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English 252:  
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Journal

## Introduction

A note to the reader: Since I am a person of a technical theater / stage management background, I will be writing with a strong emphasis on these elements of the productions (some more so than others). My knowledge of technical theater and

- € *Gobo* – A template placed inside a light fixture to produce a specific shape or effect. Gobos can be metal (to create a simple shape), or glass (to create a more complex shape with texture and color).
- € *Gobo rotator* – A device placed in a lighting instrument that rotates one or two gobos in opposite directions, creating effects such as that of fire or water.
- € *Moving light* – A light that can alter the direction it is pointing, color of its beam, and size and shape of its beam. This can happen while it is on, to create certain effects, or while it is off in between scenes, to alter its purpose.
- € *PAR* – Short for parabolic angular reflector – a type of lighting instrument that produces a soft beam, similar to that of a car headlight.
- € *Scrim* – A fabric drop that appears opaque when hit with light, but is transparent when not hit with light and the scene behind it is lit.
- € *Shutters* – Lighting instruments have flat pieces of metal inside of them that can be adjusted to alter the shape of the beam, often used to cut light off of the audience or pieces of scenery not meant to be lit at a given time.
- € *Strip light* – A lighting fixture that usually holds six to nine lamps in a line, facing the same direction. They can all be the same color, or be controlled in sets with different colors.

*War Horse*

Dir.: Marianne Elliot & Tom Morris

Based on a novel by Michael Morpurgo

Adapted by Nick Stafford

As the first production of the class – this show definitely will be difficult to beat. I was left feeling speechless at the vast amount of emotion that was brought up inside me. To be completely honest, this is the first movie or show I have seen that has caused me to cry since *The Little Mermaid* when I was a very small child (so my mother tells me). It was absolutely spectacular.

Upon entering the theater, there were many significant elements, and even more not as obvious aspects of the production that hit me. The room was filled with a very thick haze. This may have appeared as a slight musk to most people, but as someone who has used it before – I can confidently say that they were using at least five large hazer machines to fill that room. This made even the house lights create an eerie feeling, with every beam of light visible. All that could be seen onstage was what looked like a three dimensional torn piece of paper or jagged cement, spanning the width of the stage somehow appearing to be hanging in mid air facing the audience. The way it popped out of the darkness made it obvious that video projectors were being used since there were no shutter cuts visible. A regular lighting instrument could not make shutter cuts for such a complex shape. A circle evident on the floor of the stage suggested to me the possible use of a turn table. There were also more than 20 moving lights and 30 scrollers, waiting to be used. These all made me extremely excited, foreshadowing some awesome effects

to come. Lights were also evidently aimed toward audience isles, suggesting the actors will be using this space.

Upon the first scene, it was immediately evident that this production was using 300-400 lighting instruments (compared to the UR productions using less than 200). Lighting designer Paule Constable successfully conveyed the warm sun of the “town meeting” where Joey was auctioned off with great use of PARs and strip lights with no color at all. These lights produce a warm beam, similar to natural light, when not colored. The warm look, used ma

– having the same color as the moving lights. Whenever a character died, this light was used. These lights were also used to show the concept of death lurking near, or being in the edge of death. This was done by having the moving lights chase around characters as gunshots were fired, bombshells exploded, and even at times when characters were trying to stay alive after battles had ended. The other subtle use of the death lighting was a hint of it shined on the window of the farm house – showing that death was lurking close by throughout the entire play.

The other major production element that I need to comment on is the puppets. The puppet work was spectacular in all ways. For a moment I felt that it was weird that you could see the puppeteers, but I forgot about them immediately. The way they all worked so well with each other and even made the sounds of the animals was very impressive. It was nice that the costume designer decided to have them wearing attire that fit in with the rest of the characters rather than trying to hide them – since we obviously can see them. They appeared almost as if they were simply there to tend to the horse rather than acting as puppeteers.

In addition, I must mention the use of video effects on the large piece of scenery hanging against the back drop, above the stage. My prediction during the pre-show observations about projectors came true. As the show progressed, different pictures slowly faded in and out on this “projection screen,” depicting images of war at times. In other moments, it was simply used to give a taste of the setting for particular scenes. This was a very creative use of the stage. Since such minimal scenery/prop elements were used, this was a way of showing the audience the message that the directors and

designers had in mind. The projections were also done in a style of children's drawings,

stuff everywhere. I noticed that it appeared as if the theater walls were showing – with lighting cables strewn about, a massive gray door upstage (possibly for moving scenery into the space), and exposed lighting fixtures that were focused in seemingly random directions. There was also a person on stage with a clipboard appearing to check things around the set – similar to a stage manager. The last elements I noticed gave away the concept of the play: There were a row of tables stage left, one with spike take and gaff tape on it, with books and papers very organized, another with a sound board, and lastly an electric piano. This told me that this was some sort of rehearsal because these appear to be rehearsal tables. Having been a stage manager, I sincerely appreciated this!

Once the show started, I realized that this was either a rehearsal hall or a stage in progress. This was confirmed by the scenery appearing partially built (with exposed unpainted wood and missing props – the fridge and stove), the raked stage, and elements mentioned previously. The character on stage at the start of the show was confirmed to be an assistant stage manager (ASM), and he was joined by a production stage manager (PSM) – Kay, sound board operator, keyboardist, costumer, and playwright. The play did a fantastic job accurately representing the rehearsal process, with the actors being called “children” by Kay, the five minute breaks, arguments between the director and playwright regarding cut lines, etc. I found it particularly hilarious that the keyboardist was on stage actually playing while the actors would mime playing in a tacky self parody.

All of the lights that I noticed during the pre-show were either there to mislead the audience, or more likely just the theater’s standard setup, because none of them were used. Though I found this disappointing, I appreciated it as well because the stage was kept in rehearsal light, or work light. Rehearsal light is generally a flat white wash with



some lights perhaps left from old shows aiming in odd directions, with just enough to provide adequate light to please the director. This is exactly what was on stage.

With such a simple set of production elements (no sound effects, rehearsal light, no costume, basic props), I imagine that it was extremely difficult for the actors to portray their characters. It is also a large challenge to act a play in a play. To complicate things even more, the play in that play (telling the life of W H Auden) is very wordy, a rough draft that consists mostly of a few characters talking. This creates a significant challenge to draw the audience's attention – shown by the actors constantly bugging the playwright for more about why they are saying what they say, what their characters are supposed to be, and more. One character, the biographer, goes to great lengths to try and figure out who his character really is – coming on stage in drag and playing the tuba! At the end of the play, he mentions maybe he will try wearing a hat. To me, this is all part of him trying to get the playwright to tell him who his character is (or, perhaps, to tell the playwright who the character is).

One of my favorite parts was certainly at the very end before Kay walked off stage. She moved a book back and forth on the stage management table, about an inch each way. This is an example of how most stage managers (including myself) have a little obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). This obsessive tendency also shows that the actors and playwright are in good company with their OCD.

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*Twelfth Night*

Dir.: Gregory Doran

Written by William Shakespeare

In all of my time studying theater, I have always struggled significantly with the language of Shakespeare. With this in mind, I still enjoy it performed live very much, because I can research the plot ahead of time and follow the production, appreciating the emotion behind the script and how the words sound, even if I cannot translate it sentence by sentence. I considered waiting to write this journal entry until after our class lecture on it, but I decided to write it before so it is not influenced at all by what we will discuss. Even though the discussion will most likely clear up elements of the production I found confusing, I am going to focus here on the other aspects presented that I was able to take in and enjoy (or in some cases, not enjoy).

The pre-show included sounds of a jungle

ocean wave, in the upstage left corner. This was confirmed later in the production to be the ocean for the shipwreck beach scenes on the Illyrian coast.

As the play progressed, I was fascinated at how the designers successfully combined the “outdoors theater” with a more modern technological production. The ocean (peeling up stage floor) was accented with a standard lighting effect that creates the look of rippling water. This is a classic effect and is often considered tacky – done using gobo rotators with glass gobos and standard gels. For many scenes, the look of natural sunlight was removed, such as Malvolio’s prison scene (which also utilizes a trap door). A particular moment when the old theater and new theaters clash was when Sir Andrew was on stage for a scene change and a tree was flown in, landing behind him. He turned around, saw it, and jumped. It was as if he was part of the old theater and was confused at how the tree got there since it is a new theater element (with rigging flying scenery). In addition, the fact that the sky was able to be altered from scene to scene to represent night or a storm is another example of how old and new clash – with old being that there is a sky, and new being that it is altered/created with lighting technology.

This production also had a few things that I had a problem with. The most bothersome was that light came through both windows and cast shadows of the window frame in different directions – going against the natural light concept. Whenever natural light is used (such as in *King Lear* – Todd Theater, Season 17), a single location must be determined for the sun, so when there are shadows cast for effects, they are all consistent. I cannot think of a reason for the designers to do this, [unless to represent confusion within characters like Viola, who is not who she is, is out of tune and out of time, like “Patience on a monument,” waiting until the sun (the marker of time) finally gets it

straight and releases her from her Caesario birthing through her brother's likeness, whereby she will no longer be a misplaced shadow of herself, but, rather, Viola in persona – RP]. Other problems were technical difficulties – the first of which most people probably did not notice. A color scroller got stuck briefly in one of the scenes between the Illyrian coast, when a single scroller set on a blue color did not change back to natural light with all the rest of the scrollers for a moment. The other difficulty was Sir Andrew's sword breaking when he went to slice a shrub. The blade literally fell off the handle and the cast on stage was left to improvise. Though this was clearly not planned, the cast did a spectacular job of improvising. The sword was picked up immediately and held with its handle. The silly antic seemed to fit fine with the Sir Andrew's character – almost appearing as if it *may* have been intentional. It was almost calming for me to see these things happen because as a technical theater person, I face difficulties of this sort all the time, but feel as if they never happen in professional theater. More will be discussed on this point in my entry for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, next.

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### *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Dir.: Debbie Allan

Written by Tennessee Williams

Just like yesterday, the two plays seen today were again complete juxtapositions. Shakespeare and Tennessee Williams are very different playwrights. The Duke of York's Theatre was a small, older style theater, while the Novello Theatre was large and luxurious looking. The house (i.e. where the audience was seated – not the set) was complete with a fancy rug, red velvet type chairs, a massive crystal chandelier, and a

seemingly infinite supply of candelabra sconces on the walls. The luxurious house went well with the set – the also luxurious plantation house. A full size proscenium drop was hanging over the front of the stage pre-show. It depicted an image looking up at a canopy of tree tops. The light was trying to break through from above the canopy, but was seemingly unsuccessful. This served as a bit of foreshadowing, shown to me as Brick’s potential to be better than he is (to stop drinking, have children, and inherit the plantation). He is hindered though because of his internal conflict regarding his old friend Skipper and how he feels responsible for his death. This hindrance can be interpreted as the tree canopy, stopping the light.

The show opened with a fantastic package of technology. The drop was lifted to reveal a scrim behind it. This is known as a “bleed through” effect, as lighting is used to hint at the scene behind the scrim after a drop is lifted, without revealing the entire scene. We are shown the hint of a silhouette of Brick showering, and then the bath tub is hoisted up to the grid at a very high speed. This was probably done using an electronic fly system rather than a human fly rail operator (fly-man). The set revealed after the bathtub flew out and the scrim was lifted was absolutely remarkable! The high walls of the plantation house were built in a way that made the house look even larger than it was. This was done with the walls being raked to get smaller upstage, and by using slats of wood rather than solid walls, making the room look more open (and allowing us to see through walls).

For the most part, the remainder of the tech was fairly simple. As noted in the script, the play is meant to take place over the span of an afternoon into night. This was depicted with scrollers, once again. The mood becoming cooler and darker accented the

plot line as well – as the story became darker. The idea of life being filled with mendacity was the overlying theme. The mendacity was in a way lifted as the plot

*Footsbarn's Christmas Cracker*

By Footsbarn Theatre

The *Christmas Cracker* was certainly an amazing experience! What a treat to be at the historical Globe Theatre as a groundling. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Upon entering, I immediately felt as if I had stepped back in time, noticing the old wooden structure of the audience seating and the wide open ceiling over the floor in front of the stage, for standing audience members. There were also small pieces of paper fluttering to the ground, simulating autumn leaves. Prior to arriving, I wondered how on earth we were going to watch an outdoor play when the light of the day is extremely flat and dreary. Outdoor plays were designed to be lit by the m





A single word summary of this production: “Wow!” In my entire life of seeing professional theater – I have never seen a show so tech heavy (not including Cirque du

The colors of lights were used to emphasize many unique moments/themes. Whenever Billy saw his mother in his mind, she was shown in stage outline with a bright blue follow spot, as the rest of the stage was toned down – making a special look for the mother. The light blue aura around her made her appear as a spirit. Those used during *Razzle Dazzle*, a mix of bright neon colors, gave the illusion of a disco club of some sort. Various colored shin busters (lights used to accent the legs of dancers, aimed at the lower



stage left and right of the main stage. On the main wagon, there were additional wagons that could be pulled out like drawers by the actors (i.e. the bathroom, the costume closet).

ground. The sound design also utilized reverb very appropriately as the miners are brought down the elevator into the coal pit.

Other technical elements worth mentioning (that would be very impressive in any other show, but were simply not huge relative to those mentioned above) are snow falling, small pyrotechnics (the burning breakfast in act I), the massive riot barcade (end of act I), big red coal miners' banner used throughout the show, and the "safety curtain" from the Royal Academy.

I know all I have talked about for this show is tech, tech, tech – but I would like to mention one plot element that really stuck out to me. In the very end, Billy is on his dad's shoulders and is shown playing around, flailing his arms and mimicking an airplane, before he leaves for the academy. After all he has done, starting to find his

*The Pitmen Painters*

Dir.: Max Roberts

Written by Lee Hall

Once I realized that the Lyttleton Theatre is designed for shows in rep – I understood all the extra lights I saw at *The Habit of Art*. This was the production that spoke to me the most so far with its plotline, themes, and motifs. The tech was also impressive, though small potatoes compared to *Billy Elliot: The Musical*. Much like *365 Days, 365 Plays*, a Susan Lori Parks play performed at Todd Theater in fall of 2007, this production utilized video projection. Projection was used to help the audience realize when time passed, which date events occurred on, which places were being depicted, and most importantly, to see the art being created by the pitmen. The video design was very well done. In the beginning when slides were being shown through a projector and the screen showed them being changed very accurately, successful cueing by the stage manager (controlling the timing of these changes happening with the movements on stage) was evident. It was also clear that the designer had researched how this actually appears with a working projector.

This show spoke to me the most because of its dramatic commentary on the definition of art. I was left pondering numerous points raised, such as: Does art need to be political to be a success? If not, what makes art successful? Can anyone be an artist? Does having a full time career in art have anything to do with this? I also felt that throughout the play different characters represented different concepts. At first – the pitmen all represent ignorance of the common man, assuming that art has an obvious single meaning that they just need to know in order to see well. Oliver represents

questions that challenge his ignorance. Robert Lyon depicts a kind of enlightenment.

The woman who offers Oliver the job can be seen as representative of upper class people – those who are insidiously, but stereotypically, art connoisseurs.

This play utilized light as a set boundary very well. In act I when Oliver is presenting a painting to the other pitmen, a single bright light is on him while the rest of the stage is very dim, accenting his nervousness and pulling the scene to only him as he speaks. As he finishes the lights restore to the prior studio lighting. A similar effect is used when the pitmen are all speaking at their first convention. At the very end of act I, the men all stand close with light focused only on them, as they finish each others' sentences – all becoming one. The effect is like that of "Solidarity," in *Billy Elliot*, also by Lee Hall.

The final element I would like to address that is most easily overlooked here is the use of transitions/scene changes to emphasize plotline location. The scene changes start as very industrial and mechanical – with lights shining across the floor and the sounds of machinery operating rhythmically with the lights. As the pitmen become more aware of art and open-mindedness, the scene changes shift. They start to have what appear to be flickers of warm, full light – interspersed between the industrial effects. Once they begin to be well known and appreciative of art – the scene changes become very smooth, with either no sound or regular music of the times playing briefly. Toward the end of the play, as the pitmen argue over Oliver's job and the future of socialism and the mining industry, the transitions again become mixed with industrial elements and become less smooth.

I found the ending of the show to be very well done – with the historical resolution explained on the projector. As this happens, the full cast comes together to





would simply make no sense – despite best

blanks at the time this was written. If they did not want to fire blanks in this show, they could have still done a bit of a better job with the sound design rather than just playing a clip of a gun shot through the house speakers. Perhaps a smaller speaker could have been located somewhere on stage with a more realistic sound clip – or a cap gun used with a microphone placed inside it. Another odd tech element was the lighting design. The space above the stage (a sort of oversized proscenium) was at times lit with seemingly random colors. I understand that songs during musicals tend to have looks that distinguish them from the rest of the play – to show that we are leaving reality briefly – but often times the colors and intensity of the light in this space seemed extremely irrelevant to what was going on. It could have been used as a cyc, to accent the mood on stage or show time of day, but at times it was bright green or hot pink, making little sense for this production. The final problem that bothered me was the transitions. They

ignore, making it look a little silly. I also felt that Annie Oakley's accent was extremely well done, even more so than some of the characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

exactly what the setting is supposed to be. The last element I noticed upon entering that needs to be addressed is the fact that there was a full ceiling over the set. Where on earth could the stage lights be? A show can not be done without high side light and top light! Then upon closer investigation, I noticed that the lights were tucked skillfully behind these cement looking trusses that spanned the ceiling. It was a very impressive, yet elegantly simple set.

The production went on to depict a story of love, comedy, and a bit of horror – all things that I always find interesting and fun to watch. It poked fun at horror in film/theater, as well as use of drugs and alcohol for partying.

It is worth discussing the capabilities of the windows, door, and scene behind the set in detail here. For a scene in act I, there is a partial blackout on stage, leaving only a faint back light through the windows visible – very accurately depicting moonlight or street lights in the distance. A dark figure then crosses in between this light and the window, showing the audience a scary, black, silhouette. I was expecting this effect, yet it still was enough to startle me. The front door was so realistic that when it was opened, I swear I felt a draft. Later in the play, it is raining outside. Rain can be seen falling outside when the door is open, as well as trickling down the windows and dripping from the tree leaves. This is an impressive effect, considering the challenges of running water on stage. As one can imagine, when water mixes with electrical cables, lights, and sound cables – bad things happen. A very realistic effect was executed with these challenges overcome. The costume crew also did a fantastic job making the actors' costumes look drenched when off stage in the rain, even though it was clear that the rain was not actually torrential backstage.



A stage management team sprang into action in a complete blackout. One stage manager took the carpet away, while another held a black light close to the floor to make any blood spatter show up, with yet another person wiping as she went. Left over blood spatter can get tracked around the set, ruining scenery and costumes that are not ready for it. When I worked with blood in *The Illusion*, we had not thought of the black light concept and were left on our hands and knees looking for spatters on a black glossy floor – a challenge every

tediously at times. I suppose it would have been easier having read th

leaving the front of the stage, then immediately were seen floating down behind the screen, as if underwater. The dolphins also seemed very real. They were controlled by puppeteers holding them up on sticks behind the screen. Another moment that projections helped with was the starry night. Stars and a night sky were portrayed on the screens and were supplemented behind/above the screens with fiber optic lights. A fiber optic light source allows light



with the fly system pulling forward then going loose or there could have even been crew members back there pushing it manually. This show used a bright white light for death (Locaha), complimented with white makeup – similar to in *War Horse*. I enjoyed the turn table being used frequently – however I had trouble establishing its purpose in many cases. I believe this was part of the trouble with the clarity of transitions. Since it was rather uniform all the way around, it was difficult to see the designer’s intentions with it. The starry night used the turntable well. It rotated very slowly, giving the illusion that the sky was slowly shifting while the set remained still.

Lastly – it is worth noting that this was the one show so far where the cast acknowledge the technical team at the end of their bows. They all pointed toward the booth at the back of the stalls. It always touches my heart as a tech person when this happens!

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### *Rope*

Dir.: Roger Michell

Written by Patrick Hamilton

I felt that *Rope* was overall very well done. It utilized technical elements with a good balance for the size of the show, had a moving plot, and evoked a great deal of emotion/thought in me as I watched. Seeing a show performed in the round is always a treat as it makes all technical elements particularly challenging – performi11.585ai11.3sand

stage right, it is common practice to use the hours of a clock for directions. For the purpose of this discussion, we will let the fire place be located at 12:00 and the door at 6:00. The room was very dimly lit, creating an elegant, but almost creepy mood.

As the show began, a laugh track and applause track was played as the protagonists - Wyndham Brandon and Charles Granillo – came on stage, knocked over a chair, and placed the body of Ronald Kentley into the chest in the center of the stage. This seemed to simulate the start of a magic trick. The show ended with the body popping up out of the center, through the top of the chest, with green streamers – sort of simulating the end of a magic trick. I am not sure what to make of this, but it seems that as a magic trick would happen, the audience would be stunned, fooled, and in the end shocked at the outcome. Or perhaps it enhanced the calloused attitude of Brandon and Granillo toward the cleverness of their murder skills, like that of a magician but no more significant. I suppose one can make the jump that this is what the designers were trying to do to the audience of this play.

Aside from the “magic trick,” the show started with the room extremely dark, with only the fire place lit and a bit of moonlight. The moonlight was softened nicely, shined down through the glass, translucent ceiling. The firelight was made slightly larger to evenly light the stage with the assistance of a large number of other lights all on with an intensity that seemed to be 5% or less. This is a common technique to mimic a low light scene while still lighting an entire stage. A challenge of lighting the round is that

dimly lit start accurately portrays the fear and darkness that comes over the boys after they have committed their crime. It suits their subsequent freaking out very well. Once the lights are turned on, a large chandelier is lit and the stage is filled with light – though still looks creepy with only an even wash of medium intensity semi-warm light.

Rupert appears first as a particularly slimy and creepy role. He seems to distance himself from the rest of the party – suspecting the boys of murder after finding the ticket that Ronald had been carrying. After the party is over, he returns claiming he forgot his cigarettes (which he did not), then stands the entire time off the main octagon portion of the stage, around 12:00 at the fireplace, while both boys are on the other side of the chest at 6:00. Their opposite staging helps to accent their positions – the boys fearing Rupert’s finding them out.

This play used sound very effectively to convey moods as well. Again – sound design in the round is very challenging. It must be taken into account that sound can reverberate off the back walls and cause strange sounding time delays for the actors or audience across the room. This was successfully avoided. As the show progressed, rain started – making the mood even creepier and on edge. Thunder was also used very effectively, fluctuating around the room with rumbles, just as a real storm would. Also, whenever there was a bit of tension about the murder or about what was in the chest, the fire crackling seemed to get louder. The loudness of the crackle seems to go along with the boys being so on edge – since when you are in this state of mind, small sounds easily startle you.

Dir.: Harold Prince

Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber

Lyrics by Charles Hart

I found this to be one of the most remarkable performances I have ever seen for a combination of reasons. For one thing, it is the one musical theater performance that has evoked the most emotion in me. I found myself so wrapped up in the story, being almost overcome with the emotion coming off the stage. Even more remarkable than this was the fact that this show was created in 1986 at Her Majesty's Theatre, and the technical elements have not been changed since then. With a design that is almost a quarter of a century old already and the quick pace that theater technology is advancing – it is astounding that this production still works so well. The tech at the time it was made must have been the most advanced, since it is still one of the more technically impressive plays I have seen.

I would need to write for about ten pages to do justice to all the technical elements that dramatically influenced the plot and how the audience viewed the production – so I will select those that were the most important. Since the design has not been changed in nearly 25 years, there are no moving lights, yet somehow the lighting design is one of the best I have ever seen. The play uses an astounding combination of gobo rotators, effects wheels, follow spot lights, and different types of fogs to create dramatic effects. These are used to create a magical/mystical look at appropriate places. In the scenes where The Phantom takes Christine into the catacombs beneath the opera house, the stage is covered in low lying fog. They ride in a set wagon that seems to be placed in a track and either motorized (remotely controlled) or pulled with cables along the stage floor extremely

smoothly. The low lying fog gives the illusion that it is actually in the water. The illusion of water is complimented by the moment when Raul jumps down into the water, falling into a trap door in the stage. (You could hear the thud of him hitting a pad if you listened carefully.) Another amazing set element in this scene is the candles. They rise out of the stage floor in a way that makes them seem to come from the mist. Lots of small doors in the stage floor allow them to pass through. The use of lifts for bringing up set pieces like this was quite advanced for the time this was made – and is still advanced today.

The low tech use of follow spot lights is also impressive. The play used six follow spots (which could have been less if moving lights were used). Two of the follow spots used even required dowsers – opaque plates that the operator holds in front before turning the lamp on or off to make the on or off look instant while the lamp ramps up or slowly glows out. A follow spot on stage (aimed from upstage right down at The Phantom as side light near the end of act II) is also used very well. Follow spots coming from on stage are rather rare.

One of the more impressive parts of the set was the highly complex fly system. I have come to the conclusion that it must have been partly computerized. I am unsure of whether this was an available option in 1986 or if it was added – but the speed, smoothness, and complexity showed that it was not just manual. I suppose it is possible that it was manual, but it would require a team of fly men. There were many scene changes, such as the one when the old theater auction becomes the modern day theater, where the entire stage is transformed by mainly flying scenery. I did see some crew members walking along the catwalk above the front edge of the stage for certain

moments, such as when the massive curtain that is up at top of show is split and falls down. The part of the flying that I am fairly sure was machine run was the chandelier and the “pod” that The Phantom is lowered in. These move very quickly, smoothly, and with a lot of force – something that a human operator probably would not handle. Especially when the chandelier falls at the end of act I, it would be crazy for a person to try to control it manually. The chandelier was raised and lowered in a very creative way – first hoisted upward, then upward and outward (toward the audience), ending above the front of the audience. When it fell, it simply went in reverse, swaying away from the audience toward the stage. All of the chandelier movement coupled with the fact that it lit up in different colors, made it a remarkable piece in itself. The Phantom’s “pod” that he rides down in after the rooftop scene blends right in with the proscenium, then all of a sudden begins moving – surprising the audience in a great way.

The pyrotechnics of the production were also quite amazing. They made the Phantom look more magical and mysterious each time they were used. One moment features approximately 8 foot tall flames shooting out of the stage floor. In the final scene, The Phantom shoots fire balls from his scepter at Raul. This too is an effect that would be just as remarkable if the play opened yesterday. In The Masquerade scene, the Phantom seems to vanish in a burst of flame then appear way upstage, opposite where he was. This is done with costume trickery and flash paper. While the audience is blinded

The sound design was also very well executed. When The Phantom was meant to be all around the room, his voice was focused coming from every back corner of the room as well. It was so convincing that I turned to see if he was behind me at least two times. The constant use of reverb also successfully portrayed the feeling of a big, old opera house.

An additional moment worth mentioning is after Christine performs one of her first shows, and the audience is given a perspective of sitting backstage. The curtain opens, and the audience sees Christine bowi

*Pains of Youth*

Dir.: Katie Mitchell

Written by Ferdinand Bruckner

Adapted by Martin Crimp

This has been the first journal that I have waited an extra 24 hours to write because I wanted to let it sink in a bit more and was curious as to what the class had to offer. I found it to be one of the more riveting productions of the trip so far, and definitely one of my favorites. I adore the style in which it was done, using the black box feel that I am so used to calling home at Todd Theater. I left the show feeling the way I often feel leaving a Todd show – thinking to myself, “Wow, that was great!... I am so confused!”

I must start off as I always do, commenting on my immediate feelings upon entering the theater. There was a small stage with a single open room. Without any light fixtures other than practicals on stage, I knew that there was most likely going to be a lot of dark, eerie moods. There was also a row of windows near the stage right ceiling – probably a source of light to be seen later. Three practical fixtures hung in the center of the stage, along with a sconce and a few table lamps. The room was dressed very sparsely, with an institutional feel. Most strangely – all the furniture was covered in plastic sheets. It was as if the room was uninhabited for some time and covered up to be kept clean/dust-free. The sterile environment worked toward the institutional feel. The theme that we had discussed in class prior to seeing the show – about youth being isolated from society, lacking a place to fit in – can be supported by this institutional look. Being kept in an institution suggests being isolated from society – unable to fit in



for a reason. Going slightly against this theme though was the fact that the room was slightly dingy and dirty – perhaps implying that youth are somehow tainted and that is why they are isolated.

The first thing we saw after the lights dimmed was a bunch of people in black suits entering and peeling the plastic off everything. They were dressed for modern times, even though it is supposedly taking place in 1923. With them in the room, we also heard a sort of zapping sound, like electricity. The lights were all back light, which always creates a creepy, evil mood – making everyone appear in silhouette. The light was also a bright white color. It came from the windows, inside the book shelf, and behind the doors that were on the stage left and right walls. When they black suits exited, normal light restored and characters had entered the room, wearing period appropriate costumes. I will not get into the countless themes in great depth, but I will speculate on what some of these technical elements meant for the themes.

The frequent use of this blinding white light with the eerie electricity zaps, coupled with the entering of the black suits modifying the scene, to me implies that there is some sort of experiment taking place. I admit this idea is not my original. I heard a classmate speculate on it, and I have not been able to settle on anything else. The question is – who is the experiment on, and what is it testing? It seems that the experiment is being run by the black suits, since they are the ones manipulating the scene and seem to be able to stop and start it at their will. They also are constantly taking things out of plastic bags and bagging whatever they remove from the set – as one would with evidence from a crime scene, or more appropriate here – scientific data from a laboratory experiment. There are a couple moments when the actors peer out into the

audience briefly, almost so brief that they are hardly noticeable. This is the element that makes me wonder if the experiment is on the audience or on the actors in the actual scenes. It seems more logical that the later is correct.

The question of what the experiment is seeking to determine relates more to the general themes of the production. The way I saw it was that most of the interruptions by the black suits were enablers for the other characters losing control. The process can possibly be viewed as the black suits somehow symbolizing the rest of the world – enabling the youth to be how they are but doing nothing to help them.

The lighting and sound of the production went extremely well with the eerie themes of youth isolation, sins, euthanasia, etc. These elements are all every creepy and possibly even taboo. The sound send shivers down my spine, and I noticed it doing the same to those around me. There was a single musician (if you want to even call it music) using a violin bow on metal strings and springs, making squeaky, creaky sounds. He also played odd sounding piano pieces and violin music at times. The lighting for the show became increasingly dark and dreary as the characters became more hopeless and helpless, either turning to the release of death to avoid their isolation, or somehow finding a way to be assimilated into the rest of society (into the Bourgeois culture).

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*Oliver!*

Dir.: Rupert Goold

Written by Lionel Bart

I watched *Oliver!* with a perspective that I have not yet experienced in my life of theater. This was because it is a show that I have worked on (as a percussionist in the pit

orchestra in high school) and had the opportunity to see with a different director and design team. Having been extremely familiar with the show since I saw it a great deal throughout this process, I was able to focus more on what was different and how tech was improved in this professional production, rather than getting caught up and confused in a story I was unfamiliar with (like I usually am!). Most people I spoke to were dissatisfied at the acting, specifically Oliver's. As someone who is not familiar with acting (unless it is miserably bad), I did not notice this, so it was a great show to me.

The show had fantastic lighting, as expected since the designer was that of *War Horse*. It was obvious that it was the same designer because of her frequent use (I would say, a slight overuse) of haze and fog. This and her use of warm, high above the stage back light were characteristic of effects seen in *War Horse*. I am not quite sure at the look she was going for with the use of thick haze. Light beams popped out in a significant way that seemed nonsensical. There were two high side lights used to light the conductor in the pit, and these lights stuck out so much when they should have been completely hidden since they had nothing to do with the actual production. One other lighting effect that confused me was the beams shining through the upstage windows in the first scene. They were in all sorts of different directions. If they were supposed to be sun rays, they would need to be in one direction. It looked really cool, but did not make sense. Late in the church, we see the rays used again, but this time in the same directions- so I am not quite sure what Constable was going for. I am being picky because I can be, but overall the design was simply outstanding, and I certainly could not do any better!

I am becoming quite jaded to these amazing sets, which is probably a good thing because now when I enter the professional world of theater, I will not look like a fool, in awe over all of the high tech production effects in use today. Nonetheless, I am going to comment on the effects with a fresh eye. The set was truly spectacular for lots of reasons. The set designer did an amazing job portraying the cluttered streets of 19<sup>th</sup> century London – with recognizable locations such as St. Paul’s Cathedral and London Bridge. More impressively, they used a lift that spanned the length of center stage, left to right. The lift served as a single purpose and did not really change at all. Usually lifts represent intense scene changes (such as in *Billy Elliot* when we went from a bedroom to a kitchen to a dance hall by means of lifts). Here, the lift was always a street road surface, with a manhole in it that led down into the lair of the thieves. When the lift went up, the lair was exposed (brought on with wagons from both sides smoothly), but the street above still functioned as a street for actors to use. It was simply as if the camera that was focused on the street level tilted down to let us see beneath it at the same time. In the end, the street surface is also that of London Bridge, with an additional set piece flown in and placed in front of it to make the arches and walls of the bridge. In the bridge scene, there is also great use of low lying fog (just like in *Phantom of the Opera*) to give the illusion of the Thames flowing under it. The one problem I had with it was that the fog went right into the audience. I worked for a company a few summers ago that manufactures fog products, and I know they are usually quite hazardous to breathe, with a level of carcinogens in them. I suppose there are safe products out there for a price that such a great theater can pay, but I was still paranoid.

The song *Who Will Buy*

the theater included the old hydraulic lifts under the stage. This is a perfect example of old yet reliable technology still in use today. These lifts were used during the show and operated just as the new *Billy Elliot* lifts did.

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*The Inspector Calls*

Dir.: Stephen Daldry

Written by Joseph Priestly

*The Inspector Calls* was an overall enjoyable and impressive production. It used only conventional lights, from what I could see, as well as mostly simple scenery elements and sound effects. I believe I have said this in previous entries, but it is the shows that have the most simple technical elements yet still enthrall me that are by far the most impressive.

At first glance, the stage seemed rather normal – with a wooden deck and a red house curtain. Upon further inspection, the wooden decking down stage of the house curtain was falling apart – peeling up stage right and down stage left. There was also a telephone booth collapsed on the ground in front of house, stage right. The house curtain was also very dingy and was paged slightly stage left. This was quite odd because it toyed with the concept of what a proscenium theater always is. The show starts once the curtain is up typically – but here, the curtain itself seemed to be part of the show.

Once the curtain rose, there were immediately lots of additional elements that disrupted the regular proscenium theater “rules.” For one, the upstage drop (the sky) was intentionally too small for the set. The action was taking place in a small house on stage with the wall facing the audience even closed at the start. A closed fourth wall is extremely confusing! The difference between the house on stage and the area outside of the house was explained in the program. The time in the house was in the early 1900s while outside the house was in present times when the play was adapted, in the 1940s. All people outside the house were essentially from the future looking back on something that happened in the past, or of people who were living in the past.

The overall themes of the play include being aware of small things that can have great influences in the bigger picture of someone else’s life. The actions depicted tell the story of a family that has caused a series of events all together that lead to a young woman committing suicide. This is a very dark and unhappy subject. The play also takes place (outside the house) just after the war. The set very accurately depicts the dark implications of this story – with lots of smoke, a house located in a pile of rubble, and real rain/mist falling from the sky (above the stage). The lighting is also successful in portraying a dark, dreary, stormy scene. We are introduced to The Inspector early on, as he enters the world from present time. He seems to be speaking directly to the audience as well as to the children (also on the present time), as if trying to teach them from the mistakes that the family and its generation has made. His role as such a critical character is brought out very well by using a foot light, aimed up at his face from the stage right edge. It is at the proper angle to create minimal amounts of shadows on his face and cast his full height shadow on the front of the house, portraying his overbearing nature on the

family. The other characters are top lit – just like people would be in an interrogation room!

Other odd interactions are those of the community members on stage. They enter from beyond the back drop off stage right from a big rectangular opening, casting bright white light onto the stage. It is as if this is an entrance from another world – the real world. They can represent the people of present times, meant to learn from the story and judge the family. The Inspector also has some extremely peculiar interactions with the audience near the end of the show. He yells “stop!” and everyone on stage holds still, as work lights come on (essentially an even wash of no color front light). He then addresses the audience. Here, blankets are also given from The Inspector to the family. Rain also resumes. The actors wrapping themselves in blankets give them a sad, desperate appearance, stripped of their ridiculous high class living at this moment and depressed. Here, the house also is lifted up out of its roots (using a lift on the upstage end of it). I was clued into this happening by the popping sounds heard just before it occurred. These were most likely the sound of the safety mechanisms being disengaged. Typically, for an effect like this, pins will be positioned in a location to hold the set piece from activating mistakenly at the wrong time, with actors inside it. The pins will be removed via use of a solenoid – a coil of electrical wire. When current is passed through the wire, it creates a magnetic field that pulls in a direction perpendicular to the wrapping of the coil, in turn yanking a metal pin out of its safety position, making the set piece ready to move.

I felt that the “exploding” house could be seen as representative of the foundations, which the family was built on, being completely uprooted and destroyed. Just as symbolic though was the house going back to its initial position once the family



feels they are no longer in danger – reimag

fireplace, furniture pieces, and classical art on

switch and turned off high noon sun and turned on sunset. I was also a bit confused by these effects because it seemed that more than a day was meant to have passed at times when the sunlight would stay the same. There was also a changing light behind the glass panes on the upstage wall. This seemed to replicate a street light or front light outside the

me to look up at the lights over the stage. This is a compromise I am willing to make, once a while, so I was still satisfied with my partial view seat.

The high class look of the house was carried out to the set, once the curtain opened. We saw a hotel room with high ceilings, fancy molding along the walls, full height windows, paintings, mirrors, and chandeliers. These were design choices to support Jennifer's large living style, as a famous movie star.

A significant lighting effect that I was able to notice from such close seats was the subtle color shifting to support moods of the scene and the character speaking. Whenever there was a hint of tension, specifically someone quarrelling with Jennifer like Alceste or Marcia, hints of orange and/or pink top lights would fade up. If Jennifer was becoming upset, such as when Alceste makes her nearly bust into tears, more blue colors are used – probably meant to evoke pity from the audience for her. There was also a constant use of very low level blue top/back light. This type of lighting does not hit anyone's front at all, so the effect is only seen in filling in shadows created by the actors or lighting parts of the set that are in the background. It created a slightly chilly feel. I believe this portrayed the cold feeling of the world the actors are living in, opposite of what Alceste wants for Jennifer and himself. In the world shown, life is filled with hints of deceit and betrayal – something seen as severely flawed in the eyes of Alceste, but perhaps loved by Jennifer

in some of the actors' faces, but without spoiling the shadowy parts of the set. This calculated effect was not evident unless you were looking for it – which is the main reason it was so successful. I would also like to comment on the challenge of having so much fire on stage. I am surprised this was allowed by whoever is responsible for the safety in this theater. With so many large, baggy costumes around, as well as wooden scenery – the fire was quite a hazard. I would expect that flame proofing was used to minimize risks here. In the US, theaters are required to use flame retardant paint, which causes scenery to simply char and crumble rather than bursting into flames like a dried out Christmas tree.

One other moment I wish to discuss is Alceste's interruption of the final party scene, once everyone has started dancing. I was wondering if this dance scene would fade to a black out, as I looked up to see if the lights had begun to dim. Instead I saw the opposite. Most of the lights seemed to turn on to less than 5% intensity. This means one thing usually: The designer is pre-warming the lights. When a light turns on, it takes a bit less than one second to go from 0% to 100%. If a designer wants a look to happen instantaneously, lights are often pre-warmed to a low intensity in a previous lighting cue, so when the 100% moment happens, they are ready to turn on quicker. Sure enough, moments later, Alceste knocked over a cart as all the lights were bumped to full. The lighting here shocked the audience, along w

momentary single light on Jennifer, immediately fading to black. This final brief moment seems to say that Jennifer will remain the center of attention, whether among friends or enemies.

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*The Power of Yes*

Dir.: Angus Jackson

Written by David Hare

At this point in the London trip, I am admittedly becoming more and more jaded to amazing theater and finding it more difficult to appreciate shows to their full extent. With that said – *The Power of Yes* was not my favorite. I feel that it could have been more enjoyable if I was able to follow the storyline a bit more, but due to my lack of up-to-date

The most impressive technical element used was an LED (light emitting diode) screen which spanned the width of the stage and could be raised or lowered, with a full height that was about a third of the proscenium's height. With LED screens hanging without a background, all we see is a grid of tiny light bulbs hanging. This allows it to also act as a scrim, which we can see through when lit properly. One particularly memorable use of the LED screen was in the first scene when we see numbers and letters scrolling around. We are reminded of the tickers that can be seen around Wall Street in New York City. This was a very successful effect created by the video designer. Other uses of the LED screen included showing us pictures of a person or location referred to in the story as well as a date of an event being discussed. A conventional color projector was used against the back wall of the stage, with similar intents.

A set with no back or sides (only a black

In the final scene, numerous design elements are introduced for the first time – telling the audience that this scene is particularly important. In this scene, the writer essentially wraps up what he has learned throughout the story with a financial worker. A set piece of the NYC skyline is flown in near the upstage wall, and is lit up with fiber optics and LEDs inside it. Against the black glossy floor, we see the reflection of it on the dark stage. A table also rises out of the floor downstage. One actor is seated at each end of this long table, with a blue light cross focused on him (meaning that the stage right actor is lit from stage left, etc.). This is the first use of colored light in the production.

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*Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*

Dir.: Felix Barrett and Tom Morris

Written by Tom Stoppard and Andre Previn

This production was definitely a great finish to the trip. It was by far my favorite (though I know I have said that several times already, but that's the way with good theater – it may be for all time, but it is also for the moment!). *Every Good Boy* had a perfect combination of technical elements and an enjoyable plot, with numerous deeper meanings that left the audience reflecting on the story. The play successfully utilizes a full orchestra on stage! This is truly an amazing element – one that makes the play stand out from all the others. It is true that lots of other shows integrate live music – but this show used a symphonic orchestra as a physical part of the production and the plot. A few members of the orchestra even double as actors.

The audience is first presented with the orchestra playing on stage as the mentally unstable Ivanov conducts along to himself while playing his triangle. As he dances, it is



almost humorous. Most people laughed at it. I felt that while this was amusing, there was an eerie feeling to the whole situation because it was fairly obvious that Ivanov is mentally challenged and is acting in a sort of deranged state – something serious and not necessarily to be funny. This is confirmed when the doctor enters and we realize that the orchestra is only in his head. The orchestra continues motions of their playing, but the sounds disappears – an amazing effect. It is very confusing to one's senses to watch the full orchestra playing but no sound coming from them, but no more confusing, perhaps,

wire upwards of 30 lights, each requiring an individual circuit, on a platform that spins. Seems like a big tangle of wires under the stage to me! There were also lots of lights focused on the turntable, including focused on each specific orchestra member – used to accent them as they stood up to represent members of Alexander’s life story to Ivanov. There were additional lights focused on the white pathway that leads through the orchestra, across the stage. Often, as the turntable rotated, lights would stay focused in their proper location – meaning that the lights were moving at the exact speed and precision of the turntable. This is an extremely complex effect!

One additional moment I would like to mention is that when the orchestra exits at the end of the production. I was always taught that one of the first rules of lighting design is to hide the source from the audience (i.e., do not blind the audience). As the orchestra is leaving, there are fixtures along the floor on the upstage walls of the stage that are aimed directly at the audience, on a full intensity! As the stage is filled with fog and the musicians exit one by one, we are blinded and can hardly see what is happening. This is a very dramatic effect, and says so much more about the meaning of the play and what constitutes reality in our heads. I am sure there is a lot more to the meaning than I can see, but it seemed to me to make a statement about how society (the audience) can be blind to what is meant to be under control, such as the government (the production).

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*Reflections on Backstage Meetings / Tours*

During the London trip, I was able to schedule meetings with some back stage personnel at a couple theaters. I did this by simply going to the stage doors and asking the person manning the desk if I could speak with someone from the tech crew,

explaining to them who I was and what I was looking for. I did this at almost every theater we went to, and most sort of laughed at me or insisted that they had not a minute of free time (hard to believe, if you ask me!). The National Theatre and The Royal Court Theatre (home of *The Priory*) both agreed to let me meet someone for a private tour and to discuss careers in stage management and lighting – my two passions.

The National Theatre gave me the email addresses of *The Habit of Art*'s stage manager and the head of stage management for the entire theater (essentially the equivalent of the King of England in the stage management world). I was able to schedule a meeting with the head of stage management, Mr. Eric Lumsden. He flat out told me that I could not get a job there right now (which I knew since I am just graduating and the National Theatre is the most renowned, high paying theater in the UK) – but he agreed to give me a tour and sit and discuss my career with me. The meeting was extremely fascinating, allowing me to see the stage of the show we did not see in the black box – *Our Class*, and the rehearsal hall for *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*. He told me that if I wanted to work somewhere like the National Theatre, I would be better off choosing a focus in theater rather than being active in all departments as I am now. With such a large theater, they need specialists in each area, rather than jacks of all trades. I am not sure of what to do with this advice, but it is food for thought.

The Royal Court Theatre was much smaller and somewhere I would more easily fit in with my current education and experience. The Deputy Production Manager (DPM) who I met with, Tariq Rifate, gave me a tour of *The Priory* set and showed me how all the awesome effects were done (including the rain and the blood). He gave me tour of the rest of the building as well, including an additional, smaller black box theater

upstairs. He told me that someone like me could definitely apply and get an internship with them, and possibly even a job if they needed someone (pending me getting a working visa in the UK). I am still planning to try to attain work in New York City after college since it is more local to me; however, I will definitely keep The Royal Court Theatre in my mind as an option.