. Van Baars and I decided to keep the door transluent to maintain a silhouette effect. With these changes, we were able to meet Simonsenâ€™s budget requirements. (Compare Figure 55 with Figure 56 and Figure 57, 59, and 60). At the November production meeting I presented the designs for the set (see figure 53). As I worked with the lighting designer and we had gone scene by scene through the play to discuss ideas about lights and the projections. The upstage wall was seen as both a silhouette screen and a projection surface. The legs were also to be used as both. I made a white 10 model (see figure 58) in early November. Details of luminâ€™s heads, on columns and truss work were added at this point. Many technical questions on the use of projections for our stage, had been raised at the previous meeting, so a special meeting held with Jason Potts (lighting and sound supervisor), Steve Zapotowski (sound design advisor), Jayung Seo (lighting design advisor), Smith, van Baars and Sean Jeffries (projection programmer). Props Design Process Initially, the shop had planned to hire a professional props person from outside the university for this production who could also weld the larger props. It was, therefore, necessary to be as specific in the design as possible about built props early on. I needed to finalize the designs for the main prop items, the piano, silhouette cart, trellis and the car. (see figure 45). At the time we had thought there would be a judgeâ€™s bench and footlights, but we simplified, and decided not to build these items in order to keep the show within our budgetary and technical boundaries. As January came around, it became clear we were going to have to work in house staff for the assignment of property master and building props. The welding class and shop would work together to build the larger metal props. Graduate student Dave Barrington was assigned to be a Propmaster. My job was to assist his advisor and select the chairs and lamp posts that would echo the metal design elements. We discussed the best approach to building the curtain for Crime of the Century. Should it be painted or draped from fabric? Bunning used his skills in sewing to create the curtain with fabric found in storage and spray painted fringe. Excellent 11 communications between the shop supervisor, technical director, artisan and myself enabled us to solve problems that pertained to the metal props, trellis, piano, and cart. 8 Projection Design Process In January 2012 I focused on designing the projections, an extensive component of my scenic design. A distinct advantage I had in designing projections was an experienced and supportive director. Besides my conversations with van Baars, the lighting designer and myself often talked about the design process and made additional adjustments to the set design. I learned from mistakes and overlooked in productions when using projections. 9 First I developed a projection schedule10 that indicated which of the surfaces were to have a projection during which song. Next I compiled all the images for each of these instances11 to give to the programmer, Sean Jeffries. Each image required adjustments to appearance and texture, in areas of hue, saturation, brightness, contrast, and the application of filters and paintwork to bring it more into the postcard art world. This work was accomplished primarily in Photoshop. The most significant adjustments I needed to make to the images came after the first run through. Finally, I could see how they actually looked on the set walls. I learned that the color as I saw it on my computer screen varied greatly in hue, depth, and the values I was going to see in the projected image on the stage. I made more adjustments to the images and prepared for the paper tech. After this tech, the director, lighting designer, and programmer, and I scheduled our own mini tech in the theatre to review each scene with images. This very important step took place the day before the first cue to cue technical rehearsal. At this mini-tech, we were able to set lights cues, colors, and fade 12 times for all the projections in the show. The process also allowed the director to change blocking to take advantage of an unexpected dramatic effect of a rear projection image; it spilled like a gobo on the floor through the open doorway. CHAPTER III Design Concept Evaluation I was quite happy with the overall look of the show. I felt the set had a grace and elegance that touched upon the time period with accuracy. The metal set was all black except for the spirals in the railings and on some props. The gold touches on the spirls and ions had heads were very effective; they had a look that married a style portraying old world craftsmanship with the new style shown by use of iron and the iron truss. A tension between the epic scale of the story itself and the nostalgia or sentimentality specified in the directorâ€™s concept was achieved through the projected images and the wide lines of the unit set. The metal structure provided the sense of openness, allowing the cast to make swift entrances and exits. Set Design Execution Evaluation One area for improvement on my part would be to more thoroughly analyze the trims sets and prepare for the set pieces that I did not actually create myself. I had difficulty with the flag drop not fitting the fly space as scheduled and that required additional adjustments to the set at the last minute. 13 As I look back at what I would change if designing this show again, for the same venue and budget, I would have painted the upstage wall differently. I felt the color did not create the depth that I was going for. I would use translucent walls rather than muslin covered hard flats, in both the projection legs and the upstage wall to allow the director to play with shadows and to create more stylized interaction with the set. However, these would have to be reserved for the less crowded moments of the stage, such as in the baseball park. If the budget would allow, I would add back the proscenium arch structure so that the use of the ions on the proscenium would make more visual sense prior to the opening of the house curtain. I would have asked the Lighting Designer to increase the lighting on the upstage walls and doors to obtain more shadows and texture so that the lighting texture would be consistent across the upstage wall. Props Design Evaluation The skeletal props design for the car, trellis and piano (see figure 65,66, and 67) turned out to be excellent choices for the simplicity of their structure, mobility and tense of the scenes they were in. An unexpected and delightful discovery was by the actor in the role of Colehouse, they could sit on and roll in with the car- as opposed to a shuffle step lift and turn for which is what van Baars had originally asked. The casket was originally to be made as a metal piece in the style of the other large props. However, a wooden one that I found in storage (see figure 64) gave me the opportunity to increase the use of the mahogany wood to that which is used in the columns and the table in the Morgan Library.12 This was important because I believe the contrast between the metal and the wood echoed the contrast between the old world and the new age of the industrial revolution. Finally, as I looked at the production with costumes under the lights, I had to exercise &eacutecrisis self control &eacute cut the designer apron strings and call it &eacutefinished &eacute, thus allowing the play live its own life. This was a good thing to experience. Projections Design Evaluation The biggest technical and aesthetic challenge to the set was rear projection on the translucent doors. I learned by observation in the actual production with the full stage projections that even black fabric could work as a projection color surface.13 In light of that, I would have wanted to work more closely with the lighting designer and it would have been helpful to have the costume designer involved in the color choices. A benefit to working with a director so open to the use of projections was the &eacutehappy accident which came during tech week. I was inspired to try an image on the upstage center window for the funeral.14 Van Baars encouraged me to try it, so I prepared what turned out to be one of my favorite images in the show. It created a sense of reverence that worked well for that scene. My work with the director and lighting designer for the judicious use of imagery, precise timing and the understanding of how to move the story along with projection, along with the recognition of when a projection was going to be extraneous makes me particularly pleased with the projection design. I learned to calibrate how much brighter the images needed to be to look good on stage than the images on my computer screen. I also learned that on our particular 15 equipment, it was sometimes more useful for the programmer to use some of his filters to adjust color to work with the lighting, than for me to rework them in Photo shop.15 The Friday mini tech we had for lighting and projections cues helped us tie the projections and the lighting looks together for one unifed stage picture. The only projection I might change would be using a vertical split screen image for the scene of the train station where mother and Tate, with their children, meet. The tension between the scale of the set and that of the actors would have better underscored the contrast between the human and space.16 Personal Growth A brief word about my own personal growth through this process; I have noted in several places, comments about my learning experience. I would say that due to the personal tragedy I experienced early in the design process, I learned to trust my colleagues as well as my own instincts, to make decisions and take risks. I have been deeply humbled and encouraged by the support extended to me. I appreciate their confidence shown to me when I expressed my desire to continue my work on this show. Death teaches us that we never know how long we are going to be in the lives of those we live and work with. Theatre is a living breathing process. I am grateful to have had this particular group of people to work with me. This moving show about hope in fast paced changing times turned deeply meaningful as I anticipated the unknown future. 16