FINDING HUMOUR IN THE PAIN
Directing Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato’s The Idiots Karamazov

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

August, 2009

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Abstract

Finding Humour in the Pain-Directing Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato’s Play, The Idiots Karamazov examines the preparation, research, pre-production and rehearsal processes that went into staging The Idiots Karamazov at the University of British Columbia’s Frederic Wood Theatre from March 19 to 28, 2009.

This paper is broken down into 4 chapters detailing my goals to achieve a successful and relevant production for today’s audience. My rehearsal process was to inspire and guide all artists involved to act upon their creative impulses and to make this production a collaborative effort. Chapter 1 includes a biography of both playwrights, outlining their influences and a brief historical account of how The Idiots Karamazov evolved from an 8mm student film to a full-length professional production at Yale Repertory Theater. Chapter 2 provides a directorial analysis of the text and detailed methods and philosophies in directing from several well-known academics and theatre artists. Chapter 3 is a detailed journal chronicling the pre-production process including several e-mail correspondences with playwright, Christopher Durang. Also included in this chapter are several entries detailing early meetings with designers, daily accounts of the rehearsal process, production meetings, and finally a description of three performances I attended during the run. Chapter 4 is a reflection of my final thoughts on the production, concluding with major shifts to my approach to the directing process.

This purpose of this paper is to give the reader a clear understanding of the analytical and practical process involved with directing and staging Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato’s play The Idiots Karamazov at the Frederic Wood Theatre.
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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the entire cast, crew and the design team for their dedication, hard work and adventurous spirit.

A special thank you to my amazing stage manager, Breanne Jackson, for all her organization, support and commitment.

I want to thank my wife, Nicole, my babies Lachlan and Quinn for their undying love and support.

Thank you to my Dad, Huguette, Grandma, Sheri, Dennis and the members of the Creekview co-op for their support.

Thank you to Stephen Malloy, Stephen Heatley, Alison Green and Ron Fedoruk for sharing their knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment of the theatre with me.

Thank you to Jonathan Holmes for all his guidance.

A very special thank you goes to Tom Scholte for all his support, commitment and understanding during this long and challenging journey.
Dedication

This play is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Evelyn Grace McGregor, who encouraged me to follow my dreams.
Chapter One: Research

1.1 Introduction

The Yale Repertory Theater in New Haven, Connecticut first presented The Idiots Karamazov by Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato professionally in the fall of 1974. Durang and Innaurato wrote the play while attending Yale University wanting to push the boundaries of parody and satire in an academic environment.

This chapter includes a brief biography of both playwrights, refers to the many literary and personal influences that helped shape their unique playwriting styles, chronicles the years it took them to develop The Idiots Karamazov from an 8mm student film Christopher Durang created while attending Harvard College into a very successful full-length professional production at Yale Repertory Theatre, explores the career paths of both playwrights following The Idiots Karamazov, and examines the overall impact their work has had on American theatre. This material is presented in the hope that it will give the reader insight into the many influences that helped, me, as a director, determine my approach to directing a production of this play at the Frederic Wood Theatre in March, 2009.

1.2 Durang and Innaurato: Early Biography

Christopher Durang was born on January 2, 1949 in Montclair, New Jersey.

Albert Innaurato was born on June 2, 1948 in South Philadelphia. Very little information is available about Albert Innaurato’s childhood but, in an October 1999 interview with Ryan McKittrick (a second-year dramaturgy student at the A.R.T./MXAT), this is what
Innaurato had to say about his youth. "I was raised in a killer family. Chris came from a more genteel family. But I'm sure both families were equally dysfunctional."

Both Innaurato and Durang went to Catholic schools. Innaurato attended Central High in South Philadelphia, and attended Temple University as a theater major. From there he went to the California Institute of the Arts and studied theatre. Durang attended Delbarton, a Benedictine junior high school, in Morristown in New Jersey. From there he went on to Harvard College to major in English literature. I managed to find plenty of information about Christopher Durang’s life but had some difficulty with Albert Innaurato’s. I did, however, find this:

This text [Coming of Age in Soho] is more personal, which disturbed some reviewers. This play is more autobiographical that any I’ve written, though precisely how I’d rather leave a mystery. (Innaurato xv)

Innaurato states in his introduction, “the major theme of The Coming of Age in Soho, written in 1983, is about one’s man attempt to define his own sexuality.” (xv)

Christopher Durang wrote his first play at the age of eight while attending Our Lady of Peace elementary school. The nuns let him present the play to the rest of the school: his very first public performance. He says it was "plagiarized from an episode of Love Lucy where Lucy has a baby" (Durang, Intro. x). The play was only two pages long. Durang’s mother, Patricia, and his father, Francis Ferdinand, introduced him to theatre at a very young age taking him to Broadway to watch plays and musicals several times a year. One of the biggest influences in his life was the musical How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying. Durang loved musicals, and still does, especially “Sondheim for his darkly complex view of human relationships” (Durang, Official). Even
though Durang had his difficulties and challenges growing up he remembers being surrounded by family with a passion for the theatre, music and humour.

By the time he was 13 and attending high school he and his best friend wrote two plays: Banned in Boston and Businessman’s Holiday. The monks found them good enough to present to the rest of the school. They “borrowed” (Durang, Short Plays 216) girls from an all girls’ Catholic school down the road to play the female roles, however, the nuns thought their plays were too racy and didn’t “loan” their girls to them ever again. Support of his writing from the monks in his high school, his mother and extended family, helped him make the decision to become a playwright at a very young age. He wrote several plays in high school and was a very good student achieving high marks in all his courses.

Throughout his teens he read plays written by Joe Orton, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O’Neill, Ionesco and Edward Albee. He “enjoyed Noel Coward for his dialogue, Anton Chekhov, for his complicated psychology and his characters’ regrets. [He] admired Caryl Churchill’s plays: Cloud 9 and Top Girls both playful and absurd. Thornton Wilder’s, Our Town, for its simplistic human tenderness. [He] admired Bertolt Brecht for the way for he told stories; [he] found them inventive and different. And [he] was heavily influenced by Samuel Beckett’s absurd plays: Happy Days and Endgame. [He] is an avid film buff going to the movies on a regular basis; some of [his] favorites are Some like it Hot, North by North West and all of the Marx Brother’s films” (Durang, Official). Many of these influenced a number of his plays including; A History of American Film and The Idiots Karamazov.
Because Durang was a good student, he was accepted into several colleges on scholarship. He decided to go Harvard College, even though it didn’t offer a theatre major in playwriting. He continued to write plays, musical cabarets and the 8mm student film parodying, The Brothers Karamazov, in his freshman year. In 1967, at the age of 18, he wrote Diversions. This he claims “seemed to come from a different place in me. It has a young person’s existentialism, I guess; it also is drawn to absurdism, which I seemed to know from Edward Albee’s The American Dream and maybe from some Fellini movies” (Durang, 27 Short Plays 216). It was something totally different from anything else he had written in high school. It was existential and absurd, approaching a more dark and cynical side of his personality, yet still very humorous and giddy. After Diversions was produced in a theatre lab at Harvard he stopped writing for a time. Harvard was a wonderful and valuable experience for Durang; however, he became very depressed, withdrew from his friends, skipped classes, slept in, did his job cleaning bathrooms, and then, at night, went to the movies watching mostly Swedish films. He found his academic workload daunting and uninteresting.

It was here that he embraced that fact that he was a homosexual; something that must have been very difficult to come to terms with in the early 1970s. He was always a good Catholic boy; he even considered becoming a monk in his youth, the Church, of course, doesn’t condone a gay lifestyle. His father was an alcoholic and, after years of constant fighting, his parents finally decided to divorce. At the age of nineteen he had to testify in court against his father, which he found very difficult. This brought about painful memories of his childhood. His mother lived with the pain of losing three babies at birth, which impacted the entire family in a very negative way. His father drank a lot
more and his mother yelled at him when he became excessively drunk. Life had become very challenging for him and he questioned whether or not he was meant to be a writer. Finally, he was lucky enough to connect with a psychologist (Harvard offered free counseling) and he got the help he needed. He worked through his depression and considered returning to playwriting.

One morning, as he was sitting in his dorm room, a booklet was slipped under the door. It read The Nature and Purpose of the University. This was the early 1970s and the Vietnam War was becoming very unpopular with young people so Harvard put out this booklet to curb any potential sit-ins and riots that might happen on campus. When he first read the booklet he thought it read The Nature and Purpose of the Universe. This became the title of his first play in two years.

“The impetus for the play was the suffering of a friend of my mother’s — a lovely woman” (Durang xii). She was a young woman in an abusive relationship with an abusive and alcoholic husband. They had five children together and she didn’t want to have anymore. She went to her parish priest and asked if she could please use birth control to protect herself in case her husband raped her in a drunken stupor. The priest decided against it, the husband forced himself on her, and she had her sixth baby. The play is filled with rage against the Catholic Church but again in a very dark humorous way. It was during this time Durang began to resent the Catholic Church and its dogma. Many of his plays are filled with rage against the church, yet in a very humorous style. The Idiots Karamazov being one of the first.

This dark, absurd yet humorous writing style was to become Christopher Durang’s unique contribution to American playwriting. The Nature and Purpose of the
*Universe* was written in a newer, darker, comic style (pushed even further than his last play, *Diversions*). After reading almost all Durang’s plays I find, like many writers, he draws heavily on personal experience. There are themes of mental illness, depression, pain, suicide, alcoholism, death of babies, abusive fathers, despondent mothers and rage against the Catholic Church. When he wrote *The Nature and Purpose of the Universe* he found a way to deal with his depression in a humorous way.

...it was the flip side of my depression, it included a lot of hopeless feelings about life and love and relationships and people’s inability to find happiness or to get on with one another—but where those feelings had previously overwhelmed me, as I wrote this I found the excess of the suffering funny (Durang, 27 Short Plays 231).

In all of Durang’s play he writes detailed addendums or forwards for actors and directors who are about to go into rehearsals. In the addendum for *The Nature and Purpose of the Universe* he writes about the “tone” of the violence in the play. There is a great deal of graphic physical violence in the play, Eleanor is beaten, kicked, punched and thrown to the ground by her husband and children. “...if the violence is too convincing or too “specific” the play will turn too ugly”... “With the violence in particular and with the playing tone in general, the problem is somehow to balance letting the audience feel liking and sympathy for Eleanor at the same time that they find the humor in seeing her *get it*” (Durang, Explains 52).

*The Nature and Purpose of the Universe* won him the playwriting prize at Smith College, producing a very successful run. He used this play to apply to the Yale School of Drama as a graduate student in the playwriting program. He submitted this play along
with a letter from a Jesuit priest/teacher at Harvard who called him “...a pig trampling in a sanctuary.” (Durang, Intro. Explains xi)

Howard Stein, who was the Associate Dean of the Drama school at the time, burst into Robert Brustein’s, Dean of the University and Artistic Director of the Yale Repertory Theatre, office to announce; “We took in a kid from Harvard who is about 21 or 22 and who already has a subject: A scream for help in a world he knows provides none, so he keeps on screaming and laughs at it” (vii).

The summer before he started at Yale he wrote another play 'Identity Crisis'. Like his previous plays it is absurd and humorous dealing with themes of a dysfunctional family, depression, pain and suffering (one actor plays three roles virtually at the same time: a brother, father and grandfather).

1.3 Durang and Innaurato at Yale

Upon entering Yale University Durang was somewhat apprehensive and hoped to find support and encouragement. He found it in two very gifted theatre artists: Howard Stein and Robert Brustein. Howard Stein found him “relentlessly entertaining...blessed with twin gifts-originality and an anarchic spirit- he provides an audience with unruly laughter and outlandish amusement” (vii). Robert Brustein describes him as “an angelic altar boy with poison leeching through his writing fingers...” (vii).

Christopher Durang’s first writing assignment was to write a scene on a train with a man smoking a cigar, and a woman asking him to stop. In true Durang form his train turned into a boat, The Titanic, and “not much was said about cigars, although there was a lot written about white bread, mirrors and marmalade” (xiii). It’s a play about children’s anger towards their parents; the children kill their parents in a humorous and evocative
way. It would seem Durang was still dealing with the pain and anger associated with his childhood.

Being at Yale in the early 1970s was a stroke of luck for Durang. He was surrounded by some of America’s most gifted and talented actors and artists including the talented Kate McGregor-Stewart, Meryl Streep, Sigourney Weaver and playwright Albert Innaurato. Durang recalls his first impression of Innaurato in an interview with Anne Marie Donahue of the Boston Phoenix:

We both came from Catholic backgrounds and tended to have nuns in our plays. So, the first month or so, he and I were kind of sizing each other up and wondering, “Is this school big enough for both of us?” But after that initial wariness of one another, we went on to become very good friends during our time there.

Durang and Innaurato’s friendship grew during their time together at Yale working on several bizarre cabarets in their first year. “Despite their differences as playwrights, both share many similarities; both are attracted to parody, absurd theatre, pushing boundaries and channeling their rage through comedy with a somewhat cynical turn of mind” (Donahue). They wrote several crazy and bizarre scenes in their cabarets for example; setting The Catholic Mass to the score of Cabaret, hooking electrodes to Sigourney Weaver’s temples and having her sing about the joys of electroshock treatment. But the most controversial involved dressing up “a house jock as a ballerina and getting him to sing Puccini. The jocks, not to mention the Dean of the college, flipped out and a riot broke out during the performance. On more than one occasion they were called perverted due to the crude and rude nature of their humour. Both relished the
chaos and unleashing their rage through comedy on an unsuspecting theatre crowd” (McKitterick).

1.4 Durang and Innaurato Encounter the Karamazov Brothers

Christopher Durang had read the novel The Brothers Karamazov, by Fyodor Dostoevesky, in his freshman year at Harvard and was curious as to how Hollywood could possibly make a film, starring William Shatner and Yul Brynner, out of such a complicated and layered book. He was obsessed with the novel and was taken with its saintly brother, the monk Alyosha, and his nihilistic intellectual brother, Ivan. He enjoyed the entire surface melodrama of the plot; the murder mystery of who killed Fyodor with a brass pestle; the passionate and violent love triangle between Dmitri, Fyodor and the beautiful Grushenka the (1957 Hollywood film emphasized this plot line.) However, what interested him the most about the novel were the conversations between Alyosha and Ivan. They discussed the existence of God, and that burning question – “how can there be a God with so much cruelty in the world?”

Durang wrote and directed an hour-long 8mm student film parodying the novel, starring him as Alyosha, filled with wacky jokes and parodying several foreign and contemporary films including La Dolce Vita (Fellini) and The Graduate (Nichols). At Yale, “Durang showed what he called his “crackpot movie” to fellow playwright student Albert Innaurato…[Who] suggested co-writing an adaptation as a play with music, which would underline, as parody, the difficulties of dramatizing Dostoevsky’s philosophical discussions (McKittrick). Both artists where young ambitious, intelligent, well read and wanted to arouse audiences to think about organized religion, homophobia, family and all sorts of sexual relationships using hilarity and mirth. The Brothers Karamazov was the
perfect vehicle for them to collaborate on to fulfill this agenda. As they worked on the piece it became very evident that their personal styles are quite different. Durang had done some acting so he understood things like through-lines, scene objectives, character development and motivations for actors. Innaurato on the other hand was more interested in chaos and less interested in grounding acting and dramatic structure, which made for a brilliant struggle between storyline and moments of absolute chaos in the script.

Innaurato describes his own approach to the collaboration as follows:

I really loath structure, this need to make sense of everything is awful. We have to liberate ourselves from that. What makes sense? Nothing makes sense. Our grandfathers had realism. But the second half of this century has forced us to take seriously writers such as Ionesco or Beckett, who come out of an experience of randomness of life. Theatre has to express that chaos of being. “The Idiots Karamazov” is about acting, about instantaneous self-transformation. An actor has to have a gift of transformation. Why can’t you become a samovar? Do you need a reason to play a samovar? An actor is someone who can be anything. A mountain. A moon. We humans crave chaos (McKitterick).

In the same interview with McKitterick, Durang comments on his own contribution to the collaboration:

Albert’s comic imagination is more anarchic than mine; his brain is very fecund... strange non-sequiturs would pop into his head as we were writing. I found them very funny; but left to my devices, I don’t know if I would come up with them. When I wrote with Albert, my imagination
became crazier. But I was the one who would occasionally try to tie us back to reality.

1.5 The Idiot's Karamazov: Early Production History

"In his freshman year, Innauratowas hired by Silliman College (an undergraduate residence hall at Yale College) to direct a production of Hedda Gabler. But he changed his mind and introduced the students to "a musical send up" of The Brothers Karamazov and they went for it" (Durang, Intro. "Idiots" 2). In the interview with Donahue, Durang remembers that; "This first version was totally "insane"- "it was total chaos: it was a circus." "Innaurato directed and secretly cast himself as Constance Garnett and Durang played Alyosha Karamazov. They put posters around Yale that read Dame Edith Evans starring as Constance Garnett in The Brothers Karamazov, the original title of the play" (McKittrick 5). Dame Edith Evans (1888-1976) was an actress with a distinguished career on the British stage. Her most famous role was playing Lady Bracknell in The Importance of Being Earnest. "Innaurato thought it would be amusing at the top of every performance of, The Brothers Karamazov to announce that Dame Edith Evans had broken her hip in a bad fall, and that he would have to play her role. This of course infuriated many of the professors who encouraged their students to attend the production. They wanted to have the perverted playwrights thrown out of the school." (Durang, Intro. "Idiots" 3). Durang recalls:

...it was a weird time, a much more repressed time than today is.

Everything was closeted, and I don't mean only homosexuality. All kinds of no-nos were not talked about. So, of course, in The Idiots Karamazov, we did nothing but talk about no-nos. But we did it in this kind of goofy
way, so that half of the audience just thought it was funny while the other was kind of offended that we were talking in a mocking way about religion, literature, scholarship, and every kind of sexual relationship (Donahue).

Howard Stein and Robert Brustein were huge supporters of these two young and talented anarchists and rescued them from being expelled. Howard Stein saw The Brothers Karamazov and loved its craziness. He decided to give them and this crazy play chance on the mainstage. He introduced them to Tom Haas, the head of the Yale acting department at the Drama School, and he decided to schedule it for a full production the following year at Yale’s Drama School. Haas usually directed the classics with the students, so choosing to do this giddy, musical cabaret was a huge departure for him. Many playwriting students that go through the Yale program very rarely get their work produced at the school, so both young playwrights were very eager and excited to have this unique opportunity. This encouraged Durang to write The Marriage of Bette and Boo, originally a one-act play. “The play is a tribute, to his mother, who suffered and grieved the loss her babies, to an alcoholic father, and to a son, who finally after many years forgave his family and himself” (Brustein x).

At the same time Inmaurato continued to evolve his own signature style by writing a one-act play, The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie.

As for writing Benno, it began as a very vivid dream in which the events seemed frighteningly real. Solving the dream in the play form was difficult, to say the least, and I suppose one can legitimately criticize the
play for combining-uneasily-elements of naturalism and surrealism
(Innaurato iv).

Haas had a reputation for being very difficult and a terror when it came to working with actors but he had a great eye for casting talent. His most famous pupil was Meryl Steep; however, she had fallen out of favour with him and during the casting session he leaned over to Durang and Innaurato and said; “have you ever seen Meryl be good? Indicating that he hadn’t” (Durang, Intro. “Idiots” 4). However, he cast her anyway as the insane translatrix, Constance Garnett, and, in the end, she was amazing.

Before going into rehearsals Haas asked Durang and Innaurato to do some rewrites. He wanted to push Fr. Zossima’s attraction to Alyosha further and the other brothers, Dmitri and Smerdyakov, to have more texture. The play got much better as they focused on the main characters’ journeys. The story was still very confusing but Durang and Innaurato wanted the chaos and absurdity to remain.

When Haas started rehearsals he took big liberties with their script, he cut the laugh lines and had “the actors investigate the inner pain, and sexuality of their characters. The scenes were still funny, but they were on the brink of becoming endless and grotesque if they went one smidge slower and got one degree more serious.” (4). Durang and Innaurato took Haas aside and told him to put the laugh lines back into the play; after all they were the playwrights. Haas thought them difficult to work with, but they got what they wanted and the laugh lines were put back. However, they “were very worried about the production: the other scenes also seemed too serious, too portentous for the material” (5).
Haas became very sick (pneumonia) in the middle of the rehearsals and was replaced by a directing student, Walt Jones; he was well liked by the other students and had a good sense of humour. This made Durang and Innaurato very happy. He brought in several great ideas and started to lighten the tone of the piece. He implemented some clever staging ideas for the musical numbers, but the actors were still playing the scenes slowly and investigating their inner journeys. Durang writes:

Then Haas got back, and the actors ran the play for him. During it, he squirmed in his seat, rolled his eyes, and during many scenes, snapped his fingers obsessively, indicating “faster! faster!” When the run-through was over, and the actors came out sheepishly to hear Haas’s notes, Meryl spoke up bravely to her teacher and told him his snapping behaviour in the run-through had been one of the most difficult, unpleasant experiences she’d ever been through in theatre. Haas nodded and said “uh huh,” as if she’d said something pleasant but uninteresting; and then he proceeded with his notes” (5).

The play finally opened in the 1973 and it was a huge success, even though the process was unpleasant and confusing for Durang and Innaurato. Durang notes that, “The trick was that the pace got cranked up to comedy pace, and the actors “lightened” their intentions, but did not throw the intentions out” (5).

Robert Brustein loved this new version and scheduled it for a professional production on the Yale Repertory stage the following season. This would be Durang and Innaurato’s very first professional production. They did a few more rewrites and changed the title to The Idiots Karamazov, which is a far more suitable title for this play. There is
no relation between “Idiots” in the title and Dostoevsky’s other epic novel The Idiot. It simply describes the four brothers in the play as idiots.

Haas was scheduled to direct the play but didn’t. “At a faculty meeting Haas suggested throwing Meryl Streep out of the school; Brustein thought Meryl was wonderful” (6) and threw him out of the program instead. A new director was hired, William Peters, a Yale directing graduate who specialized in comedy. Durang and Innaurato thought that was a fantastic idea and welcomed him to the production. When it was time to do casting for this new version Meryl Streep was the only one cast in the same role. Many of the original cast members were cast in the show again but in smaller roles. The Rep’s company members were cast in the larger roles. Durang was thrilled when Brustein cast him as Alyosha and then he was given a small role, as a nihilistic student in a new stage adaptation of Dostoevsky’s The Possessed.

Innaurato was busy finishing, Gemini, his first full-length play. He began writing it in his first year at Yale and was almost finished. But things weren’t going so well for him when a medical condition, specifically a surgical procedure he had undergone, had hemorrhaged. At this point Innaurato was struggling to survive and had no health insurance. He developed a high fever and, unable to keep his part time job (he was a messenger) had to beg for help. Howard Stein stepped in, making another surgery possible (which again became infected, causing him to develop yet another high fever).

When the fever broke I left the hospital, creating considerable hysteria among the interns and nurses at Yale New Haven Hospital. I wanted to die. That’s when I wrote the last scene of Gemini the next morning, the wound stopped oozing, and the swelling decidedly lessened. Bad writers,
I’m sorry to admit, often give their writing mystical significance, but those who told me that the play had a ‘healing’ quality may have been on to something (Innaurato v).

As rehearsals progressed for The Idiots Karamazov things were not going so well. The director, William Peters, made some very strange design choices. For example he raked the stage and put walls up making it impossible for Meryl Streep to move about the stage. Haas’ production had been done in the round making it easy for her weave in and out of the many short scenes. Their solution in the end was to cut a section out of the walls so she could sit in and watch the action of the play. Durang and Innaurato were not happy with that choice as it as took away the way Constance related to the characters and “it lost the magic…” (Durang Intro. “Idiots” 7). However, that was not the biggest problem with the production.

Peters never saw the Hass production; and he was directing the play as a simple farce, with no psychological underpinnings whatsoever. And so the production was becoming unpleasingly schizoid…the actors from the Haas production (many of whom, though, were playing different parts now) kept trying to root their comedy in some psychological truth: while the actors new to the production, taking their cue from the director, were going for what I viewed as hideous exaggeration (8).

The play was a mess, an exaggerated comical disaster. Durang and Innaurato knew it and they missed Haas’ way of working with the actors. Even though he was crazy and difficult to work with he understood what the play needed in order for it to work. Haas took the time with the actors to find the truth of their characters’ wants needs and
desires. Peters was just going for the laughs. "When a production is lacking these serious underpinnings, the play can end up seeming a funny, madcap series of non-sequiturs, a Russian literature *Hellzapoppin'*, entertaining perhaps, but not quite a play." (Durang, Innaurato, 66). Durang was beginning to panic and tried to take control of an out of control situation. This was his professional début, not only as a playwright but as an actor as well.

As we got closer to first preview, it felt like we were in a big bomb. My friend Kate and I couldn’t figure out how to play our scenes together, and ended up blocking ourselves; I don’t know what Peters was doing. (Though I remember once Kate and I heard Peters telling the designer to cut a particular chair, and we cried out. "No! We need it at the end of the act." It felt as if he wasn’t watching our scenes, and didn’t know what furniture we used.) (Durang, Intro. "Idiots" 8).

After Brustein had seen the first preview, he knew what to do; he’d seen the first two versions and stepped in and made a few adjustments.

“One of them was to move Alyosha’s big number, "Everything’s Permitted" to the top of Act II, rather than the end of the act. This did not make much sense thematically—because it marks the end of Alyosha’s journey, not its mid-point—but in this production things like "journey" were not registering anyway, it made good audience sense because the number was funny and worked, and put the audience in a good mood (9).

The play opened in the fall of 1975 "and somehow the production kind of succeeded on its own terms, less special than the Haas one, but offering the audience
laughs and strangeness” (9). Throughout this long and arduous process, both Durang and Innaurato learned something about finding the right “tone” for their play. Durang states, “So it was a confusing process. But it was an early lesson in the advantages of playing comedy with real psychology underneath. And I think the production [Haas’] was one of the very best I have ever seen” (6).

The play received several favourable reviews from the local newspapers, but it was Mel Gussow’s positive review in the New York Times that launched their careers.

New Haven-The Idiots Karamazov, which opened last night at the Yale Repertory Theatre, is, more or less, a musical comedy based on The Brothers Karamazov, which is enough to make Dostoyevsky turn over in his grave. Actually there is nothing grave about this antic undertaking A travesty by Christopher Durang and Albert F. Innaurato, two recent graduates of the Yale School of Drama, it is as precocious as it sounds – but it is also has moments of comic inspiration.

The authors are Yale’s response to Tom Stoppard and Vladimir Nabokov. The script is riddled with literary allusions and intellectual jokes. This is a lampoon not only of Dostoyevsky, but also of all Western literature… I liked the all-nonsense attitude...(Gussow 365).

1.6 Durang and Innaurato: Life After Yale

When The Idiots Karamazov closed both Durang and Innaurato went to New York to start their careers as professional playwrights. Durang’s plays “The Nature and Purpose of the Universe and Titanic ran off-off-Broadway at 11:00pm” (Durang Intro. xiv). Both did very well until moved to a commercial run off-Broadway where they
received very harsh reviews. Now flat broke and disillusioned but still willing to pursue his passion as a playwright Durang wrote A History of American Film. This brought him much success and a name in the business. He had three separate productions opening at the same time in 1977. As he prepared for its arrival on Broadway he felt rushed and the rewrites for the show didn’t go so well for him. It was produced at “the ANTA Theatre, which was much too large for us and though, the New York Times review was good, the other reviews were cranky and harsher on the show than I felt it deserved, flawed though it was” (xv). “A History of American Film was to be his last dramatic parody. After this, he was to explore the more difficult terrain of his own life and his own family, without ever abandoning his almost Swiftian indignation” (Brustein ix).

Innaurato also produced two plays off-off Broadway, Gemini and The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie. I found some information about Innaurato’s life at this time but was having some difficulty with details so I e-mailed Durang. Here is his response:

His play "The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie" was a big hit at the O'Neill (in 1974 on a guess?); then a critical success (Gussow review) I think at the Direct Theatre off-Broadway with Anne DeSalvo as the mother. Then an off-Bway hit with the umbrella title of "Monsters" (I think) starring James Coco as Benno. Then it came back again in early 80s at Playwrights Horizons, with Peter Evans as Benno; and directed by Albert. Peter Evans was a highly admired actor (original "Streamers," original "A Life in the Theatre" of Mamet). He was one of the early deaths from Aids, most sadly.
Around the "Monsters" hit, Albert's "Gemini" was done at Playwrights Horizons successfully (Sigourney Weaver was in that version); then it was done again by Circle Rep to a glowing review (I think) by Gussow, and then it moved to the Helen Hayes theatre (now called the Little) where it ran like 5 years. (Sigourney was not free to be in the 2nd two productions; Carol Potter took over. Danny Aiello was greatly praised as the father; and Jessica James was notable as Bunny.)

"Gemini" had a somewhat cheesy, but effective TV commercial that ran in NYC from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. a lot; many people think it helped the play run a long time. Albert feels (I think) that the commercial made the play less taken seriously.

Durang, Christopher. E-mail to the author. 18 Dec. 2008.

Below is the review Gussow wrote in 1976 about Gemini and The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie.

The comic vision of Albert Innaurato is fiendishly demonstrated in Gemini, at the Playwrights Horizons, as it was in the author's earlier The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie. Mr. Innaurato's instrument is not a needle, but a cleaver. There is a savagery in his humor that is, in a strange way, refreshing at the same time that it is terrifying.

Gemini is a longer, more comprehensive indictment than Benno Blimpie, but the target remains the same. Humanity, in particular the American family, slapped over the head with a pig's bladder. Mr. Innaurato is a caricaturist-closer to Mad magazine that George Grosz-whose plays are
like operas. *Benno* is an extended aria by an incredibly fat boy. *Gemini* is a
grand soap opera. Everything is larger than life; laughter, tears, shouting,
screaming. Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman fans might recognize the
territory, but they will never see *Gemini* on television…

Much of the grotesque humor derives from interruptions and sudden
changes of mood. Mr. Innaurato repeatedly shifts gears-high to low to
reverse, pathos to buffoonery, tears to laughs. He sends the characters
careening in one direction, then slams on the brakes. An argument ascends
to catherwauling proportions and stopped cold by the entrance of a crowd
of people carrying a candlelit cake, wearing funny party hats and singing
“Happy Birthday, dear Francis.” A scene of quiet tenderness is interrupted
by the off-stage sound of Bunny throwing a piano at her fat son.

Except for the ending, which seems appended and a bit too poetic, this
is a swift, exuberant cartoon…

In common with David Mamet and Christopher Durang, the author is an
original, an iconoclastic rebel in the American Theater (162-163).

A year later Gussow placed the emergence of both Durand and Innaurato in
context in an essay titled *A Rich Crop of Writing Talent Brings New Life to the

The American theater is being revitalized by a prolific band of
adventurous new young playwrights. Away from the spotlight, working
Off-Off Broadway and in regional and institutional theaters, they have
been sharpening their talents and expanding their possibilities. Late last
season, four new playwrights-Michael Cristofer, David Mamet, Albert Innaurato and Christopher Durang-made an impact on the public consciousness…Innaurato had two plays produced commercially, *The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie* and *Gemini*. Durang *A History of American Film* had three consecutive, different productions in major regional theaters.

The four men are on the crest of a wave that is buffeting theatrical tradition. For years, new American plays have been if not exactly anathema, at least a rare commodity. But the theatre is changing; it is becoming more hospitable to experimental work (1).

In 1978, Durang became depressed and doubtful worrying about what critics might say about his work (Frank Rich, critic at the New York Times “had the distinction of panning many of [Durang’s plays]” (Brustein, x). On top of all that, his mother, who he was very close to, was dying of cancer. They had a very close relationship and, in 1979, she died while he was writing *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*.

The play was in no way written “because” my mother died. It was written partially in giddy recall (who can believe we once believed in limbo?), and partially in anger (the Church’s teachings on sex have done nobody any good) (Durang, Intro. Explains xvi).

However, he writes a very passionate speech describing the death of one of the character’s mother. The speech has many similarities to what he went through when his mother died. *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You* was his first true success in New York awarding him with his first Obie Award in 1980. Later he wrote the
companion piece, *The Actor's Nightmare*, as a curtain raiser specifically to double cast with *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*.

In 1981 he was commissioned to write his next play, the very popular and successful *Beyond Therapy*, which was eventually made into a film by Robert Altman. In 1985 Durang finished working on his most successful and widely recognized play, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*. He won an Obie Award for writing and acting. The play, like most of his plays deals with pain, suffering, family, loss, identity, anger, rage and religion in a humorous and giddy way.

At this time Albert Innaurato’s career as a playwright started to falter with a string of hits and misses. Durang explains in his e-mail:

> He had a traumatic bad review of "Ulysses in Traction" at Circle Rep. And he worked for a long time on "Herself as Lust," about a young woman in love with a teenage boy; it eventually became "Coming of Age in Soho," where the young woman became a 35ish man in love with a teenage boy (played by Chad Lowe) and seen at the Public. That got some good reviews, including I think in the Times. Some time in the 80s Albert wrote a play called "Gus and Al," about composer Gustav Mahler and playwright Albert Innaurato. It was playful about "artistic suffering," and was well received by critics. Mark Blum and Jennifer Van Dyke were in it. It was fun and funny.

Durang, Christopher. E-mail to the author. 18 Dec. 2008.

Albert Innaurato hasn’t worked much recently. In fact, he hasn’t had a play produced in New York in over 20 years. He’s written over 15 plays including *Earth*.
Worms, Urlicht, and Wisdom Amok Bizarre Behaviour. However, none were nearly as successful as Gemini in the early 1970s, which played for over four years on Broadway. It was also made into an opera.

He pays the rent on his Chelsea apartment by writing for newspapers and magazines about opera, music, even starlets. He spends an inordinate amount of time cruising opera websites, where he is not always welcome, given his affiliation with the Established press. "I am hated, I am loathed, I was tossed from AOL for starting flame wars. Without warning, cabal went and got me thrown off. Opera people are nuts," he comments, without irony. And he watches nature shows "about insects who devour other insects." And reads the New Testament, in Greek (Lange 1).

I found this quote and I believe it relates to the ending he wrote for The Idiots Karamazov as well.

It strikes me now as curious that I’ve never been able to manage a conventionally simple ending. I may be incapable of hope. Though part of it is, that in Gemini and Coming of Age, I became so involved with these characters (they were realer to me than I am to myself) that the endings reflect an unwillingness to let go, to settle their fates once and for all (Innaurato xvi).

Howard Stein’s assessment of Durang’s work points out a contrast with Innaurato that may, in part, explain Durang’s more enduing success.

Durang shouts for reason in an unreasonable universe and in an unreasoning society. He is, in the best sense of the critic, attempting to be
corrective while fulfilling his primary purpose of entertaining his audience. He has to be offensive to be effective, just as Jonathan Smith (typo Swift) had to be offensive. That offensiveness is in the service of an objective to aid an audience to see not only its follies and vices but also its misplaced values, its lies and deceits, its infirmities, even its cruelty and callousness. Only by having such conditions razed in front of us can we begin to the process of building, of correcting. With his uncommon talent, Christopher Durang lights a candle rather than curses a darkness (viii).

Characteristically, Durang has persevered through many challenging and difficult times in his life and continues great deal of success as a playwright and as an actor. He has written over 40 one-act plays including: *Stye in the Eye*, a fun parody of Sam Shepard’s work. *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls*, where he parodies not only Tennessee William’s plays but also Amanda Plummer’s work as an actor in the Broadway revival of *The Glass Menagerie*. His full-length plays over the years include: *Laughing Wild*, *Baby with the Bathwater*, *Sex and Longing*, *Betty’s Summer Vacation*, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit’s Wild Christmas Binge*. In 2005 he wrote *Miss Witherspoon*, which had a successful run at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton and Playwrights Horizons in New York.

In explaining his ongoing admiration for the man and his work, Robert Brustein sums up Durang’s contribution to American Theatre.

I have been reading and watching Christopher Durang’s plays for over twenty-five years now, ever since he entered the playwriting program of the Yale School of Drama…

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In a sense, Durang set the tone for this witty and brilliant, sometimes acerbic, sometimes disaffected generation. I once described him as an angelic altar boy with poison leeching through his writing fingers, which was my clumsy way of saying that behind his shy and courteous demeanor lurks a literary Jack the Ripper. I have recently come to realize that this characterization is only marginally true. There is a great deal of anger in his work, all right, often proceeding from genuine pain and wounded innocence. But except on rare occasions - when a demon leaps out of his skin and starts pitch forking some fatuous damned soul - Chris is much too kind-hearted to go for the jugular.

It's probably more accurate to describe him as a Catholic lapsarian, troubled over the meaninglessness of life and heartsick over the absence of God - when he is not being dumbstruck by his malevolence and delinquency (vii).

To this day Christopher Durang is still writing plays. His most recent play, Why Torture is Wrong, and the People Who Love Them, will open in April 2009 at the Newman Theater. He lives in New York City and has been the co-chair of the playwriting program at Juilliard since 1994.
Chapter Two: Part One

A Director’s Technical Analysis of The Idiots Karamazov

The following analysis was written over the Christmas break in December of 2008 and is reproduced as originally composed

Initial Response to the Play

On first reading the Idiots Karamazov I was completely taken with its utter madness. Christopher Durang and Albert F. Innaurato have written the most bizarre, chaotic black comedy in which nothing and nobody is safe from their razor sharp, rapier-like wit. Religion, art, artists, composers, playwrights, women’s rights, homosexuality, and family relationships – nothing is sacred and all fall prey to their unique brand of parody and satire.

I had never read anything so unashamedly crazy in my entire life. However, despite the lunacy, these characters, their lives and the challenges they presented fascinated me. I simply couldn’t put the play down. How could one cut a woman in half on stage and make it work let alone make it funny? By the end of the play it was a challenge I was determined to explore.

The play is awash with literary references and allusions, some obscure, some not. Though I had read a number of the works referenced in the play, I certainly had not read all of them. I had little familiarity with The Brothers Karamazov, Great Expectations, or Nightwood to name a few, but that seemed not to matter. I was drawn to the play’s theatricality, spirit and depth. Something I hoped an audience would embrace as well. Indeed, as I read the play it occurred to me that this would not only be a great opportunity
for me to expand my knowledge of 19th and 20th century literature, but also a chance to
work in one of my favourite genres, black comedy. I had a powerful sense that now was
the time and place to take on such a play and such a challenge. I had the time, the
resources and the desire.

After having spent some time pondering the play’s giddy corniness and sharp
satire, a very serious reality began to emerge from beneath the insanity, namely,
Alyosha’s journey. Alyosha’s profound disillusionment with Father Zossima and the loss
of his faith prevents this play from becoming merely a series of madcap, quirky jokes; by
putting the craziness into relief, Durang and Innuarato show us that behind the madness
lies an intelligent, thoughtful story of a young man trying to find his way in the world.

However, there was something I needed to address: Is this play dated? It was
written in the mid seventies during very different times and I wondered what it could tell
a contemporary audience. But it occurred to me that audiences are as familiar (or
unfamiliar) with Dostoevsky, O’Neill, Dickens, Hemingway, Chekhov, Joyce, Chaliapin,
Anais Nin, Djuna Barnes and Peter Tchaikovsky today as they were 35 years ago and the
universality of Durang and Innuarato’s desire to mock, ridicule, and parody everyone and
everything, including homosexuality, family, sex and religion allows this piece to feel as
fresh today as it did when it was conceived.

Finally, what was my most crucial response? I laughed. I actually laughed out
loud. I found myself laughing at things I really thought I should not laugh at, not least a
father beating his son while yelling at him to stop singing like a girl. Will an audience
share this sense of humour? Can I realize this on stage? My challenge would be to walk
this fine line and hopefully take an audience on this chaotic journey with me.
**Type or Genre of the Play**

The *Idiots Karamazov* is a satirical black comedy parodying some of the greatest works of classical literature from the 19th and 20th centuries with a hint of musical cabaret thrown in for good measure.

It is an extremely physical play drawing from iconic sources such as The Marx Brothers world of film alongside Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Eugene O’Neill, and Anton Chekhov from the world of the theatre. Occasionally we see these two worlds collide; scene three, for instance, is a potent mix of The Marx Brothers comic style and dramatic content from three Chekhov plays; *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Seagull*.

My first step towards fully understanding this play (to the extent that it can be fully understood) is to do extensive research and reading. I need to figure out the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ these two playwrights have chosen to satirize these particular novels, plays, musical compositions and individual artists. I believe the key to a successful production would be to understand the reasons and motivations behind the playwrights’ choices.

**Style**

The style of the piece is one of heightened absurdism; filled with obscure non-sequiturs. A woman is cut in half then parades around the stage in two halves spouting a feminist rant. A priest turns into a samovar, one character turns into a dog another into a Venus Fly Trap and the dead come back to life to give advice and sing a macabre musical number. These genuinely absurd moments in the play are balanced with some very specific and serious undertones. Both Durang and Innaurato identify with the relationship
between Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov. They discuss the existence of God and, ask why if there is a God, there is also cruelty to children.

Every scene is initially layered with a farcical tone. My task as a director will be to help actors uncover the action and find the through-line of their characters. We will work hard at determining the through-line or spine for the characters and play the reality not the comedy; if we think we’re in a comedy and play the comedy we’re in serious trouble.

The linguistic style of the play changes from scene to scene, however the overall style must maintain a fast paced, farcical tone. The very first scene between Alyosha and Ivan is, as I mentioned earlier, straight out of a Marx Brothers’ film. But then the next scene is very poetic, Djuna Barnes reads from her novel, Nightwood. Later, Mary Tyrone bursts onto the scene quoting dialogue directly from Eugene O’Neill’s Long Days Journey into Night, she is melancholy and poetic. It is going to be a big job to distinguish between these specific styles and at the same time making sure the overall tone is farcical. My approach to solving this will be to take the time to clearly determine the characters’ scene objectives, and then start rehearsing the lines technically to achieve the farcical pace the scene requires.

I think it is important to get the actors up on their feet as soon as possible to begin creating that world. I don’t want to spend too much time talking around the table believing instead that actors work better on their feet than in their heads. Prior to rehearsal I have asked each of the actors to complete a few tasks; write a short biography of their character; find a prop their character might have in their pocket, and look for any other information about their character that they can find. I want them to have as much
information as possible about their character on day one in order to get the process moving as fast as possible.

The first day of rehearsal will be spent exploring clown along with some comic acting games and exercises. In my experience clown work has proved a terrific way to explore one’s own natural rhythms and focusing actors to listen to their impulses. My goal is to use clown techniques in the rehearsal process as a tool for the actors to find their own way into the world of the play and to perhaps find some paths towards creation of character. I’ll encourage the actors to get in touch with their own creative impulses through this work in an attempt to discover what their characters truly want in the play. I firmly believe the more they ground these characters in something real, the more the audience will buy into the chaotic madness of the play.

Space

The Idiots Karamazov will be performed on the Frederic Wood stage, a proscenium theatre with an audience capacity of 400. The stage is very wide and very deep; I am not exactly sure of the dimensions, maybe 25 by 30 feet. In any case – it is wide and audience members sitting on far left and right often miss much of the play’s action if it is played too deep. I have asked Rachel Glass, our set designer, to bring the set as far downstage as possible, but give enough room for 20 actors to fit comfortably in the space together. I have two reasons for this; firstly, I want the audience to experience the intimacy of the play. The character, Constance Garnett, has several monologues to the audience and I do not want her to disappear or fight against the vastness of the stage. I want her to have the feeling she’s engaged in a conversation with the audience and that she doesn’t have to push. Secondly, I want enough room behind the set to create shadows
on a scrim wall. Rachel, Ereca Hassell (our lighting designer) and I have had a few conversations (Sept. 2008) about the set and lighting. One idea we are working on is transforming the walls with shadows cast on the back of the set to create different environments. We have not totally figured this out yet, but I like the possibilities. A scrim wall might facilitate the many environments I want to play in. This approach might work well for Fr. Zossima’s cell, Grushenka’s warehouse (whorehouse), as well as the open field for the Russian snowstorm scene.

This play is an in-your-face comedy and I am considering opening the show in the house. I would like to stage Alyosha singing on the apron in front of the main curtains. His father, who has been sitting in the audience, gets up, marches on stage and slaps him across the face. He then exits back through the house. Alyosha’s pop star number is another moment that might benefit from being in the house. I would love to costume the leather girls to look like 1950’s “Elvis” fans screaming from the audience. I will try this approach for Anais’ cabaret number as well, having her weave through the audience, singing and interacting with the male audience members. My goal is to find as many ways as possible to give the audience a visceral theatrical experience. Bringing as much of the action into the house may achieve this goal.

Over the years I have worked in some fairly large venues, The Frederic Wood Theatre being one of the biggest. In my experience, no matter how hard you try there are always going to be issues with actors’ volume, diction and dropping the ends of sentences; this is not helped by rehearsing in a small room then moving to a big stage. It takes time to make this adjustment so it will be something I will be constantly reminding the actors about during rehearsals.
The dialogue is very dense with some very difficult passages and some of the words are even made up. I plan on having someone come in to teach us the correct pronunciation of all the Russian names and words before we get into scene work. I will take the time in the final week of rehearsal to sit at the back of the house and listen. I want everyone to pronounce names and words the same way; for example pestle, Karamazov, Anais, Aloysha, and Ivan. I am fortunate enough to have a voice coach, Gayle Murphy, on this production, a luxury one doesn’t normally enjoy in the professional world. I am thrilled that we will have some help with the voice work and diction.

The last thing I should mention is that this play is a musical (though Patrick Pennefather, sound designer and composer, and I are approaching it as a ‘play with a few songs’) and, once again, the particular nature of this performance space will have an impact. I doubt we will have a band (but maybe Patrick can get one together), so the backtracks will be played through the onstage speakers and monitors. In the few productions I have seen at the Frederic Wood I have found it hard to hear the actors voices. I will take the time to stage these musical numbers as far downstage as possible or mic the performers if they are singing alone. Patrick and I agree that the more support the performers can get the better their comfort levels will be. Most of the actors can sing well but they are not trained musical theatre performers. (Patrick and I had a short meeting in Nov. 2008).

Audience

The audience will be mainly students (past and present), friends, family, Theatre UBC subscribers and a few theatre artists from the community.
[The Idiots Karamazov] is especially good, truthfully, in a college/university atmosphere where the audience knows a lot of literature...

Durang, Christopher. E-mail to the author. 29 Aug. 2007.

I agree with Christopher Durang, however, there are a lot of obscure historical characters mentioned in the play. To make this more of an enjoyable experience for the audience I am going to have the actors write short bios of the people they are playing for inclusion in the program. Furthermore, I will write short bios for Antonin Artaud, James Durrell, Henry Miller, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, Virginia Woolf, Anton Diakov and Charles Dickens; characters who are mentioned, but do not actually appear in the play.

Given Circumstances

Rehearsals

We have a fair bit of time for rehearsal (approximately 200 hours in total). The rehearsals will be broken up into two parts with a few days off at reading week. For the first few weeks I will lay out all the scenes with the whole cast, then during reading week I will work exclusively with the lead actors. I will work with them for three full days at the beginning of that week and do a half-day of work with Constance Garnett on her monologues.

I have asked to rehearse in Rm. 128 until we move into the theatre. I think it is a good room with few distractions. It is warm, clean and the floor is perfect for the physical work we will be doing. With Breanne’s help I want to make it a safe, comfortable space to work in. I will ask her to support me when I tell the actors not to drink, eat or talk in
the space. There is a green room for that. I want to encourage the actors to feel free to explore, take chances, and make mistakes during this rehearsal process. This play is going to be a huge challenge for the actors. It will be physically and emotionally demanding and I want the actors to have a safe place to work.

I have decided to take a new approach to this rehearsal period. On my first day of rehearsal I am going to play theatre/clown games. I want the cast and crew to feel comfortable with each other in a fun way rather than just sitting around a table and talking. I want them to bring their imaginations, hearts, souls and humour to this production. I want everyone to feel that their input is valuable and to feel that this is their show too; not just mine. Theatre is a collaborative effort and I love to have everyone’s input.

Budget

The budget has been a huge mystery to me. I was told we would receive the standard budget allocated to productions on the Frederic Wood stage. However, a few days ago a thousand dollars was cut from the overall budget; times are tough. I have asked each of the designers to dream big and we will make it work somehow. I know there is money to get this production up and, with the amazing technical team at UBC, it will come together and look fantastic. It is so nice to know that, for the first time in a very long time, I do not have to raise the money or make deals to get a production up.

Cast

The cast for this show is very big (20 actors). I am using four BA actors and all the BFA actors in the final and intermediate years. I really wanted to cast student actors
for this production. I know, in the past, MFA directing candidates have used professional actors and I certainly considered it. However, I think I have made the right decision by getting all UBC students involved. After all, when the play was originally produced in the 1970s, all the actors were students from Yale.

I was fortunate enough to have worked with all the actors in the last year except for three. I worked on Shadows of Troy and Featuring Loretta with the final years and Picnic with the intermediates. They are all very talented and eager to get into rehearsals. I am very happy with my cast and know that everyone will have fun playing. I get a strong sense that the actors trust my approach and are keen to explore the script through clown and improvisation. I was delighted that both classes had worked on clown and Bouffon with Catriona Leger. The final years worked on Gormenghast and the intermediates worked on A Servant of Two Masters. Everyone did a fantastic job with that style of work. Having that behind them it will be so much easier for them to dive into clown and farce.

Crew

I am very blessed to have Breanne Jackson as my stage manager. She has had some great training from Bob Eberle and been involved with several productions over the years here at UBC. Last year she worked as an ASM with Blackbird Theatre so she is ready to handle a big show. So far she has been very organized - working hard on schedules and booking rooms for rehearsal. I rely a great deal on the stage manager to help me through the rehearsal process and I think she will be a huge support and a great asset to this production. She has a lot of energy and is very ambitious and focused. I am also very blessed to have Keith Smith, technical director, working on this show. He is
very knowledgeable and works very hard to make things happen. I’ve worked with Keith on several shows prior to this and he’s always done an amazing job. I am in good hands with these two on my team so I won’t have to worry about the production side of things.

**Design Team**

I hit the jackpot when I was assigned this design team. Jenifer Darbellay for costumes, Ereca Hassell for lights, Patrick Pennefather for sound design and musical composition, and Rachel Glass for set design. All are very creative and resourceful artists who will make this production look and sound phenomenal. I have had a few meetings with each of them (more to come in the following weeks) and have been delighted by the manner in which they have taken my ideas and made them better. Exactly what I like in a designer - someone who gets immersed in the world of the play. I feel very blessed to have such a strong creative design team to help me through the process.

**Script**

This is will be a very difficult script to work on. The storyline is not totally clear. It is truly absurd with hundreds of literary references and non-sequitors. I will need to know exactly what everything means and why. Luckily, Christopher Durang is willing to help me out via e-mail.

**Period**

This has been a very difficult aspect of the play to solve, but I, with the help of the designers, have managed to find a way. Constance Garnett is the narrator of the play talking directly to the audience. However, I do not want her to look modern. I think she is
stuck in the Edwardian period. Everything I have read about her indicates that she was in her glory around 1912 when she translated The Brothers Karamazov. So I figure she is about 148 years old. Jen agrees with my assessment (Jen and I had a brief meeting in Sept. 2008). I have not seen any renderings but I am looking forward to seeing her ideas.

Rachel and I have talked about the set looking like a Victorian/Edwardian library (Rachel and I had a brief meeting in Sept. 2008). I am thinking of a study or a library with lots of oak and hundreds of books scattered about the stage. This is Constance Garnett’s world - her sanctuary. As the play progresses we are invited into Constance’s mixed up world where all kinds of different time periods collide. The three Karamazov brothers transform into Chekhov’s Three Sisters and sing. Djuna Barnes and Anais Nin arrive on the scene from the late 1930s. Djuna Barnes had just finished writing Nightwood at that time and was having a difficult time getting anyone to read it. Anais Nin was hanging out with Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell and writing erotica. I thought this would be a good “period” to set these two characters in – at the beginning of their sexual exploration. Jen agreed. There are a lot of fantastic costumes in that era from long flowing dresses to fun sexy lingerie.

The next “period” I am dealing with is the late Edwardian era. Mary Tyrone is right out of Long Day’s Journey into Night. I have asked Jen to take a look at the movie version with Katherine Hepburn and try to design a dress that looks like the one she wears. Christopher Durang is famous for parodying not only characters in plays but actors who make those roles famous.

The question of “period” has been a very good question to mull over. There are so many characters from so many time periods all smashed together in one play. I have to
define it for the designers and be as clear as possible so we do not get lost. However, the main period in the “story” is 1880’s Russia when *The Brothers Karamazov* was written. I think if I can establish that period then these other “periods” can be layered on the story. I am going to have to be as clear as possible with the actors and designers. We are in the present with Constance Garnett (albeit she looks like she is in 1912), but her translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* is being blended with other literary icons from many different eras. I am not sure why yet but, as I work through the play, the reasons will become clearer.

**Emphatic Element**

I have been reading several books recently about directing and directors and the following is one of my favourite quotes from Terry McCabe “In plays, as in jokes, plot is more important that character. A play is an imitation of an action, not a person” (45).

Okay, he did not actually say that, Aristotle did. However, for this play I think the plot is the emphatic element on which to focus. I think there are two stories going on here. The first is Constance Garnett’s; the story of her search for revenge on the literary, male dominated, world. The second is Alyosha’s journey of self-discovery. The overall story is not clear but the individual through-lines are and so, by concentrating on the individual through-lines, I hope that the overall story will begin to reveal itself. So I am going to work with the actors at the beginning of the rehearsal process to help them find strong scene and super objectives to emphasize the clarity of those through-lines.

The next important element I will focus on is character. Some are fictional and some not. I want the actors to find out as much as they can about these characters before rehearsal. Most importantly, I want them to bring as much of themselves to these
characters as possible. These characters are big and theatrical and if the actors do not find
the truth of their world we are in trouble. This is why I am approaching the play through
clown. I believe clown is a great way to explore the largeness of characters, but at the
same time, stay connected to real human desires and emotions. Clowns have simple
needs and desires—“fleeing, fighting, feeding and fucking” (Turner). Rehearsing a scene
with one or two of these actions can help the actors discover what the scenes are about.
Using clown philosophy in rehearsal will keep the energy high and hopefully enable the
actors to trust their impulses and act on them. I believe playing in the clown world will
inform a multitude of elements for the actors and help them on their journey to
discovering the heart of this play.

Theme or Idea of the Play

Determining the play’s theme has been a challenge for me. This is something I
read in Terry McCabe’s book. “Deciding too soon what a play is about-the theme of the
play-can bias your decision about what happens in the play-it’s action” (111).
So I have thought about the “idea” of the play, and I think it is this.
-The Idiots Karamazov is a story about a young man figuring out the point of his being
And
-The Idiots Karamazov is a story about a woman taking revenge on the literary world.
I really like Gregory Mosher’s advice to the director. “[What a director needs is one good
idea] not five. That idea has to be expressed actively, vibrantly, and consistently. If you
choose an action that is perfect for the play, then the other actions will resonate” (Bartow
234).
Action of the Play

The play has two storylines. The first one is Constance’s and the other is Alyosha’s. Finding where they intersect and connect will be the challenge.

One: Alyosha Karamazov’s Action

Stasis

At the beginning of the play Alyosha Karamazov is at peace with God, his world and his life. He sings in his falsetto (purity and innocence) to get closer to God.

Intrusion

Fyodor Karamazov, his father, enters slaps him across the face and asks him “why can’t you sing like a man?” Alyosha takes it upon himself to help his father and his family to solve their problem.

Major Crisis

The plot’s major crisis is when Alyosha discovers that his mentor, Father Zossima, is actually insane and his faith is challenged.

Climax

The climax of the play occurs when events in the story have gotten so out of control that Alyosha is left alone screaming in agony “I WANT MY MOTHER!”

New Stasis

At the end of the play, the new stasis sees Alyosha tied to chair maybe with Hemingway’s brain matter splattered across his face. This new stasis suggests to me that Alyosha is no longer the innocent young man we met at the beginning of the play and now sees the world for what it really is, a chaotic mess he could never control in the first place.
Two: Constance Garnett's Action.

Stasis
At the beginning of the play we meet Constance Garnett a famous translator having a nightmare about the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Intrusion
She wakes up to discover an audience sitting in front of her. She decides to impress this audience about the time she translated the book and how difficult it was for her.

Major Crisis
As she is translating she begins to get totally lost and confused. She destroys the novel, rips her dress, and smashes her monocle while screaming at her manservant, Ernest Hemingway.

Climax
She has transformed herself into Miss. Havisham plotting her revenge killing everyone, except Alyosha. He will take Ernest’s place as her manservant.

New Stasis
At the end of the play Alyosha is tied to a chair and the only one left alive. Constance conjugates the verb Karamazov in “victory” and now has finally had her revenge on the literary world. She is no long in the background and forgotten the audience know exactly who she is now.

Dramatic Metaphor
I have a few simple dramatic metaphors I have tossed around with the designers.

“A ball of string that starts to unravel very slowly then faster and faster until it’s just a huge mess on the floor.”
Another one I am working with is,

"Like an authentic Chekhovian play with a slight twist to the clown."

I think these metaphors helped the designers with their ideas, especially Jen and Rachel. We will see if it helps them or just confuses them.

**Mood**

I want the mood to be dangerously dark, sexy and dirty, full of energy and surprise. I think it’ll be fun to find out how far I can actually do that. The *Idiots* Karamazov is closer to a cabaret/burlesque farce than a traditional play. However, the play draws from some of the world’s most famous literary works from the 19th and 20th century. If I do not take this seriously and ground the heart of the play in these references it will come off as fluff and insignificant. I do not know if the mood in the theatre will be as polarized as it was in 1973. There is always the chance that today’s audience will find the play so completely tasteless and politically incorrect and they will hate it. Or they could love the political incorrectness and embrace it. Who knows? Anyway, that is what I want to find out. During rehearsals I will warn the actors that people may be offended with the material and walk out of the theatre. I hope they do not but, if they do, I do not want the actors to feel it is their fault. If we create those reactions in an audience, they may indeed be doing everything right. I am very interested to see how an audience will react to this play.
Characters

**Constance Garnett**

Qualities Intelligent, mad, eccentric, wacky, a sexual prude, cagey, unpredictable. Sometimes lost in her memories then suddenly sharp as a tack.

Metaphor Like a blender that has gone out of control.

Rhythmic/Musical Quality Sharp, quick, erratic.

Major Desire To impress the audience with her greatness.

Main Action To be fully involved with the action of her story.

**Alyosha Karamazov**

Qualities Honest, innocent, caring, sensitive, good natured, naïve, God fearing, intelligent, pragmatic, fair, honest.

Metaphor Like a lost puppy in a cruel world.

Rhythmic/Musical Quality A beat behind the rhythm.

Major Desire To save his family.

Main Action To find himself.

**Ivan Karamazov**

Qualities Intellectual, sterile, mad, brutish, quick witted, aggressive, passionate, he never listens.

Metaphor Like a bull in a china shop.
Rhythmic/

Musical Quality  Fast tempo, ahead of the rhythm.

Major Desire  To convince his brother Aloysha there is no God.

Main Action  At every opportunity force his opinions and beliefs on Aloysha.

**Dmitri Karamazov**

Qualities  Sensual, sex starved, military, aggressive and not too bright, violent.

Metaphor  Like a raging storm or tornado.

Rhythmic/

Musical Quality  Loud, full of rage.

Major Desire  To have sex with Grushenka.

Main Action  Pursues Grushenka.

**Smerdyakov Karamazov**

Qualities  Quiet, servile.

Metaphor  Like an obedient dog.

Rhythmic/

Musical Quality  Slow and lumbering, then bursts of erratic energy.

Major Desire  To serve his masters well, Constance and Fyodor.

Main Action  Tend to his masters’ every need.

**Fyodor Karamazov**

Qualities  Brutish, angry, sexist, sex starved, drunkard, violent, impatient.

Metaphor
Rhythmic/ An erratic lighting storm.
Musical Quality Loud, erratic and obnoxious.
Major Desire Have sex with Grushenka.
Main Action Pursues Grushenka.

Mary Tyrone Karamazov
Qualities Guilty, addictive, needy, sloppy, pathetic, self-serving.
Metaphor Like a top spinning out of control.

Father Zossima
Qualities Eccentric, flamboyant, manipulative, insane and possessive.
Metaphor Like a hungry snake trying to devour a baby bird.

Fr. Zossima’s Altar boys
Qualities Playful, mischievous, obedient.
Metaphor Like two fireflies buzzing around a flame.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Desire</th>
<th>To serve Father Zossima.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Action</td>
<td>Tend to his every need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anais Pnin (Nin)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities</td>
<td>Sexy, eccentric, flamboyant, seductive, artistic, self-involved,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spiteful, bitter, controlling, wounded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>Like an old, wrinkled flower painted to look young and beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</td>
<td>Driving, forceful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Desire</td>
<td>To have everyone love and admire her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Action</td>
<td>Seduce and control everyone around her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miss Pnin’s Leather Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities</td>
<td>Sexy, sultry, powerful, playful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>Like a hard crack of a whip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</td>
<td>Sultry, smooth, sexy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Desire</td>
<td>To be accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Action</td>
<td>Tend to all of Anais’ wishes and demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Djuna Barnes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities</td>
<td>Manly, depressing, unconfident, jealous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>Like a little lap dog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmic/Musical Quality</td>
<td>Loud and slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Desire</td>
<td>Get somebody, anybody to buy her novel <strong>Nightwood</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Action  To sell her book and to serve Anais.

**Grushenka**

Qualities  Sexy, provocative, sultry, alluring, powerful, strong.
Metaphor  Like a wild sexy Whirling Dervish.
Rhythmic/
Musical Quality  Energetic, wild and sexy.
Major Desire  To have a home, a husband and an abortion.
Main Action  Have Dmitri and Fyodor fight over her.

After the split Grushenka I and II

Qualities  Angry, determined, strong.
Metaphor  Like an angry viper waiting to strike out.
Rhythmic/
Musical Quality  Quick and erratic.
Major Desire  Fight for women’s rights.
Main Action  Spread fear into the hearts of the oppressors of women.

**Ernest Hemingway**

Qualities  Quiet, soft-spoken, obedient, quirky and stoic.
Metaphor  Like a stoic obedient guard dog.
Rhythmic/
Musical Quality  Long and slow.
Major Desire  To serve Constance.
Main Action  Tend to her every need.
**Joacquin Pain**

**Qualities**

He is dead (in a plastic body bag for the entire show).

I really like what Gordon Davidson has to say about his work in the rehearsal hall with actors. I will try to do the same during my rehearsal process.

Doing this analysis I have made a lot of decisions and choices about the characters but I am more than willing to throw it all away for better ideas.

It's very important to create an atmosphere for actors that is conductive to their doing a great deal of the work. I try to elicit from the actors, as I do from everyone else on the team, their contribution to the play. I really do believe that the work is a collaboration that it's not a judgmental situation that the actors absolutely have the right to experiment and fail. I feel that there's as much chance that they're going to teach me something about the event or the character as there is that I am going to be able to teach them (Bartow 77).

**Structural Elements**

The Idiots Karamazov is divided into two acts, which are in turn divided into several scenes. The first act comprises of scenes ranging from one eighth of a page to six pages. The second act is divided in to five scenes ranging from half a page to eleven pages. Each of the acts contains a few songs (four in the first act and five in the second).

Throughout the play there are several 'direct address' monologues delivered by Constance Garnett. She talks directly to the audience much like the character of the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder’s Our Town. She is the play’s narrator, who, like the Stage Manager, involves herself in the story and plays a few characters. However, unlike the
Stage Manager in Wilder’s play, who helps support the action, Constance wants to take over and run it.

In the first ten scenes of the play we are introduced to all the characters and subjected to a mix of exposition and subsequent complications. These complications, problems and conflicts range from a fight over a woman to opposing beliefs about God giving us an array of reasons for the dysfunction of this family. It is not until act one, scene thirteen that the play’s crisis is revealed. Alyosha’s faith is challenged when he realizes he has been following the word of an insane madman, Fr. Zossima. Alyosha spends the rest of the play trying to discover the meaning of his existence.

The climax of the play arrived in act two scene five; Alyosha has a complete breakdown and screams for his mother. Resolution occurs when his father comes back to life and asks him what he has learned on his journey. The play rockets to a climatic ending when every dead or absent character returns to the stage in Alyosha’s “happy dream” to sing about the taboos of life, parodying The Wizard of OZ. After the song, all the characters that were dead drop dead again. Just when you think it’s over, Constance sings her “Swan Song” having taken her revenge by having everyone killed, except Alyosha, who now becomes her next manservant. The play takes some time to end.

There are twenty characters in the play but rarely do all twenty arrive on stage at the same time. There is only one time when all the characters are on stage at once (during the “Totem and Taboo” song). After Fyodor’s murder (act one scene seven, only fourteen pages into the script) many of the characters fade into the background. Fyodor spends the rest of the play being dragged around in a plastic body bag apart from a brief appearance
in the dream sequence singing the song “Totem and Taboo” to Alyosha before dropping dead again.

Joaquin Pnin is dead from the onset of the play and he too is dragged around the stage in a plastic body bag. Dmitri turns in to a Venus Fly Trap spending the rest of the play snapping at flies. Smerdyakov turns into a dog and is eaten during the Russian snowstorm scene. The two Altar Boys have no lines and appear in only three scenes. The Leather Girls don’t have any lines and make three appearances, though they might get a song. They also become Alyosha’s fans and an army of legs in the second act. They’ll be busy. Ernest Hemingway appears throughout the play and has maybe 10 lines. My plan is to work the scenes with these smaller roles during the first few weeks of rehearsal then during Reading Week let them take a break and I’ll work more intensely on the larger roles.

There are very few monologues in the play except for Constance’s direct addresses to the audience. I’ll take Becky and work with her on her own. There’s no need to have everyone around while I work with her. I really want her to feel comfortable and to find ways to connect with the audience. It will be a huge challenge for her but she can do it. The Frederic Theatre is very big space to fill. She is playing a 148-year-old woman; keeping that illusion alive is going to take a lot of work. She’s on stage the entire play. I want her to be comfortable and in control at all times. Her monologues directly address the audience - she asks them questions...they may answer back!

The scenes are written in a very stichomythia style: very quick and very snappy. As I mentioned they have been described as similar to the “Marx Brothers” or “Vaudevillian” in their performance. I asked that some of the actors, as part of their
research, find a few Marx Brothers films to watch. I suggested *Duck Soup* and *Monkey Business* I want the actors to find a specific rhythm in the dialogue and not blow through the lines. We will take our time to first find the action of the scenes and then listen to the rhythm of the dialogue and work from there. I want the work to be exact and precise.

There are nine songs in the play. Three are traditional “Bye, Bye Black Bird”, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”, (I am adding that one) and “Over There”. The rest are parodies written by Christopher Durang. I asked Patrick Pennefather to take a look at the songs and rewrite the music (Patrick and I had a short meeting in Nov. 2008). The play was written in the early 1970s and the songs were parodies of pop culture. I want Patrick to get that same “pop culture” feeling for this production in 2009. Patrick wants to have all the songs available for the first day of rehearsals. I want to get the songs to the actors so they can get them in their heads and bodies as soon as possible. I am not a very musical person; I have directed two musicals in the past and did a horrible job. This time I asked for help from Stephanie Olsen, a young woman from the music department, who is willing to help coach the actors (I asked her in Oct. 2008). I will schedule as many musical rehearsals as possible to get the actors to feel as confident and comfortable as possible with the songs. I asked Patrick if it would be alright to have Stephanie help out in any way she could and he though that was a great idea.

**Directorial Approach**

My approach to this play will be influenced by David Ball’s work as a director.

I like to project for the actors some standard by which we all, the ensemble, may consider ourselves successful at the outcome. For example, “Let us consider the measure of our success on this production that we
have a good time working together,” or “let us consider as the measure of our success for this production that we say yes to every creative idea and find out what happens (103).

My goal is to set up a rehearsal room where actors are free to play, make mistakes, ask questions, challenge me, challenge themselves and have fun. I want the actors to develop and explore the play through their own impulses. I will encourage them to do their homework, be specific and work towards the best possible choice. I will remind the actors that there is no right or wrong, only more or less appropriate. I’ll encourage them to run with their choices, I can always turn it down if it’s too big. I want them to explore their natural impulses and bring their hearts, imaginations, intuitions and fears to the work. I am going to encourage them to be flexible and have a willingness to make changes at anytime during the process. I particularly liked this sentiment from Terry McCabe’s book. “A good director shapes and guides but does not try to control the actor’s choices” (33).

Design Words

When talking with my designers I will emphasize “authenticity.” I want the costumes to look like they’re right out of the appropriate period. The Karamazov brothers are from 1880s Russia, the classic Chekhovian or Doctor Zhivago era - dark, heavy fabrics and lots of layers, vests and overcoats perhaps. Djuna Barnes and Anais Nin date from the late 1930s and I want us to pay particular attention to what they really wore. Djuna Barnes favoured masculine suits and was often seen in her signature ‘long black coat’ and Anais wore flowing purple bohemian dresses. Mary Tyrone wore Edwardian
tight, full-length dresses circa 1912 and we are all familiar with Ernest Hemingway’s safari suit or tweed vest and jacket.

Not only are all these choices authentic but also they act as visual triggers for the audience. I am going to suggest that the costume designer consider a slightly clownish take, looking at how comedians like Charlie Chaplain and the Marx Brothers wore their iconic costumes as a second skin. Charlie Chaplin’s vest is slightly too small, his shoes and pants are slightly too big. The Marx Brothers pants were too short and sleeves were too long. They wore simple black ties or bow ties.

I have done some research on Victorian/Edwardian sitting rooms and libraries and I think the images I found could be an inspiration for the set designer. When thinking about colour, I see sepia, dark oak, deep reds and royal purples. I think fabrics are a very important aspect to consider for this set, long flowing curtains and a few area rugs. This will give it an authentic atmosphere. I need a lot of exits and entrances so the action can flow uninterrupted; I am hoping to get at least seven entrances on set. I only want a few set pieces on stage; a table, a few chairs, a settee and maybe a sideboard to store props. I don’t want clutter on stage because I don’t want to confuse the audience with too much information. If I do go with the library idea then I think books stacked about the set would be a great metaphor for Constance’s confused mind. I also had an idea about bringing the teak wood grain colour that surrounds the audience in the Frederic Wood Theatre into the design - I think that would be a great way to unify the space.

When I think about lighting, one word I like is sepia as in old faded photos. That word, for me, supports Constance’s world. She’s stuck in the past, in her memories. I like the words, isolation and expanse; sometimes the play feels tight and intimate, some of
Constance’s moments for instance, and yet sometimes it’s huge and foreboding, the Russian snowstorm for example. Yet sometimes the play turns giddy, corny and bright with the musical numbers like “Gotta Get to Moscow.” I am going to rely on lighting to help support these vastly different worlds in the play.

I am thinking about using a scrim and lighting it in such a way that it reveals worlds and environments on both sides of the set walls. I am thinking sometimes Constance would be able to watch the play from behind the set. I used the scrim technique in a play I directed at Carousel Theatre. The ship in Treasure Island was covered in scrim. It was painted to look weather beaten and old, but when lit from the other side the audience could see the entire lower deck. It was the best thing about the play.

In terms of sound I am considering whether the sound effects should be Foley (live sound effects created by hand on stage) or recorded. Not sure yet, but I have time to play around with different ideas. There is a student sound designer for the show, so I may just record everything and find a way to justify it. I know for a fact I don’t want to have live gunshots on stage. I find it very expensive, 20% of the time the blanks don’t fire and more importantly it’s really dangerous for the actors. In the first scene Fyodor wildly fires off thirteen rounds with nine actors on stage.

For the few musical numbers in the play I would like to source today’s pop cultural, the same way Durang did in the 1970s. I don’t have any specific ideas yet but I think it’ll be a fun way to approach the music.
The World of the Play

As I have previously stated. The world of this play is very complex. It’s an absurd family drama with a farcical/black comedy/satirical twist. It’s also a giddy musical clown/burlesque/cabaret show. The world is extremely fantastical and theatrical, however, there is a serious story underpinning all this madness. My job as a director will be to ensure that the farcical theatrics do not take over story and I lose the audience. I read this in Terry’s McCabe’s book, Mis-Directing the Play, and I think it is very appropriate as I embark on the process of directing Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato’s The Idiots Karamazov at the Frederic Wood Theatre.

David Mamet says that plays work on subconscious themes, the way dreams do. Dreaming is our subconscious mind’s way of working out problem that for one reason or other elude our conscious mind. We dream in metaphors that our subconscious mind can explore as it looks for a solution to the literal problem that stumps us during the day. Likewise with plays: a play deals with thematic issues that are not susceptible to conscious exploration. A good play doesn’t make statements; it asks questions to which it seeks answers. The dream—metaphor that is the play is put onstage, and it interacts with the audience’s subconscious dream-life; the play is successful if its subtextual theme speaks to the audience’s subconscious conscience (47-48).

Special Problems

I have a concern that there may be too many obscure literary references the audience won’t understand and they’ll spend the whole show thinking, “What the hell is
Another of my concerns is that the story will get lost under the weight of the chaos and comedy in the show. This will be something to keep in mind during the rehearsal process. I'll really have to make sure the stories are clear and that the comedy doesn't take over.

The design elements worry me. Talk is cheap, but will they really work? The budget concerns me too; the set could be quite big and complicated to build but I am good at adjusting and making things work. I have some amazing designers to support my efforts and the technical team at UBC will make this show look fantastic. It'll be fine but I know it'll be a lot of hard work for everyone involved.
Chapter Two: Part Two

Scene Synopses with Actions and Character Shifts

Act One

Act 1 Scene 1: At One with God.

Alyosha and Fyodor.

Scene synopsis: Young Alyosha Karamazov is singing in his falsetto, a beautiful “Vocalize” from Rachmaninov when his father, Fyodor Karamazov, enters and belts him one in the head then strides off. Alyosha runs off after his father.

Actions and objectives:

- Alyosha wants to be as close to God as possible.
- Fyodor wants him to be a man.

Shifts:

- Alyosha wants to be close to God but is Father interrupts his prayers.
- Fyodor wants him to be a man but fails and leaves.

Scene 2: Meeting the Narrator and the Rest of the Family.

Constance Garnett, Ernest Hemingway, Ivan, Dmitri and Smerdyakov Karamazov.

Scene synopsis: Constance introduces herself and the Karamazov brothers. He attempts to impress the audience with her credentials. The brothers sing about wanting to leave for a better life in Moscow.

Actions and objectives:

- Constance talks directly to the audience wanting to impress them.
- The Brothers sing about how desperate they are to get out of their boring situation and get to Moscow.
Scene 3: The Trouble at Home.

Constance Garnett, Ernest Hemingway, Alyosha, Ivan, Dmitri, Fyodor, Smerdyakov, Grushenka.

Scene synopsis: Alyosha comes home to help his family. His brother, Dmitri, and his father are fighting over Grushenka. Constance is having trouble reading and asks for her optometrist. Ivan is feeling uneasy about something and asks Nurse if he’s “changed much”. She is invisible. When Alyosha arrives Ivan attempts to convince him that there is no God.

Actions and objectives:

- Alyosha leaves the monastery to save his family.
- Constance demands to see her optometrist so she can see more clearly.
- Ivan wants to convince Alyosha that God does not exist.
- Smerdyakov wants to help Constance by becoming her optometrist.
- Fyodor fights for Grushenka.
- Dmitri fights for Grushenka.
- Grushenka wants a settlement, a home, a husband and an abortion.

Shifts:

- Alyosha fails and decides he needs Father Zossima’s help.
- Constance does not get her optometrist to help her.
- Ivan does not convince Alyosha that God does not exist and his Nurse is gunned down.
- Fyodor does not win Grushenka and the fight continues.
- Dmitri does not win Grushenka and the fight continues.
- Grushenka is left along on stage with nothing.

Scene 4: We Meet Djuna Barnes.

Constance, Ernest, Djuna Barnes, Anais Pnin.

Scene synopsis: Djuna Barnes reads from her book Nightwood while Anais lays on the settee asleep.

Actions and objectives:

- Djuna wants to impress Anais with her reading.
- Anais sleeps.

Shifts:

- Djuna's reading has no effect on Anais.

Scene 5: Father Zossima Meets the Family.

Alyosha, two Altar Boys, Father Zossima, Fyodor, Dmitri, Ivan, Smerdyakov, Constance.

Scene synopsis: Alyosha brings his family to Father Zossima to solve their disputes. He bestows his wisdom upon them in the form of a parable.

Actions and objectives:

- Alyosha wants his family to find Christ.
- Dmitri wants to solve the problem about Grushenka but thinks it’s impossible.
- Fyodor wants the problem resolved about Grushenka but thinks it’s impossible.
- Smerdyakov want the family to be at peace but does see any hope.
• Father Zossima wants to be with Alyosha.
• The Altar Boys want to serve Father Zossima.

Shifts:

• Alyosha thinks that the Father Zossima can help his family but he only confuses them with his parable and set Fyodor and Dmitri on a dangerous course of action.
• Dmitri didn’t think it was going to be that easy to solve their dispute.
• Fyodor didn’t think it was going to be that easy to solve their dispute.
• Father Zossima attempts to manipulate Alyosha but he still doesn’t have Alyosha.

Scene 6: Father Zossima’s Parable goes Terribly Wrong.
Grushenka I and II, Dmitri, Fyodor, Smerdyakov, Ernest.

Scene synopsis: Dmitri and Fyodor bring Grushenka on stage. She thinks the two men have solved their differences and all three can now have a good time together.
Smerdyakov enters with a saw throwing it to Dmitri. Dmitri and Fyodor take Grushenka and proceed to cut her in half. Ernest hides the violence with a sheet, which gets covered in blood.

Actions and objectives:

• Dmitri wants the bottom half of Grushenka.
• Fyodor wants to top half of Grushenka.
• Smerdyakov wants to serve his father well.
• Ernest wants to protect the audience from the horror.
• Grushenka wants a ménage a trios with her two lovers.

Shifts:
• Dmitri is totally disappointed that it didn’t work out and now Grushenka is a feminist.
• Fyodor is totally disappointed that it didn’t work out and now Grushenka is a feminist.
• Smerdyakov didn’t serve his father very well he tripped.
• The audience still heard the horror Ernest was trying to protect them from.
• Grushenka was cut in half and now hates all men.

Scene 7: Constance Translates the Most Important Event in the Novel (Wrong).

Constance, Ernest.

Scene synopsis: Constance attempts explain the term “to kill one’s own father with a pestle.” She mixes up the term “parricide” with the singer Fyodor “Chaliapin”. Ernest is wrapped in the bloody sheet.

Actions and objectives:

• Constance wants to explain her work to the audience.
• Ernest wants to stand out of sight from Constance and hide his brutality.

Shifts:

• Ernest is seen by Constance in the shadows.
• Constance is distracted by Ernest and gets personal with the audience about her sexual relationship with her husband.

Scene 8: Fyodor is Murdered with a Pestle and All Hell Breaks Loose.

Fyodor, Constance, Ivan, Dmitri, Smerdyakov, Djuna.

Scene synopsis: Fyodor is murdered; he is struck in the back of the head with a pestle. His sons Smerdyakov, Dmitri and Ivan find the body. Dmitri transforms into a Venus Fly
Trap plant and Smerdyakov transforms into a dog. Djuna enters wanting to sell her book to someone.

Actions and objectives:

- Fyodor wants to live.
- Dmitri wants to save his father.
- Ivan wants to save his father.
- Smerdyakov wants to save his father.
- Djuna want to sell her book.

Shifts:

- Fyodor dies from his injuries.
- Dmitri cannot save his father and turns into a plant.
- Ivan cannot save his father and curses God and asks for help.
- Smerdyakov cannot save his father and turns into a dog.
- Djuna can’t find anyone to buy her book and leaves to tell Anais about the incident.

Scene 9: Alyosha “Oedipus Sex”.

Father Zossima, Alyosha, Constance Ernest, and two Altar Boys.

Scene synopsis: Alyosha goes to Father Zossima and wants to get permission to go home to comfort his family during this difficult time. Father Zossima is busily getting dressed for a party at Anais Pnin’s house. Alyosha wants to make a confession about his mother feet.

Actions and objectives:

- The Altar Boys are busy getting Father Zossima Ready for the party.
• Alyosha wants Father Zossima to give him permission to go to his family and to get penance regarding an awful dream about his mother.

• Father Zossima wants to look perfect for the party.

Shifts:

• Alyosha thought it would be difficult to get permission but Father Zossima was too distracted and didn’t care.

• Father Zossima stopped his task to listen to Alyosha sing like a 14-year-old boy.

• The Altar boys thought they were helping but weren’t.

• Alyosha wanted advice regarding his awful dream (sexual) about his mother but Father Zossima was too distracted and didn’t give him penance.

Scene 10: Constance out of “Sight” out of “Mind”.

Constance Garnett.

Scene synopsis: Constance tells the audience about the next chapter and she’s having a hard time translating the book but is doing her best under the conditions.

Actions and objectives:

• Constance wants to keep us engaged and impress us with her work.

Shifts:

• Constance is getting everything wrong in her translation. She’s getting confused.

Scene 11: Mom comes Home for the Funeral.

Constance, Grushenka I and II, Ivan, Dmitri, Smerdyakov, Mrs. Karamazov, Alyosha, Fyodor, Ernest.

Scene synopsis: Ivan, Dmitri, Smerdyakov and Grushenka I and II and hanging out in Grushenka’s warehouse when Mrs. Karamazov arrives. Alyosha bursts in wanting to
know why they aren’t at their father’s funeral. Alyosha decided to bring his father to the warehouse and have the funeral there. Mrs. Karamazov becomes very disruptive so they all decide to take the funeral back to the funeral parlour. This is all too much for Alyosha who decides to find Father Zossima for solace.

Actions and objectives:

- Ivan wants to have sex with Grushenka I and II
- Dmitri wants to eat flies.
- Smerdyakov wants to have sex with anybody (legs).
- Grushenka wants to be fawned over.
- Mrs. Karamazov wants to ride herself of guilt.
- Alyosha wants everyone to attend his father’s funeral.

Shifts:

- Mrs. Karamazov and Alyosha disrupt Ivan’s plans of sexual activities.
- Smerdyakov is kicked away.
- Mrs. Karamazov and Alyosha wreck Grushenka’s evening.
- Nobody wants to listen to or has any respect for Mrs. Karamazov’s troubles.
- Alyosha is set into a spin when he sees his mother and becomes confused.

Scene 12: Anais Pnin Soirée.

Djuna Barns, Mrs. Karamazov, Alyosha, Ivan, Five Leather Girls, Anais, Fyodor, Smerdyakov, Father Zossima, Two Altar Boys, Ernest.

Scene synopsis: Anais’ house, her party for everyone in Volume 23 of her diary.

Actions and objectives:

- Djuna is working to gather her strength and courage.
• Father Zossima wants to be noticed.
• Alyosha wants Father Zossima to give him guidance.
• Anais wants to be loved and admired by all.
• The Karamazov Family wants to find an author.

Shifts:
• Djuna does not find any comfort and must continue to suffer for her art.
• Alyosha finally connects with Father Zossima but Anais tries to seduce him.
• Anais wants to be admired but is denied.
• Father Zossima is not admired and has a fight with Anais over Alyosha’s.
• The Karamazov family do not find an author and are thrown out into the alley

Scene 13: Alyosha’s World Crumbles.

Alyosha and Father Zossima, Constance.

Scene synopsis: Father Zossima has Alyosha alone and he makes his move on Alyosha.

Actions and objectives:
• Alyosha wants solace and comfort from Father Zossima.
• Father Zossima wants Alyosha.

Shifts:
• Alyosha is turned off by Father Zossima’s advances of sexuality and calls him insane.
• Father Zossima does not get Alyosha to be with him and drives out of the monastery to be with that “women” Anais Pnin.
Scene 14: Alyosha is Seduced by Anais.

Anais, Constance, Father Zossima, Alyosha, Djuna, Joacquin.

Scene synopsis: Anais has fallen for Alyosha and sings a heart breaking song about her troubles. Alyosha arrives at her parlour. He has no options but to stay with her and be her spiritual advisor.

Actions and objectives:

- Anais wants to have sex with Alyosha.
- Alyosha want to be Anais’ Spiritual Guide.
- Djuna wants Anais to love her book Nightwood.

Shifts:

- Anais does not pay attention to Djuna and her novel.
- Alyosha is seduced into a sexual relationship with Anais.
- Djuna is rejected by Anais.

Act Two

Act 2 Scene 1: Alyosha in a Dark Mist.

Constance, Alyosha Djuna, Anais, Mr. Karamazov, Ivan, Dmitri, Smerdyakov, Grushenka I and II, Fyodor, Joacquin, Ernest.

Scene synopsis: It’s later that night or early in the morning Anais and Alyosha have just had sex together. Anais awakes and decides to make Alyosha into a pop singer so she makes him write a song to one of her poems. Then everyone in his family shows up as if in some sort of dream. Alyosha is feeling very guilty for what he has done and is very confused. Grushenka I and II arrive on the scene to scope out the area for their new
leader. At the end of the scene Anais forces him to lie on top of her and her dead father.

She asks Djuna to spread mayonnaise on Alyosha’s ass to complete the sandwich.

Actions and objectives:

- Alyosha want to find his way through this mist.
- Anais wants to create a pop star out of Alyosha to make her look good.
- Mrs. Karamazov wants to alleviate her guilt about the way she raised her boys.
- Grushenka I and II want to find a place to start their revolution.
- Dmitri wants to eat flies.
- Smerdyakov wants to hump someone’s leg.
- Djuna wants to serve Anais any way she can.
- Constance wants to be a part of the action.
- Ivan wants to help his family.

Shifts:

- Alyosha gets more confused and goes to an even darker place.
- Mrs. Karamazov lives in denial and won’t face her past.
- Smerdyakov has an epileptic fit.
- Dmitri doesn’t get any flies just bubbles.
- Ivan can’t help his family they are helpless.

Scene 2: Alyosha Star Burns Bright.

Constance, Ernest, Alyosha, Djuna, Anais, Mrs. Karamazov,

Alyosha Groupies.

Scene synopsis: At the Palace, Djuna introduces Anais, she reads from her diary. Then she’s about to introduce Alyosha when Mrs. Karamazov enters, she steals the show for a
moment and tells the audience about the happiest time in her life, when she got married.

Anais interrupts and introduces Alyosha. He sings like a pop star, and is a huge hit, and the crowd goes wild.

Actions and objectives:

- Constance wants to be apart of the exciting action.
- Alyosha wants to survive.
- Mrs. Karamazov wants to come clean.
- Djuna wants to do the best she can to impress Anais.
- Anais wants to be in the spotlight and to be loved and admired.

Shifts:

- Mrs. Karamazov just looks pathetic.
- Alyosha steals the show from Anais and is in the spotlight.
- Djuna looks like a fool she can’s even read a joke.
- Constance tries to be a part of the action but only succeeds in supporting it.

Scene 3: Alyosha’s After Glow.

Alyosha, Father Zossima all the Leather Girls in other costumes.

Scene synopsis: Right after the concert Alyosha is signing autographs for his Groupies.

Father Zossima shows up to get his autograph and to talk him into being with him. Father Zossima has lost everything including his arm in an explosion.

Actions and objectives:

- Alyosha wants to understand what has just happened to him.
- Father Zossima wants Alyosha.

Shifts:
Alyosha is a star whether he likes it or not.

Alyosha rejects Father Zossima again.

**Scene 4: I No Longer Feel Certain of Anything.**

Constance, Ernest, Father Zossima, Alyosha, Mrs. Karamazov, Ivan, Dmitri, Smerdyakov, Anais, Djuna, Grushenka I and II and an Army of Legs.

Scene synopsis: A lot happens in this scene. Alyosha has become a very successful pop star touring the country. He's home resting after the long tour and celebrating his success with his family. Father Zossima has turned himself into a samovar. Ivan enters suffering from brain fever; he tries to convince Alyosha that there is no God. Alyosha no longer feels certain about anything. Ivan ends up killing his most treasured possession, Kukushka. Anais and Djuna burst into the parlour looking for the death stench. Father Zossima no longer pretends to be a samovar and begins to prophesy. Father Zossima and Anais argue about who gets Alyosha as Grushenka I and II burst through the doors with the Army of Legs (The Russian Revolution has arrived). Constance who has been an observer for the entire play now assumes the role of Commissar and orders the Grushenkas to wreak havoc and chaos. She orders Anais’ diaries to be burned but decides not to as Anais begs to have them spared. She does, however, throw everyone out in to the snow to be executed, except Alyosha. She is now alone with Ernest and asks him for a kiss but he refuses her, which sends her into a rage. As she destroys her book, clothing and monocle the set is torn apart revealing a Russian snowstorm. She then chases after Ernest begging for his forgiveness.

**Actions and objectives:**

* Alyosha wants to find his place in the world.
• Ivan wants to wake his brother up to the fact that there is no God.
• Anais wants to make her death stench collection bigger.
• Father Zossima wants Alyosha.
• Grushenka I and II want to wreak havoc to impress the Commissar.
• Constance wants to control the entire world she created.
• Djuna wants to serve Anais (she gets to kiss her).
• Mrs. Karamazov, Dmitri and Smerdyakov are catatonic.
• The Army of Legs wants to go a good job serving their leader.

Shifts:
• Alyosha goes into a more confused place, the vast Russian snowstorm.
• Ivan is unclear and confused about his argument about God and faith.
• Anais and Father Zossima are thrown out into the snowstorm and don’t get anything.
• Constance enters the scene and wants to take control to get Ernest’s affection but he refuses her and Constance tears apart her world.

Scene 5: Alyosha Bears Witness to Constance’s Revenge.

Constance, Ernest, Father Zossima, Alyosha, Mrs. Karamazov, Ivan, Dmitri, Smerdyakov, Anais, Djuna, Joacquin, Fyodor, Grushenka I and II and an Army of Legs.

Scene synopsis: Constance has conjured up a snowstorm where everyone enters on a troika. Anais and Djuna are very cold and hungry so they take Smerdyakov off stage, kill him, cook him, making him into a soup for everyone to eat. Grushenka I and II arrive they shoot and kill Djuna. Things are going out of control, Mrs. Karamazov is trying shoot up the pestle, Ivan is playing the role of James and slapping Alyosha around
thinking he’s Edmund, Alyosha finally loses it as they all start to leave and he screams for his mother! Anais throws his dead father from the troika at his feet as they exit.

Fyodor wakes up from the dead and asks Alyosha if he’s learned anything on his journey through life. Alyosha gives him Dorothy’s answer from The Wizard of Oz that life is really in your own backyard. Everyone returns (even the dead) and they sing about it.

Constance has a great little song that encapsulates her true feelings about being an artist in the background and tells us about her anger and she wants to be noticed. She becomes the vengeful Miss. Havisham and makes Alyosha into Pip and Mrs. Karamazov into Estella. She threatens Alyosha (now Pip) to play! Alyosha has no choice but to play and does what ever it takes to survive. Father Zossima throws himself into the scene and dies of a coughing fit. Just as Constance was making some progress with the torture of Pip the Grushenkas arrive to kill the Czars but Constance is very upset that they’ve arrived too soon. The Grushenkas gun down everyone except Alyosha. Constance kills them with a blowgun before that have a chance. Constance assumes to role of Miss. Havisham and continues to get Pip (Alyosha) to play. He sings a song about how everything is permitted which sums up his journey in the play. Life can be a dark, unfriendly and cruel.

Constance makes Ernest tie Alyosha to a chair. Mrs. Karamazov dies by overdosing. Ernest blows his head off; everyone is dead except Alyosha who has to watch Constance drive to the end of the play spewing lines from several great plays and novels written in the 19th and 20th century.

Actions and objectives:

- Alyosha wants to survive this madness and go back to the monastery.
- Constance wants Alyosha to be with her.
Everyone else wants to survive the death threats from The Russian Commissar.

Ernest wants to leave Constance.

Shifts:

- Alyosha is forced to stay and comes to terms with how cruel life can be.
- Everyone dies.
- Constance goes mad.
- Ernest cannot leave Constance and decides to kill himself.
Chapter Two: Part Three

Glossary

Act One

Sc. 1 page 5.

- Rachmaninov- (Sergei) (1873-1843) Russian composer.
- "Vocalise" – using the vowel ah, usually a vocal warm up.

Sc. 2 page 5.

- Constance Garnett in a wheelchair - She really was cripple in her old age, however she walked with crutches.
- Translatrix- A made up word by Constance Garnett to describe her work as a translator.
- Bart. – Abbreviation for Baroness.

Sc. 2 page 6.

- Leo Tolstoi’s War and Women – War and Peace.
- The Life of Sessue Hayakawa - Sessue Hayakawa (1889-1973) was an Academy Award-nominated actor who starred in American, Japanese, French, German, and British films. (He was called the Japanese Charlie Chaplin).
- Chekhov’s The Three Siblings and Uncle Sea Gull – Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya and The Sea Gull.
- Jacob’s Womb – Virginia Woolf’s novel Jacob’s Room.
- “Sister” Peter Tchaikovsky (the Nutcracker) – A joke on Tchaikovsky’s homosexuality.
• Anton Daikov - famous Bulgarian opera singer of the 1930s, interested in Orthodox Church music.

• Lubleevsky- comes from "lubit" (to love, to like) the title of a famous anti-socrealist novel by Sinyavsky is "Lubimov".

• “I had kittens today…” – Constance Garnett heard kittens meowing in her house but never saw them.

• “Song of the Olga Boat Men” - Russian Folk Melody “Song of the Volga Boat Men” made famous by Feodor Chaliapin. Olga is from the Three Sisters by Chekhov.

• Obligato - a musical notation (Italian for obligatory), indicating that an instrument or voice is essential and not to be omitted from the song.

Sc. 2 page 7.

• Ennui - French for a feeling of utter weariness and discomfort.

• Asp- A snake (Cleopatra held a snake up to her breast to prove her bravery).

• “The Italian word for window, ceiling slips through our grasp...”- from The Three Sisters.

Sc. 3 page 8.

• “Morbidetza et tragica moribunda” – made up words about death and dying. (French mostly).

• “Steht der junge” – made up German words.

• Ivan. (Speaking to the “Nurse”) – From Anton Chekhov’s play Uncle Vanya.

• Samovar - Russian teakettle.

• “Nevsky-pudovhkin”- made up Russian words.
Sc. 3 page 10.

- "You Are Not My Regular Optometrist" – Constance Garnett was really going blind in her old age she had Myopia (A condition where the eyes bug out).
- Cyrillic- an alphabet used by Slavonic peoples of the Orthodox Church.
- (Smerdyakov) "my half-brother" - In the novel, The Brothers Karamazov, he and Alyosha are half-brothers.
- This scene is a mix of Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters and The Seagull by Anton Chekhov.

Sc. 3 page 11.

- "Mein liebe schatzche" – made up German phrase sort of "my little darling".
- "Nana est mort, quelle dommage, dommage" – sort of French for Nana is dead too bad too bad.
- ASDFJKL; - left to right on a keyboard.

Sc. 3 page 12.

- "Do you think that...our suffering Grushenka?" - line from Chekhov’s Three Sisters said by Olga.
- Ivan shoots a seagull from the sky- from Anton Chekhov’s The Seagull.
- “Virgin Forest”- also from The Seagull.

Sc. 5 page 15.

- Exhortation of St. Paul – I Corinthians 13, King James version.

Sc. 6 page 17.

- “Zelda and Scott”- Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald - intense lovers and very good friends of Ernest Hemingway.
• Octaroon - a person having one-eighth black ancestry - offspring of a quadroon and a white.

Sc. 6 page 18.
• The First Sex - 1971 book by Elizabeth Gould Davis 2nd wave of feminism Great Goddess.
• Matriarchy, They Came from The Sea, Put your Mouth Where Your Vagina - all made up book titles.

Sc. 7 page 18.
• Chaliapin - (Fyodor) (1873 -1938) famous Russian opera singer-bass.

Sc. 8 page 19.
• Dmitri turns in to a Venus Fly Trap – an odd reference from the play Suddenly Last Summer by Tennessee Williams.
• Smerdyakov turns in to a dog – no reason Durang and Innaurato thought it would be fun.

Sc. 9 page 20.
• Boris Godounov - a Russian Opera composed in 1868 -1894 sung by Fyodor Chaliapin.

Sc. 10 page 22.
• Inexorable – unalterable.
• "Galina Vishnevskaya Irena Archipova loiblu liubasha grigory warfa evgeny atlantov. Rimsky-Korsakov moderate cui mussprovsky pushkin, solugub afrodesiac leningrad rasputin" - a ramble of Russian words and names.
• Irena Archipova - famous mezzo-soprano.
• Rimsky-Korsakov - famous Russian composer.

• “loiblu liubasha grigory warfa evgeny atlantov”- Russian names.

• “modeste cui mussprovsky” - Modest Mussorgsky famous Russian composer.

• Pushkin – (Aleksandr) (1799-1837) a Russian poet.

• Leningrad - city in Russia.


• Civilization and its Discontents – Sigmund Freud one of his most important and widely read works.

Sc. 10 page 23.

• Consummatum - Jesus said this before he died on the cross- meaning “everything is complete.”

Sc. 11 page 24.

• “Mary Tyrone” Karamazov – from Long Day’s Journey into Night.

• Magdalena – a reformed prostitute.

• Edmund and James –Mary Tyrone’s sons in Long Day’s Journey into Night.

Sc. 12 page 25.

• “...we have come here in search of an author”– Luigi Pirandello’s play Six Characters in search of an Author.

• “The Grand Duke was shot at Sarajevo” – June 28, 1914, a possible reason why WWI started.

• “I still prefer your father as the Count of Monte Cristo” – Eugene O’Neill’s father was an actor and played that role for many years.
• Quasi-Spanish/French accent—Anais was half French half Spanish and spoke with a very strange accent. Some people thought she had a speech impediment.

• “...my years as a Spanish dancer”- Anais was a famous Spanish dancer in her youth.

Sc. 12 page 27.

• Antonia Artaud – (1872-1916) he was one of Anais’ lovers, she thought he was a mad genius.

• Euphemism – Anais was a model in NYC when she was young but the euphemism for “modeling” at that time was “prostitute”, she worried about being called a prostitute and gave up her modeling career.

• “David to my Saul” – from the Bible - King Saul took in young David.

• Joaquin Nin – (1879-1949) Anais’ father, they were lovers when she was young. She wrote a book about her experiences. He was a famous pianist/teacher touring around the world. He seduced several young women.

Sc. 14 page 34.

• Sister Ulrica - is a character from the British BBC drama Tenko that aired from 1981 to 1985.

• “Mia bambino melancholia” – Spanish – “my baby mental condition”.

Act Two

Sc. 1 page 37.

• Commissar – Russian political leader.
• “Edmund, stop saying that! It’s just a summer cold!” – Mary Tyrone’s line from Long Day’s Journey into Night.

Sc. 4 page 42.

• Monastic - of, pertaining to, or characteristic of monks or nuns, their manner of life, or their religious obligations.

• Troika - a Russian sled.

Sc. 4 page 43.

• “Death stench” – It is believed that if a corps (Priest) does not smell it is saintly and pure. Fr. Zossima is based on real life Priest Staretz Amrosy who died in 1891. It is said when he died he did not have a death stench, this meant he was a saint.

Sc. 4 page 44.


Sc. 4 page 46.

• John Ferrabosco – (1626 –1682) an English organist and composer.

• Sarah Orne Jewett- (1849-1909) an American, she wrote short stories and novels, she was in a very bad wagon accident; which left her a vegetable (hence have her for dinner).

• “The Russian word for mulatto is Pushkin” – Pushkin was mulatto.

• “The Russian word for overcoat is Gogol” – (Nikolai) (1809-1852) he wrote the short story The Overcoat.

• “The Russian word for epileptic is Dostoevsky” – he was an epileptic.
• “The Russian word for accident at the train station is Anna Karenina” – in Tolstoy’s novel Anna Karenina the title character dies in a train accident.

• “The Russian word for bubble bee is Rimsky- Korsakov” – he composed the “Flight of the Bumble Bee.”

• “The Russian word for hysterical homosexual is Tchaikovsky” – (Peter) he was a tortured soul and a homosexual.

Sc. 5 page 49.

• Lumbago – sore loins.

• Fontanelles – the spaces on an infant’s skull.

• “Ideal weather for my lumbago”- line from Samuel Beckett’s Endgame (Hamm).

• “Something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles”- line from Beckett’s Endgame (Hamm).

• “Uncle Henry and Auntie Em” – from The Wizard of Oz.

• “Totem and Taboo, and Toto too…” – parody of Sigmund Freud’s book Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics.

Sc. 5 page 52

• “You think she is very pretty. And you, Estella? What do you think of him?” – Mrs. Havisham’s lines from Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations.

• “I think he is very common. And his hands are course.” – Estella’s line from Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations.

• Estella – character from Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations.

• Pip – character from Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations.

• Armand – a character from Giuseppe Verdi’s opera La Traviata.
• Addio del pasato – a song from Giuseppe Verdi’s opera La Traviata.

Sc. 5 page 53.

• Nicholas II – last Russian Czar (1868-1918) he was jailed and executed by the Bolsheviks.

• Alexandra- Nicholas’ wife – (1844-1917) also executed by the Bolsheviks.

• Parthenogenesis- ability to give birth without a member of the opposite sex.

• Homophiliac – play on words someone who is attracted to the same sex, and hemophiliac, someone who is subject to uncontrollable bleeding.

Sc. 5 page 54.

• “Everything is permitted” – comments made by Ivan in the novel The Brothers Karamazov.

Sc. 5 page 56.

• Shot is heard off stage – Ernest Hemingway blew his head off with his favourite shotgun in 1961.

• “In the beginning was the Word. And there were fishes, and there were winged fowl, and there were…” - The Bible (Genesis).

• “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” – Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens.

• “He said they were good” - The Bible (Genesis).

• “Call me Ishmael” – Moby Dick by Herman Melville.

• “I am a sick woman. I am a spiteful woman. I am an unattractive woman. I believe my liver is diseased” - Notes from the Underground by Dostoevsky.
• “Once upon a time and a very good time it was, there was a moo-cow down the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo...” - James Joyce A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

• “There is but one truly serious philosophical question, and that is...” – quote from The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus.

• “Baby Tuckoo...”- James Joyce’s novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

• “…was brought up by hand by his elder sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery” – Charles Dickens Great Expectations.

• “God bless us every one,” Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol.

• “It was a turkey! He could never have stood upon his legs, that bird!” – Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol.

• “They often went shooting quail in the country, oh what a rouge and pheasant slave am I”’ - William Shakespeare’s Hamlet “Oh what a rouge and peasant slave am I.”

• “We shall now listen to the “Dichterliebe” sung by Dietrich Frischer-Dieskau.” – Schumann.

• “Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism are all very good words for the lips; especially prunes and prism...” - Charles Dickens.

• “The following words will be helpful in carrying the thought smoothly from one idea to the next in an argumentative paragraph: moreover, first, second, third, finally, furthermore, in addition, then to, equally important, on the contrary, at the same time, hence, therefore, thus, in fact.” – from a book on manners and rules.
• “I took the babe from my breast and dashed it...” – Lady MacBeth from William Shakespeare’s MacBeth

• “All happy families are alike but unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.” - Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenin (the first line of the novel).

• “Please sir, I want some more,” Charles Dickens’ Oliver Twist.

• “Moreover, they were all at Charing Cross to see Lilia off- Philip, Harriet, Irma, Mrs. Heriton herself. Even Mrs. Theobald, squired by Mr. Kingcroft, had braved the journey from Yorkshire.” – E. M Forster’s Where Angels Fear to Tread.

• “The orphanage was not kind...”- Charles Dickens Oliver Twist.

• “Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather.”– James Joyce’s novel Ulysses.

• “In the little world in which the children have their existence, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice.” – a quote from Charles Dickens.

• “This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, this blessed plot, this earth, this realm...”- William Shakespeare’s King Richard the II.

• “I shall now conjugate the verb Karamazov” – characters in Chekhov’s The Three Sisters often conjugate in the play. (This is Latin).

• Hallie Marshall’s e-mail to Gayle Murphy who then forwarded it to me. Hallie Marshall is a Doctoral Candidate in the Programme in Comparative Literature at UBC and teaches as a sessional in the Department of Theatre and Film and in the Department of Classical, Near Eastern, and Religious Studies.

    Hi Gayle,

    Serunt is the 3rd person, plural, present, indicative active of ‘to sow’, so
'they sow' or 'they are sowing', but I think in this passage it is just an accident that a real verb has been produced at the end. The first six words are pseudo verbs made off of Karamazov that give a complete conjugation in the present indicative active

I am Karamazov,

you (sing.) are Karamazov

he/she/it is Karamazov

we are Karamazov

you (pl.) are Karamazov

they are Karamazov

The next three all appear to be gibberish with a pseudo Latin sound, with the final sound eliciting as association with second person verbs and the final one a mixture of a second person conjugation and a passive conjugation, with the final word I think a mixture of 'to be' in the present third person plural conjugation (sunt) and the future third person plural (erunt)

So an equivalent in real Latin would be: amo 'to love' with the final three being jumbled to create the right sound at the end, but not actually being real words.

amo, (I love) amas (you love) amat (he/she/it loves) amamus (we love) amatis (you love) amant (they love) amabatis, (you were loving) amavissetis (you might have loved) amati sunt (they were loved)
amati erunt (they will have been loved)

I hope this helps,

Hallie

Murphy, Gayle. E-mail to author. 17 Feb. 2009.
Chapter Three

Production Journal

December 7, 2007

I e-mailed Christopher Durang when I was granted permission to direct The Idiots Karamazov at the Frederic Wood stage in March 2009. This is what he wrote back.

Chris McGregor

Hi there, thanks for the hello and the news you'll be directing "Idiots Karamazov" in 2009. (Sounds so far away, though maybe you'll be doing it a year from this spring - is that right?)

You ask if I have any advice. In a way I do, but it's an awfully complicated piece, and the tone is tricky to get. If you have specific questions, or maybe as you get closer to production, I will try to share some thoughts.

Also... and I don't want to make you get a semi-expensive edition of my work ... but in the book "Christopher Durang: Complete Full Length Plays, 1975-1995," I write fairly long prefaces to the plays inside the book, starting with "Idiots." It's hard to find in bookstores casually, but it's sometimes there... it's published by Smith and Kraus, a small theatre publishing company that does have a website. And I just checked and amazon.com is selling it. Because it's only the intro to "Karamazov" I think you'd find helpful, I hate to hawk the book to you... maybe your library has it. Or you could convince them to buy it.
My first contact with Durang was in early August 2007 when I was searching to find a one-act play to direct for my (520) course. He was very supportive and helpful and my hope is that he’ll continue to help me with any questions that I might have about the play. I have a feeling there will be a lot. I will, of course, search out Christopher Durang: Complete Full Length Plays, 1975-1995 and have a read of it.

July 4, 2008

I just started reading The Brothers Karamazov. It’s a huge book, but I’ve got time. So far it’s a great read. I’m getting a lot of detail about the characters that are not apparent in the play.

July 6, 2008

I’m getting through The Brothers Karamazov. It’s very dense, but the images are clear and it’s great to see what Durang and Innurarato have chosen to parody. In their play they concentrate on the relationship between Ivan and Alyosha and focus on the religious aspects. Both artists have similar backgrounds and both are interested in absurd theatre. (See Chapter One-Biography). Both men are gay, and making Father Zossima very gay and flamboyant is a choice I find interesting. I’m not entirely sure about the significance of this, but I suspect it may have something to do with the general perception of the gay lifestyle of the 1970s.

I’m going to take a break from The Brothers Karamazov and read a few plays: Durang’s Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it all for You, The Marriage of Bette and Boo.
I loved all the plays, but I especially loved Beyond Therapy. I’ve contacted a few friends to have a read of it. I’m going to ask them not to push the comedy but rather concentrate on playing the reality of the scenes. In Appendix B of The Idiots Karamazov Durang and Innaurato comment on the way the comedy should be played. “...play the comedy seriously. Don’t do that tongue-in-cheek, I-know-I’m-in-a-comedy kind of acting that, for instance, Mel Brooks uses in most of his comedy films” (66). It’ll be a cold read but they are all great actors. I’m giving them the script before hand to read so they’ll have some time to think about it the scenes and get familiar with the parts. I’m looking forward to hearing the play read.

After reading a few Durang and Innaurato’s plays I’m beginning to understand their “world” a little better. It’s a “world” that explores the darker side of humanity; things that people don’t like to talk about are things they want to throw on the stage. As I’m reading through The Brothers Karamazov I’m discovering that The Idiots Karamazov is less a parody than a vehicle for Durang and Innaurato’s interests. And after reading The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie by Innaurato and The Marriage of Bette and Boo by Durang I’m starting to see a pattern. I can only describe it as, exposing the dark side of the dysfunctional family. (See Chapter One-Biography.)
July 20, 2008

The reading of Beyond Therapy was fantastic. The play is a crazy, wacky comedy about relationships but there are real emotions and real characters at the heart of the madness. I wanted the actors to focus on this truth. They did a fantastic job. It took them a few scenes to avoid the obvious comedy but once they did the play was a lot funnier. This is an approach I’m hoping to bring to “The Idiots” rehearsal process; find the reality in the scene not the comedy.

July 21, 2008

I’m still plugging away at The Brothers Karamazov. I’m getting a lot of detail about the characters, the atmosphere, the settings and mood. The exploration of Alyosha and Ivan has been particularly illuminating. I’m surprised to find the novel more riveting than I had anticipated. Some sections are absolutely horrifying especially the passage about a child being ripped apart by dogs.

July 28, 2008

I found a copy of The Brothers Karamazov movie in the Burnaby library. This was Durang and Inaurato’s first exposure to the work and led them to the idea of parodying the novel. The movie focuses on Dmitri and Grushenka’s storyline. I suspect it’s the through line that lends itself most easily to the screen. It doesn’t dwell on any of the religious banter between Alyosha and Ivan and essentially is just a love story. Yul Brynner is terrific in the movie and I’m drawn to his “romantic” military uniform. I’ll see if Jen thinks it might be something that could work for this production. I finally finished
the book; it answered many questions but left me confused about a lot of other things. Why did Durang and Innaurato make Dmitri turn into a plant? Why turn Smerdyakov into a dog? I e-mailed Durang and this is what he wrote back.

Dear Chris,

I'm afraid Dmitri becomes a Venus Fly Trap as a nutty non-sequitor -- though with a touch of Tennessee Williams' reference thrown in. (in "Suddenly, Last Summer," play and movie both, the crazy and possessive mother of Sebastian Venable meets the psychiatrist investigating her son's death in her over-grown garden, where she has a Venus Fly Trap which she likes to watch devour insects. Implication being that's what she did, emotionally, to her son.)

My co-author Albert Innaurato had/has a wild imagination, and in truth after focusing on Alyosha, Ivan, Fr. Zossima satirically but with some references to their actual characters from the book, we lost interest in continuing the stories of Smerdyakov and Dmitri, and in a way wrote them "out" as a dog and a Venus Fly Trap. (The book really focuses on the father and his son Dmitri fighting over the sensual Grushenka; and saintly Alyosha and intellectual Ivan look on from the side in the book. Albert and I, with our Catholic upbringing, were more drawn to the monk Alyosha and the nihilistic intellectual Ivan, and so we moved the other two brothers aside. Then once Anais and Mary Tyrone came in -- neither of whom have equivalence of any kind in the book - it further cemented
Alyosha's centrality in our version; and Ivan keeps showing up too.

Hope that helps. best, Chris

Durang, Christopher. E-mail to author. 9 Aug. 2008.

August 10, 2008

Just watched a fantastic version of Great Expectations and afterwards I read a few of the passages relevant to the play. Almost all of chapter VIII is referenced in the play. Not sure why Constance turns into Miss. Havisham. It’s funny and weird but I haven’t got a clue as to why Durang and Innaurato chose that particular character. I know Durang is a huge fan of Dickens so maybe it’s nothing more than that.

August 15, 2008

Watched a few Marx Brothers’ films; Duck Soup and Monkey Business. I’ve read several sources that suggest that the brothers in The Idiots Karamazov have a lot in common with the four Marx Brothers. I think that’s especially true for Alyosha and Ivan in their first scene. Their banter back and forth is in a very ‘Marx Brothers’ vein; at least that’s how I hear it in my head. I think these Marx Brothers films will be good source material for the choreographer to work with as well. I want the first dance/musical number feel like it’s right out of Duck Soup. I’m hoping there is a choreographer assigned to this show.
August 17, 2008

Watched Long Days Journey into Night (the Katherine Hepburn version). It was absolutely fantastic. It’s amazing how Durang an Innaurat incorporated the characters into The Idiots Karamazov. It’s going to be a challenge for the actors but I hope fun.

This summer I’ve been teaching at a musical theatre camp. I cast two 14 year-old boys to play Fr. Zossima’s Altar boys, Conner and Marc. They’re friends and both live close to UBC so getting to rehearsals will be easy. They’re totally excited to be in the play. I gave the script to their parents to read and they were fine with it. I wanted to make sure it wouldn’t offend them.

August 21, 2008

I e-mailed Durang because I had a few questions about the play.

Hi, Chris McG,

I've been away from my website mail for several days, so I only saw your e-mail today

I'll answer by copying first what you said.

Fr. Zossima's peanut and foot fetishes are they "nutty" non-sequitors or are they from the book "Medical Expertise Chapter The Brothers Karamazov?"

"...I've just arrived, and have come to thank you for that pound of nuts; for no one bought me a pound of nuts before; you are the only one who ever bought me a pound of nuts. And I remembered my happy youth, and a poor boy in the yard without any shoes, and my heart turned over..."
from Durang: I've never heard of Medical Expertise... did you seek it out?

Find it by chance? Anyway, in most regards there's nothing in the play from such an obscure choice.

In the book Fr. Zossima is very saintly; Alyosha looks up to him. There is an oddity in the book - when Zossima dies, he has a very strong "death stench" (his rotting body stinks), and this causes upset/comment among the monks. Somehow if he were really a saint, he wouldn't have such a stench. I can't recall if they say that, or only imply it.

But the core of Zossima is he's a great saint, very wise.

Albert and I took that and gleefully made Zossima overtly gay, and even queen-y. Alyosha in his innocence sort of doesn't notice. Or tries not to. Albert made Zossima have a foot fetish; I can't explain why. The peanuts thing I truly can't recall how that happened - though it's a way to take a fetish (foot fetishism) and add an insane detail that makes it surreal, less real, more crazy. Plus we both got a kick out of how stretching out the words of "peeeeeeenuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...ts" sounded like we were going to say penis, but instead he said peanuts. (It feels very loony explaining this... some of it really was anarchic mental play between me and Albert...)

Also

The Leather Girls who have been transformed into an Army of Legs... pg 44.
Does that mean that the actresses are wearing black tops to hide the top of their bodies?

from Durang: yes, hoping that description of Grushenka I and II is still in the printed version, once they're cut in half, it's the rather clunky device of black mesh-ish material covering the top to create the Bottom Half (or Halves), and the material covering the bottom half for the remaining Grushenka who speaks...

Now that Grushenka is cut in 1/2 does she (they) represent "The People's Will" of the 1870's and 1880's in Russia when the people started to revolt against the Czar AND the students at Yale in 1974 revolting against the government's actions in Viet Nam?

from Durang: are you kidding with the above question? I feel your mind shouldn't be going to that kind of thing if you're directing this play... the cutting in half of Grushenka comes from two things: in the real book the father and son (Fyodor and Dmitri) are both in love with Grushenka. Albert and I then looked at "wise" Fr. Zossima, and made him like wise King Solomon, who told the two mothers to take the disputed baby and cut it in half. The mother who DIDN'T want to do that was awarded the baby. In our version, the father and son just AGREE and cut Grushenka in half. Nothing more to it than that...

reassure me: your brain isn't going to that kind of thing too much, is it? Did you mean the question tongue-in-cheek?

best, Chris D
I guess I was going too deep. Thinking too much maybe! I think he misunderstood my question about Grushenka. I think I pissed him off. I’ll give it a few days and write him again. I just hope I haven’t lost him as a resource.

August 28, 2008

I just read Durang’s play The Vietnamization of New Jersey. This play should be done today. Many of the themes are relevant in today’s world. I also read Diversions, one of the first plays he ever wrote. (See Chapter One-Biography) I just finished reading three amazing books about directing. Mis-directing the Play by Terry McCabe, The Director’s: Voice: Twenty-One Interviews by Arthur Barlow and Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style by Michel Denis. They were all fantastic and I’ve taken lots of notes. (See Chapter Two-Directorial Approach, for some examples.)

September 4, 2008

I’m back at school. I found out Tom, my advisor, is off for the semester. Stephen Heatley will advise me until he returns. I asked him questions about what the thesis document should be when this whole process is finished. He gave me a few ideas to work on.

September 8, 2008

I met with Jen Darbellay to talk about the costume design (preliminary ideas). It had been a while since she had read the play so I started from the beginning and went through all the characters as they appear in the play. I explained to her my thoughts about
the world of the play. I want the costumes to appear authentic. This play is a mix of fictional and non-fictional characters and I want them all to be represented through their costumes in an honest and genuine way. I want the non-fictional characters to be costumed in something they might have actually worn in their lifetime. I presented her with several images: costume ideas, colour and actual photos of the non-fictional characters. Constance Garnett was a real person (1861-1946) and she spends the entire play in a wheelchair. I want her to be present. (I mean she’s talking to today’s audience) but stuck in the 1900s Edwardian/Victorian era. Ernest (Hemingway) is Constance’s manservant. Not sure about what Hemingway image we want to use yet. Past productions used his rugged safari look. I’m not sure. It’ll depend on who is cast. Fyodor Karamazov is a rich landowner and a drunk. I want him to look like he’s been tossed around a bit but not look like a bum. For Alyosha, the innocent young monk, I showed her some images of “authentic” Russian cassocks. Ivan, Dmitri and Smerdyakov the brothers (idiots) Karamazov are right out of 19th C Czarist Russia (1878 to 1880) when the book was written. All these characters are well-dressed Russian gentlemen; maybe throw in a twist of Chaplin or Marx Brothers. Smerdyakov is Fyodor’s son but also his manservant. Grushenka is the object of desire for Fyodor and Dmitri. She should look sexy and wild. I’m picturing a turn of the century dancehall look. I’d like to have Anais Nin and Djuna Barnes in the late 1930s or early 1940s. Jen will do some research and find some fun fashions. I want Anais to look very sexy and Djuna to look very restricted and conservative. For Anais’ Leather Girls, I asked Jen to do some research on what they might look like in the 1930s or 1940s. I want them to be fun and sexy and of course I want the actors to be comfortable on stage. Fr. Zossima is also based on a real person,
Staretz Ambrose. I showed Jen a photo of him. In the play he’s younger, very flamboyant and attracted to Alyosha. Fr. Zossima wears several costumes throughout the play and I went through them with her. He starts off in a regular priest cassock then dresses in an elaborate gold cloak (wedding cake) then changes into a Joan of Arc costume being “burned” at the stake. At the end of the play he’s in a simple cloth cloak missing one arm. Fr. Zossima has two altar boys (both played by 14 year old actors in this production). I’d like them in an authentic Russian altar boy costumes. We talked about giving them a costume that represents fire to help dramatize the Joan of Arc scene. Mrs. Karamazov (aka Mary Tyrone) arrives on the scene (1912). I want her look like Katherine Hepburn in the movie version of Long Day’s Journey into Night. I asked Jen to watch that movie for inspiration. After we went through these ideas I gave Jen my working metaphor for the play, (ball of string- See Chapter Two-Working Metaphor). She liked it and thought it was fun. We also talked about “games” the characters are playing. She talked about the way the characters were playing “games” on the audience and in one way I thought she was right but I don’t think they are playing games. I think the playwrights are playing “games” and that the characters are truly fighting to make sense of their lives. It only looks like the characters are playing “games”. I think she understands the difference now. She had an idea to put writing on the costumes, the way the designer did for last year’s play Learned Ladies. It worked for that play but I don’t want that style here. I want the costumes to look authentic. I think she’s clear on my direction so we’ll see what she comes up with.
September 23, 2008

I met with Dr. Bozena Karwowska, Assistant Professor Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies in her office. She’s very keen to help she says she love theatre. She’s a brilliant women and very eager to help me with my show. There are a number of Russian words and phrases in the play. I asked her to give me some help with the pronunciation of the names of the characters and to translate. Her advice was to pronounce each vowel in the word then squeeze in the consonants. I went through the script with her and showed her all the passages that are in Russian; she brought clarity to the humour for me. Many of the Russian words are jokes that only a Russian speaker would understand. As Albert Innuarato speaks fluent Russian, I suspect these were his work. There are also many famous Russian artists lampooned in the play and it was great to have Bozena talk about them. She enjoyed our session and is willing to come to some early rehearsals to help the actors with the Russian pronunciation, especially the names of the characters. I’ll schedule time early in the rehearsal process for her to come in and work with us. I really want all the actors to be on the same page when it comes to the pronunciation of the names and word. I find actors are all saying something different it can take the audience out of the play.

September 25, 2008

Met with set designer Rachel and shared a few of the same thoughts and ideas I gave Jenifer re: working metaphor (ball of string) and world of the play (burlesque/clown/cabaret). I talked to Rachel about The Idiots Karamazov being “a dream play” a few examples I gave were, The Glass Menagerie and Own Town. Both plays have a similar “dream” or “memory” quality to them. I’d like to achieve that with
this play. I talked to her about my desire to set this play in Constance’s library or sitting
room. A place Constance feels comfortable in surrounded by her books. I showed her
pictures of past productions. In Yale they staged two different productions. The 1973
production was staged in the round, and the 1974 production used the set, a Russian
drawing room, of The Possessed, an adaptation of Dostoevsky’s novel. In 1999 the
A.R.T. staged a revival of the play and Durang and Innaurato rewrote parts of the script, I
asked Durang to send me a copy. No word yet. Anyway that set was a huge Edwardian
library. I really like the idea of setting the play in a library and somehow making it
transform into the many different worlds. I think this scrim idea might work. I can play
with light and shadow (see Chapter Two-Space). We talked about incorporating the
auditorium on stage i.e. bring the teak wood paneling motif in the theatre on stage
somehow. I want the audience to be “in” Constance’s library and I thought this might be
a good way to achieve that. Rachel talked about working with Robert Gardiner and using
some projections. I suggested that the Russian snowstorm might be a good place to
feature that. I gave Rachel several images to inspire her design; some images of Victorian
wallpaper, Russian sleighs (troikas) and a few of birch trees (a symbol of Russia). I also
gave her a book of Chekhov’s plays. In it there are several production photos from the
Moscow Art Theatre. We went through the entire play scene by scene and tried to place
the environment; many were up for grabs. I want this play to happen in Constance’s
world or her library but what the different “environments” are I don’t know yet. Over the
next few weeks I’ll have to be more specific with every scene and the environment in
which it occurs. Some are very clear (the monastery, Anais’ parlor, Grushenka’s
“warehouse”) but others are less so.
September 29, 2008

Today I met with Ereca Hassell, the lighting designer. I felt that Constance’s world was sepia, faded, dusty and a bit shadowy like a faded photograph. I talked about the vastness of the snowstorm scene, stark and white, and shared some thoughts about what it might represent. I think it’s a metaphor for the state Alyosha has arrived at in his life. He’s lost, alone and confused. He’s lost everything, his family, his faith and himself. It’s a very “absurd theatre” concept, he’s in a foreign environment, it’s cold, harsh and lonely. Rachel and I talked about it taking over the entire stage and somehow making the library disappear. I don’t know how to do that, but I’m sure we’ll find a way. Maybe if the scrim idea will work when we backlight the walls of the library they’ll transform. Maybe we can have shadows of birch trees. I don’t know. Anyway, there’s time to mull it over.

Okay, back to the ideas for the rest of the play. I wanted Fr. Zossima’s cell to be dark and gothic. Maybe attempt some sort of stained glass treatment with lighting. I think the lighting can play a huge role in separating the space and making the scene changes fast and efficient. Ereca brought up a very interesting idea about using the structural wood frame of the set to represent other environments. For example one side is a textured painted scrim of the library and when we backlight a section of the walls we see the architecture of the monastery. Then if we backlight a different section of the set we see a sort of warehouse look. This could be a fantastic way to change the setting without actually doing anything physical. We talked a lot about the humour and seriousness in the play. She sees the play as very funny and silly but with a weight to it that explores the human condition. I totally agree with her. It was fantastic to talk to a designer about
content rather than what the play should just “look like.” Ereca thinks this is an ambitious project; yes it is, but I think the students are up for the challenge. I know I am. We left on a very good note. I think she just wanted to see where I was coming from and how I was going approach the play. I think I was clear with her. It’s still early in the process but I think I’ve got a fairly clear vision of the play and how I want it to unfold. I think we’ll have a great time working together on this production.

September 30, 2008

Auditions went very well with a few surprises. I had some strong ideas about how I was going to cast the play but now I’m totally rethinking. There are more auditions on Thursday with BA actors. I did group auditions with the BFAs rather than individual ones because I wanted to see if they could “play.” I also wanted to give the actors an idea of how I’m going to approach this production through clown and improv. I’ve been reading about a Polish director (Kantor) and I really liked his philosophy about rehearsing plays. He writes about working with a playwright and their script rather than on the script. I really like that concept. For me that means don’t layer anything on top of the script. Work at bringing the written script to the stage. Durang and Innaurato are brilliant writers and I want to make sure that their work is realized in this production. I’ll of course bring my own ideas to the production, which I hope will make the story clearer.

October 1, 2008

I’ve made a few decisions regarding cast. The BFA auditions really helped me confirm a few things. I think I’ve got everyone cast in a role they’ll enjoy and be able to have lots of fun with. I’m very pleased at the way it’s turned out. And I think the actors
will be very happy. The actors who approached me to play certain roles got the roles they asked for. I added a few more Leather Girls to the show so now I have 5 instead of 2. This means I’ve cast every actor in the Final and Intermediate years of the BFA. I still need to find two more men. The BA auditions are in a few days. So I hope I’ll find what I need there. In those auditions, I’m just going to get the actors to sing a song and do a monologue. I don’t need to see if these actors can “play”. I need to find Ernest Hemingway and the Father (Fyodor) they are smaller roles but important.

October 2, 2008

I’m TAing this term (History of German Theatre) and in the class there is this really nice young woman, Stephanie Olsen, who is in the music department. I asked her if she’d be interested in helping me with some of the musical references in the play. I had a short meeting with her after class and gave her the script. She seemed very excited about being involved. I need all the help I can get, as there are a lot of references to opera. I also asked her if she’d consider helping the actors with vocal coaching. She’s going to check her schedule and get back to me. I’m not sure if Patrick will like having her involved, so I’m going to get them to talk and maybe it’ll be fine. I know I’ll need all the help I can get on this production.

October 7, 2008

I had the BA auditions today. I found two actors to complete the cast; I’ve cast Will Goldbloom and Harrison Cowen (I know Harrison from last year, he was in the BFA acting program but was asked to leave). I’ve cast Will to play Hemingway and Harrison
to play Fyodor Karamazov. They’re very excited to be involved in the production. That’s always a good sign.

**October 20, 2008**

I met with Stephanie and she’s absolutely brilliant. She made a few CDs with all sorts of musical references. There’s everything from classic Russian music to songs about Anais Nin. She’s very excited to be involved with the project and is totally willing to help any way she can. She says it really great to do something totally different and work with new people.

**November 7, 2008**

I met with Jen to talk about costumes again. She had a chance to re-read the play so she now understands more of what I was talking about last time we met. She brought some black and white images of the Marx Brothers and Charlie Chaplin for me to see. She likes the idea of black and white for the men and more colours for the women. She’s thinking in the red/purple/mauve pallet. I like her ideas. We talked about Anais and the fact that she’s about 90 years old in the script. A very young attractive actress is playing her. We thought maybe we could over do the make-up and give her a wig. We’re thinking maybe she looks like Pricilla Presley (old but very young looking in a weird creepy way). We discussed Alyosha’s popstar transformation and what that might look like. I think it should look as garish as possible. He’s lost his faith and is forced into being a popstar I think it should be a cheesy, sparkly, almost Elvis like. Sorry Elvis, but it was looking a little over the top near the end. The Presleys are a good inspiration for this show.
November 17, 2008

I met with Patrick this evening. He hadn’t had a chance to read the play but we had a good talk about the songs and the music. I went through all the songs with him; there are seven in total. In the script they all have a different “style” to them” i.e. Frank Sinatra, Helen Reddy or L. Frank Baum (The Wizard of Oz). We talked about the fact the play was written in the early 1970s and the songs are the only pop cultural references in the play. I asked him to consider what the equivalent to Frank Sinatra would be for today’s audience and he thought of Justin Timberlake. For Helen Reddy he suggested Janet Jackson. The music is the only thing that lands the play in today so I’ve asked Patrick to think about today’s pop culture the way Durang did in the 1970s (Durang wrote all the lyrics in the play). There is a score for the play but I’d like Patrick to rewrite it and bring his own version of pop culture to this production. We also talked about the music between the scenes. Not much to say about that yet, but something to think about. Maybe Stephanie can help with that. I’ve asked her to record several selections of Russian folk music, Russian Orthodox chanting and some popular music from the 1930s and 1940s on CD for me. There are a number of sound effects in the play and I’m thinking of using Foley. Patrick thinks that’s a great idea. If it doesn’t work out the way I want I can always record the effects. There is a student assigned to assist Patrick with sound design.

He talked about using mics. The Frederic Wood is a very difficult venue to sing in and even though many of the actors can sing they don’t have the loudest voices. He’s going to bring in a period mic to see if it works. Using period mics might help support my idea of the burlesque/cabaret feel I want to achieve with this production. We talked
about the possibility of having a small band. I prefer that to back tracks but money is tight and, from what I understand, our budget was just cut again. He hopes to have a few song ideas recorded very soon and he’ll send me his ideas through his website. He’s going to get all the music written by the first day of rehearsal. He’s going try to see if he can find a small band to play. It would be nice but I’m not holding my breath.

December 7, 2008

I met with Breanne (SM) and Rachel Glass (set designer). This was my first opportunity to talk to Breanne about the show and how I was going to approach it. She is amazing: so much energy, very organized and very professional.

Rachel showed me her design concepts, which were broken down scene by scene. She did a beautiful job and had a very clear idea of where she was going. However, she didn’t incorporate any of the suggestions we had talked about in our first meeting. I think she read the novel and designed that rather than the play. She designed an open snowy field with lots of wattle fences; a sheet hanging from a tree which different images were to be projected. It was very imaginative and absurd but not the direction I wanted this play to go in. I really do want a library or sitting room: a place that’ll represent Constance’s world that will somehow transform into a snowy field as Constance’s mind starts to crack. I don’t know how to do that but there has to be a way. I thanked her but told her I didn’t think this is the direction we should pursue. I don’t want the whole play to happen in the middle of a snowstorm. She’s going to design a Victorian library and think of a way to bring a Russian snowstorm on stage.
December 15, 2008

Went to Vancouver public library and took out books about Constance Garnett, Anais Nin and Djuna Barnes. I found a biography of Constance Garnett written by her son. I picked up a number of Anais’ diaries and a few different biographies. I also picked up Nightwood and a biography of Djuna Barnes. I think it’s about time I get to know these women a little better.

December 20, 2008

I found some really interesting details about Constance, Anais and Djuna. We won’t be ‘impersonating’ these people, but I want the actors to know some specific details about their lives. For example, Anais was very fond of the colour purple and wore long flowing dresses in her later years. She had a sexual relationship with her father, with Antonin Artaud amongst many others of both sexes. She writes in one of her diaries that she and June Miller were lovers, though June denies this. She was flirtatious with a powerful sexual appetite and was in love with being an “artist”. Anais and Djuna never met; in fact Djuna hated Anais and never wanted to get to know her. I’m not sure why. Anais sent her fan letters and wanted to work with her and be her friend; she loved Djuna’s book Nightwood and it became an inspiration for her own writings. Djuna became a recluse and an alcoholic in the latter part of her life. In the script there are a few similarities between the real Anais and the play’s Anais. The play pushes her personality into the absurd. The real life Djuna and the script’s Djuna are quite different except for the fact that Djuna was having problems selling Nightwood after it was first written. It wasn’t until years later that the book became an icon for woman’s sexual freedom.
There are many similarities between the real Constance and the play’s. She did translate hundreds of books from Russian to English. She was going blind and she was crippled. She spent a lot of time in her library translating and had a manservant named Alfred. It really helped me to read about these women and find out more about their real lives and why Durang and Innauratoparodied them. The most important thing I got from all the reading was how difficult their lives were. All were very talented and gifted artists having a significant impact on the literary world.

December 22, 2008

I had a few good e-mail conversations with Rachel over the Christmas break. She’s done up a rendering of the set and did a fantastic job of the library. It’s not quite there but on the way. It’s a semi-circle with lots of room for the actors to play. We’re now talking about entrances and exits and I think the window at the back should be changed to French-doors. Also we’re still talking about using scrim on the set walls and projecting either gobos or having cutouts backstage to help distinguish the different environments. I think it would be striking and effective if we were to cast shadows on the walls to establish the different scenes. Perhaps the walls could lift away or fold off stage for the storm scene, but, on reflection, I think I should keep the action in the library as much as possible to establish that this is all happening in Constance’s imagination. I’m very happy with the direction Rachel is going now. She’s incorporated the teak paneling into the design that I mentioned earlier; I really think will help to bring the audience into the world of the play. Now I just need her to add two more entrances and change the window upstage centre into a door and I think we’ll have a great set to play on. I want as many entrances and exits as possible.
December 28, 2008

I’ve been putting this off for a very long time but it’s now time to finally write the script analysis for the play. I’m going to use Stephen Heatley’s version.

January 2, 2009

Christopher Durang turns sixty today; I sent him an e-mail wishing him a happy birthday and a Happy New Year. He wrote back thanking me for the good wishes. It was good to hear from him again I thought I had lost contact with him forever.

January 7, 2009

I made a decision today and cut Connor from the show. He was going to be really busy during tech. week and I was having a hard time finding another 14-year-old boy to replace Marc who dropped out last week to do his school play. I decided to invite two first year students at UBC to play the altar boys. They’re twins and look really young so they can pull off it off. They seem really keen but they told me they might have some conflicts. I hope it works out. I need to settle this soon. I finally finished a rough version of the Director’s Textual Analysis. It took a lot longer than I thought it would take. I’ve given it to Tom to read and I hope to meet up with him in a few days to discuss it.

January 8, 2009

Just meet with Rachel and the designs look really fantastic. The scrim idea is gone (too expensive) but the library idea is looking really good. She’s designed a balcony along the top of the back wall that could be functional. I hope it works out; more
possibilities for staging. She also has this brilliant idea about splitting the set in half, each half rolling off stage to reveal the Russian snowstorm scene. Not sure how that’ll work but I’m sure we can find a way. I still want to add two more doorways though. I want as many options as possible to get people on and off stage. The colours she’s chosen look gorgeous; sepia, dark oak, royal reds and deep purples. We’re going to meet up with Ereca this week and show her the designs. I’m very happy with what she’s done. I think it’ll be a very elegant and authentic set to work on. I love the idea that it splits open revealing the snowstorm. Now the only thing we have to figure out is to actually get a Russian snowstorm on stage.

January 14, 2009

Ereca, Rachel and I met to talk about the set. Rachel took her set drawings to the production dept. and we finally were told our budget. The budget for the set is only $1000.00. The balcony idea will be too expensive so we cut that and she added two archway doorways now I have lots of possibilities for blocking. Ereca loves the set.

January 16, 2009

Met with Tom, my advisor, for the first time today. He read my analysis and had some great comments. He asked me about Constance’s role in the play and suggested she’s some sort of a “God” creating the world she wants us to see. At the end of the play Constance becomes Miss. Havisham. We talked about what that might mean. In Great Expectations Miss. Havisham seeks revenge on men because her fiancée left her at the altar. Maybe Constance is seeking revenge too but for a different reason. It’s a very active choice so I’ll try to think that through. We talked about absurd theatre and
Beckett's *Endgame*. Tom noticed that there are a number of references to *Endgame* in the play. I don’t know the play very well but he noticed that both plays start virtually the same way. He suggested that I read Martin Esslin’s book on absurd theatre and that it might help with my direction of the play. It was a great meeting and it opened up a lot of possibilities for me. We also talked about parody and who gets parodied in the play; the artist, God and religion, feminism, family and homosexuality, virtually everybody. One important thing he wants me to look at is the relationship between Constance and Alyosha. What is that relationship and why is Alyosha the last one alive at the end of the play? Not sure yet. He gave me lots to think about. Their relationships intersect during the course of the play - something I’ll keep an eye on during rehearsals. I just found out an actor dropped out today, so now I’ve got to find a new Dmitri. I’ve used every actor in the department so now I might have to cast someone who’s recently graduated. There are a number of very talented recently graduated actors that I can contact. I just know if they’d be keen to come back and act in a small role.

**January 16, 2009**

I received this e-mail from Rachel. She totally understands the direction I want the set to go in now and she’s doing a great job.

Dear Chris,

I wanted to briefly sum up news set-wise.

- Wed. Ereca (lighting), Chris, and I met and had our first design mtg together, where lots of great ideas came up and we discovered some great set alterations, which would work better, for our budget:
-Bye Bye Balcony- big cost, big safety issue, and not really integral to blocking routes

-Tall Walls- (~16 ft) 4 high bookcase walls (great absurdist, baroque exaggeration effect- imposing, unreachable books.) with 2 arch-way walls (provides good cross for blocking)

Other major components are still the same, but to reiterate:

-Back French Door/Window Unit- will know be a literal set of French doors with little doorframe/upper clerestory-type window above, visible thru

-Projection on the cyclorama- thinking about possible denotations of time-change thru lighting on the projection image as well, need to ask Robert about using side projectors?

-The two sides still pivot apart, but the window unit will remain stationary (conceptually, is the central portal-type image and technically, Jay really doesn't want it flying around!)

Those should be the major areas. Aside from that, Jay and I had a couple of great meetings- the most recent being yesterday where I ran estimated materials and costs by him. He approved these and I have attached samples of specifics to show you- wallpaper, bookcase grillwork and books.

-Wallpaper- found great, large, readable damask prints at an online discount store- one in particular are a great dark burgundy/purple. This would go on the archway walls and the small connector wall unit above
the back window door unit.


-Bookcase grill-work: best deal is to actually go with plastic and this specific sample is orange, but I am checking to make sure polyurethane can be painted down


-Books- found a great deal on a wallpaper of books, which are the right size and pre-pasted. We would lay them over a 3-D surface (cardboard, foam.) for a low-cost, low-labor, uniform method of producing all the books. http://www.johnsonwallcoverings.com/71bowabo.html

Meanwhile, I have the white model ready to go for Monday, and hope to have the final drawings ready by tomorrow/Sunday to provide the carpenters and everyone with their copies at the meeting as well.


Rachel is doing an amazing job on such a tight budget. She's been open to all my ideas and working really well coordinating the colour pallet with Jen and Ereca. I love it when the design team works together. It helps create unity on stage.

January 18, 2009

I've got Will Goldbloom now playing the role of Dmitri. He was playing Ernest. He's very happy he's got a bigger part but now I have to find a new Ernest. Maybe I'll cast someone in my THTR 120 class; the same place where I found the altar boys. I've been looking outside the department but I really want to all the actors to be from UBC.
January 19, 2009

I had my first production meeting today. It was great to see everyone in the same room. Everyone is confused about the play. It’s a confusing play. But I hope as we work on it together, and I explain my vision, it’ll be come clearer for everyone. I just hope everyone has fun working on it and they find it a challenge in a good way.

Thought there are more questions to be answered next week; it’s nice to get a started, the set looks great and we did get $500.00 added to the budget. It’s a pretty big set. Our set budget is now $1500.00 - still pretty low but I think we can make it look good I have faith in the design and the technical departments. Patrick has been working hard on the songs and I’ve heard a few posted on his website. They sound fantastic. NOT at all what we talked about, but better! We spoke about making the songs pop culture but he went in the burlesque/clown/cabaret direction. I think it suits my vision and creates a better unity.

January 20, 2009

I did a lot of work on Constance’s final speech to try and figure out the many literary references. Many I already knew but some I couldn’t find so I e-mailed Durang to see if he could help me out. He gave me a few answers but wrote that Innaurat wrote the speech and he couldn’t really give me any insight into the reasoning or logic of it. But he did have this to say about the way the actor should play it.

You should be careful what Constance plays. It’s kind of simple. She’s grabbed all the power back, and she is going straight through translating the book. And though her mind shifts from the thing to thing, she should recite the lines with full commitment as if it's normal what's she doing,
and is actually a good translation of the book. When Meryl Streep did (ahem), she just committed to the tone of each piece -- gentle and a little sensitive/understand about "in the little world where children have their existence", then bold and declamatory about "I took the babe"; delighted and happy about the turkey…etc.

I once saw someone play the last speech as tragic and as being in pain. I told them not to do that and they switched and it was fine.

(It was a late rehearsal)

best, Chris D

Durang Christopher. E-mailed to the author. 23 Jan 2009.

This totally makes sense. I’ll encourage Becky to take this direction. Becky is a very intelligent actor and will have probably read most of the novels referred to in the speech. I have confidence she’ll find her own way through the madness.

January 26, 2009

Had a great meeting today with the props department, Janet and Lynn. I brought them up to speed on every single prop I wanted. Last night I googled every image I could and gave them pictures right down to the kind of key I wanted. Their budget was cut from previous shows by $500.00 so they’re a bit worried. The props list is huge. It’s going to be a challenge for them. They’ll have to be very creative. I think they’re excited to work on the show.

We had our second production meeting, which was really very brief. Everything seems to be on track; of course everything is on paper right now we’ll just have to wait and see what happens when the actual work starts. After the meeting I met up with the
costume department, Jean, Charlotte, Chantelle and Basha. Jen the designer is in Calgary for another week. So we went through the whole play and I told them my ideas and we talked about the sketches. The design team needed some clarification about the time periods, the cutting in half of Grushenka and what the Army of Legs might look like. I think I cleared up all their questions and they seemed really excited about working on the show.

January 28, 2009

I just reread Backwards and Forwards by David Ball. It was great to read again before I start rehearsals. I like the idea of looking at the end of the play and working backwards to the beginning of the play to determine what were the actions that brought the play to that ending. He describes it as a sort of domino effect; one action triggers the next action. In Chapter Two-Part Two, I’ve tried to determine what the actions are in each scene, but I think it’ll become a lot clearer once I’m in rehearsals working with the actors. I’m looking forward to start rehearsals but I’m still looking for an Ernest. Patrick sent me the songs through his website and I really like the direction he’s taken. All the songs are in a cabaret/burlesque tone; which works much better than my original idea of drawing from pop culture.

January 29, 2009

Met with Gayle Murphy, voice coach, today regarding accents and dialects. I decided that I’d like Constance to have a slight English accent, not too thick. Anais has to have a weird Spanish/French accent. In all the books I read about her she is described as having a very distinct accent. Some people actually thought she had a speech
impediment. She would say words like “dwink” instead of drink and “dwive” instead of drive. I’m giving Jocelyn the freedom to come up with whatever she feels comfortable with. Her task will be to make the accent odd enough but clear enough so the audience will still understand her. Gayle will work with Becky and Jocelyn in class time. I want the accents to sound really good (I hate it when they don’t) so I’m glad the actors have help. I believe Jonathan Holmes, a dialect coach, has been hired to help them out too.

I finally got an Ernest! A young man from my THTR 120 class will play the part, Simon Thistlewood. He looks exactly like a “young” Ernest Hemingway. I’m still not sure which Hemingway we are going to use i.e. his really young look or a bit older. I’ll leave it to Jen.

February 3, 2009

Last night was our first rehearsal. It’s a huge cast (20 actors) and a very large stage management team (maybe 5 or 6). Everyone had a lot of fun doing the clown exercises. I think it was a great way to start the whole process. I think I’m going try this more often in the professional world.

February 4, 2009

Had our first read through last night and I tried to keep it casual. I read them one of the first e-mails I received from Chris Durang. Then I talked about keeping the dialogue open and for everyone to feel free to make mistakes and be brave. One thing I’m really going to enforce in this process is not to allow actors to give notes to each other. On last production I did at UBC (520) one actor in particular became a problem in this regard.
Rachel presented her model and it looks fantastic. I have never seen a model with such detail; she did an amazing job. We heard the music and it’s really funky. None of the props people were there so Rachel and I talked about some of the ideas we had. Ereca wasn’t there either but we’ll get an update about her thoughts later. Her assistant said she plans on coming to as many rehearsals as possible. I love that! Then we read the play. It was good to hear it for the first time out loud. After the read through I let the actors go and had a sound design meeting with Stacy, the sound assistant. I’m not sure if the Foley idea will work so I’m planning a SFX back up. Stephanie had given me a CD with several music cues on it so I gave it to Stacy to listen to. I’ll think more about transitional music and sound effects. I’ll meet with Stacey later in the process when I’ve had time to work on the play.

I’ve arranged to have Dr. Bozena Karawowska (UBC Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies) come to rehearsal tomorrow to work with the actors on their Russian pronunciations. I want everyone to be on the same page. Gayle said she’d be there to take notes. Becky has the most Russian words and names to pronounce so she’ll take some time with Bozena and they will work together. Then we’ll start working scenes 1 to 6 and off we go!

February 4, 2009

Tonight was our first scene rehearsal. I’m not sitting around the table talking about the scenes at all. We are up on our feet working right away. All plays are about action so I want the actors to start thinking that way as soon as possible. It’s all about objectives; asking the question “what do you want in the scene?” I’m not going to worry about blocking the scenes right away. I want to play around with the entrances and exits
and discover where the possibilities might be. I just want the actors to play and to use their impulses. I want this show to come from them. They are all very capable and talented actors. It’s very liberating to work this way. In the past I’ve planned out all the actors’ exits and entrances. I’d block the entire play in my head then tell them where to go. This time I’m getting them to do the work and I’m just going to shape it. I want to work at getting the actors to answer their own questions. I’ll obviously be there to support their work and ideas but I just want to try this technique out see if it’ll work. This was something I read in *A Sense of Direction* by William Ball.

**February 6, 2009**

Last night I worked the same scenes. Not many of the actors have strong scene objectives so it’s slow work. I’ve talked to some of them about their super objective. Jeff in particular needs to find a strong one. Tom suggested that he try “to rid himself of emotional pain.” After the break I spoke to Jeff about this idea and he loved it. That super objective really works for Ivan (in the novel) and James in *The Long Days Journey into Night*. It also works for the Chekhovian parody in the play.

I made a break through with Michael; he was shying away from the homosexual, flamboyant aspect of Fr. Zossima character. He didn’t want to go down that path so I asked him to look at the script and tell me what he believes Fr. Zossima wants and desires. He came back after the break and said that Fr. Zossima wants Alyosha. We tried playing “To have Alyosha as his lover.” It worked. Michael has embraced Fr. Zossima’s homosexuality and most importantly his flamboyant nature. Starting to get some nice moments from Becky already. We had a good talk about her super objective. We’re starting with the idea that Constance is trying to impress the audience with her
intelligence. Moments are starting to come alive with that choice. It’s not all there yet but it is only day one. She’s prepared and very keen to work. Patrick came in at 8:00 p.m. and he taught the entire company all the songs. The music is fun, exciting and very entertaining. I really like the direction he took the music in.

February 7, 2008

This is a really challenging play but what’s making it more difficult is that many of the actors have not done any research. It’s very apparent when I ask them what their characters want in the scene and they say things like “I don’t know”. I’m working very hard and helping them make some choices. Tom took me aside and said I’m working too hard. He’s going to have a talk with them on Monday in his class. Time is short and we have a huge job a head of us. I don’t have time to do their work and mine. They are keen they just need to focus and get to work. They need to start bringing in scene objectives for their characters. I don’t care if they’ve made a strong choice or not at this point I just need them to start thinking about scene objectives.

February 8, 2009

Today was my first long day with the company and I think we used the time well. Ali and Andrea choreographed the first song. I wanted it to be “campy” with a Marx Brothers feel about it and they did a fantastic job finding just that; it’s very wacky. I think Ali drew some inspiration from the film Duck Soup.

At that same time I had Becky alone and we worked on a few ideas about Constance, her pain, her revenge, her actions and her connection to the audience. I think
we made a nice jump. We still have a long way to go but Becky is very bright and passionate; she’s done her homework. She’s done a lot of homework!

I had all the lead actors in for a talk about their characters. I wanted to find out how they were doing. We discovered that each character is dealing with pain and suffering in a different way. I think this will inform their scene objectives and, perhaps, their super objectives. The action of trying to get out of pain has struck a cord with all the actors. Maryanne was just totally lost though. Her character is from Long Days Journey into Night and she’s having a very difficult time connecting her character to this play. I totally understand that, but she’s a very talented actor and with time she’ll find her way in. I’ll do my best to help her out. I told her to read Long Days Journey into Night as much as possible and work from that script. As she gets to know that play really well she can layer it on top of this one. I’ll use some clown techniques to help her the blend the two plays.

Jennifer came in just after lunch and showed the whole company her costume designs; they look really elegant. I’m very happy with what she did - she takes direction very well. I wanted everything to look authentic and she achieved that. Of course she threw her own artistic sensibility into the mix and they look amazing. The colours she chose work really well with the colours Rachel chose for the set. I’m very happy with the direction of these two design elements. The actors seem very happy too and that’s always a good sign.

Later Patrick came in again and ran the company through more music. Some of the numbers are getting bigger and bigger. One number has 19 people singing in it. Why not?! The cast is having a fantastic time with Patrick. Stephanie came to rehearsals for the
first time to help Kevin work on his falsetto and run through a few of his songs. I asked him if he wanted to sing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” in the scene with Anais and he loved the idea. It’s not suggested that Alyosha sings that song in the script I just think it’ll be fun for him to do it.

I’ve decided not to go the Foley way; just do electric S.F.X. Stephanie brought me in a few more songs and opera pieces. I think I’ll just meet with Stacy and get her to do some sound effects. I have a few ideas but I look forward to her input.

I feel pretty good with the way things are going, Tom promised to talk to the actors on Monday so I hope that does the trick and they start to bring in ideas. I don’t care if they’ve made a strong choice or not. I just need somewhere to start from.

February 10, 2009

Okay the last two days of blocking have been hell. Getting a scene from the page to the stage is, for me, the most difficult part of the process. Once I get a clearer idea of where the scene is going it becomes easier; I just have to be patient. I’m really trying hard to throw the questions back to the actors mostly because I want to hear what they’ve been thinking. I’m feeling very doubtful right now but I’m trying to stay positive. At times I feel I’ve taken on too much and this production will be the biggest failure of my career. I think I’m just overwhelmed and need to focus. It’s been great having Tom come into watch rehearsals, he asks some fantastic questions to get me back on track.

February 11, 2009

I’ve been working some clown exercises with the actors to make some new discoveries. I need to get things going in a positive way. I had Jocelyn come out and brag
about herself. I wanted to tap into what she thinks of herself in a positive, magnificent, sexy way. It was amazing to see her brag about how great she is, how sexy she is and how smart she is. Jocelyn is not like Anais Nin, she is sexy and smart but she’s not an egomaniac. It was a great exercise to put Jocelyn through because now she’s weaving it into her character. Anais Nin is a lot scarier and threatening; something she must be for the scenes between her and Kevin to work. I believe Alyosha doesn’t leave her parlour because he’s scared of her and now she’s scary. I did a similar exercise with Krissy where she has to tell a joke to the audience. I got her to drop the script and just tell us a joke she knows. It totally worked it made it real for her - now she’s connecting to her own insecurities and to the audience.

February 14, 2009

The last few days have been better I’m feeling more positive now. We’ve crashed through all of act one and it’s looking pretty good. I’m saying “yes” to everything they offer. The actors are starting to take control of the scenes and bringing bold choices to the work. They’re starting to see the play for what it is. I think they understand the “tone” and the “world” now. The discussions we had about working from the characters’ pain are starting to pay off. The choices they’re coming up with are fantastic and the staging ideas they’re throwing at me are really imaginative. They are really having a good time and working very hard. It took a while for them to get it but I think some of the clown exercises are freeing them up. I’ve been working with the 30 rules of clown in rehearsal and it seems to help the actors understand what is expected of them in terms of clown. And how they can relate it to this play. These rules are taken from a clown workshop I did in 2006 and are:
30 Rules of Clown!

29. Be flexible. 30. Break All the Rules! (Turner)

These are great rules and I’ve been referring to them a lot during this process especially rule number 17. Follow the impulse. I’m not sure where these rules originated but I think it’s a combination of Jacques LeCoq and Richard Pochinko’s work.

February 15, 2009

Had a great morning with Krissy, Tianna and Ali. Krissy was having a lot of trouble with her first scene, reading from the novel Nightwood and massaging Anais at the same time. She just didn’t know what she wanted and to be honest, I wasn’t sure either. We tried a few things and came up with the objective to impress Anais with her writing so that she will love her. That totally helped and now she’s thinking of running that objective through the entire play. She was also having trouble with the “selling of her book scene.” I got her to play a clown exercise and sent out her on campus to “sell” her book to anyone she could. It totally worked. When we did the scene again in the rehearsal
hall it was very specific. The last thing we worked on was her NNNNNightwoooood speech. I asked her to find a way to connect it to her own life and it totally worked. She made it very real and specific. The problem had been that she was being general with the work. These clown exercises have helped her to be more specific and detailed.

I worked with Ali and Tianna on their feminist rant. I gave a few more lines to Ali so it’s a bit more even. We ran it a few times in the studio but it wasn’t really going anywhere. I threw them outside on campus the same way I did to Krissy. I needed them to make a connection with people to fulfill their objective. It totally worked - they got really specific. Rather than just yelling a bunch of lines out they were connecting to people to get their important message out. Lots of fun today - they all made the work very specific.

February 16, 2009

We had another production meeting. The production meetings have been running quite smoothly. Keith Smith has been amazing and everything is moving along very well. The set is huge but he’s managed to find things for free and recycle wood from past productions to build this set. He’s a very good technical director.

February 17, 2009

We are now into Reading Week. I’ve let most of the cast go except for the actors playing the main characters. I’m going to take this time to get really specific with the actors in terms of clarifying their scene objectives. Now the play is completely rough blocked. The actors are doing some great work, I don’t know what Tom said to them last week, but they’re really bringing in things to play. Not always right, but at least it’s
somewhere to start. Jocelyn has done so much work on her character. She’s read a lot about Anais Nin and her work has been very detailed and specific. Becky is doing a great too; she’s working her way through it and finding lots of interesting levels. The character comes and goes, but it’s good that she’s playing around. She’s still trying to find the right voice for her. She sometimes plays her as a sweet old lady then other times a mean crazy witch. For me it works better when Constance has an edge and is dangerous. We need to find the correct balance so the audience will want to take this journey along with her.

February 20, 2009

The last few days have been really fun as the actors are starting to get the world of the play even more. They’re finding clarity in their characters and in the story. I’m pushing Kevin to think about Alyosha’s journey and connect himself from scene to scene. I talked to him about the clarifying his actions. One action causes another action. He needs to think his way through this play and clarify his journey. He needs to know he’s in a comedy but not play the comedy. He has to find Alyosha’s pain and I feel some resistance from him. My job over the next few weeks will be for him to delve into the character’s pain.

This week has been great to have the actors for full days I feel we’re getting to the heart of the characters and making some bold choices. It looks great and everyone is working very hard. I’m giving them all four days off at the end of this week to relax before we head into the last few weeks of rehearsals.

I had a short meeting with Jen and the costumes look great, lots of fun and very colourful. It also sounds like the costume dept. is having a great time working on the
play. The Leather Girls are no longer Leather Girls more like Lingerie Girls. That’s fine with me as long as the actors feel confident and comfortable on stage.

**February 23 to 28, 2009**

This was a good week. We worked some details in act one. I’ve given the actors a lot of room to play and explore. They’re having a great time and things are starting to blend nicely. The truth in the scenes and the comedy are working well together. I’m on them about pace a lot though. They really need to know that this play needs to move along at farce speed!

It’s been great to have Ereca in rehearsals to see how the show has been blocked. It’s been a luxury to have the lighting designer be a part of the rehearsal process. We’ve also had the opportunity to talk about concepts, mood, tone and atmosphere in individual scenes. She’s an awesome designer with so many fantastic ideas.

I’m rehearsing the full company now and I’m incorporating the Leather Girls into all the scenes. It’s great to have them around - they’ve been away from the process for a while. They bring in a lot of enthusiasm and fresh energy to the rehearsal hall.

Ali has done an amazing job choreographing all the numbers. We go on stage next week so I’m giving her some time to work on it. She’ll need to help the actors adjust to the different space. Going from a small room to the big stage is always an adjustment. I want the dance numbers to be up and out.

**March 1 to10, 2009**

This week we were on stage for the first time. It’s great to finally have the space to work in. We’re plugging away at act two. It’s a harder act than the first and the scenes
are longer. The “story” gets really bizarre and very absurd. Act two is only five scenes but two of them are really long. The play ends about five times before it actually ends.

It’s tough and I’m finding it really different from act one; I’m finding it harder to get clear actable objectives from the actors. I’m a bit lost and struggling to keep focused. Act one has a clearer story. Act two is coming though; the songs are sounding great - we used Monday night to stage all the songs in the space and play around with the mic. I think everyone is getting a bit tired and a bit confused in the play.

March 12, 2009

Last night’s run was terrible, terrible, terrible! Tom had some great notes but the best was to get the actors to think of act two in terms of Bouffon rather than clown. Bouffon has a darker more sinister tone where clown is more innocent and light. Brilliant suggestion! He assures me that it’s all there; the actors just need to push act two into the Bouffon world with a more sinister tone. I gave them that note and other specific notes and tried to boost their confidence. I can feel that the actors are starting to feel lost and confused. We still have time! Tom suggested that I take Kevin and Jeff and almost choreograph their big scene in act two tomorrow. They get it sometimes but other times it just falls flat - it’s a long scene so it better be good or we’ll bore the audience.

I came in today and worked for a few hours on the scene. It’s starting to work now. Their choices were too general so I took some time and discussed some specifics and I ended up choreographing the entire scene. This was the only scene in the play that was blocked so specifically, but, for whatever reason, I needed to do that.

Tonight’s run was great. It’s starting to work. I hope they keep going in this direction and keep having fun. Tom’s suggestion of playing Bouffon really worked. I
guess it’s not really Bouffon but, whatever it is, it’s working. The actors are making the moments bigger but still grounded. They’re holding on to all the character work we’ve done over the last few weeks and it’s paying off. The play is at it’s funniest when they play the truth of the scenes. It’s hard for them to commit to a character in so much pain in a comic environment, but it works if they play the reality; once they start playing the comedy it’s not funny.

Gayle has been a huge support. She’s really helped the actors support their work through their voices. She’s worked hard at helping them fill the space; it’s a big stage. Andrea has also been fantastic on this show, she made a very interesting observation about the set - it’s a very big set with lots of high vertical lines and the actors have to physically hold themselves up so this enormous set doesn’t swallow them.

I start doing some LX work tomorrow and then we’re into cue to cue. I need to find time to work a few more scenes. Maybe during tech. I can grab a few actors and work with them. I’m feeling much better about things now. The actors have all embraced the Bouffon style in the second act. Maryanne especially has taken her character to a whole new level. Tom made a great suggestion that she should watch A Street Car Named Desire. Vivien Leigh’s performance is very “dramatic”, almost “melodramatic”, but still very real and connected to the truth of her character. I gave Maryanne that note and it’s working really well for her. She’s doing a brilliant job. Maryanne’s Mary Tyrone Karamazov is pathetic, funny, charming, desperate, sad, hopeful and full of pain.

March 15, 2009

Well, I survived tech weekend. I did LX levels from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. on Friday and it went very well. It’s great to have Ereca on the team. We had several very
detailed conversations about the lighting during the rehearsal period. It looks fantastic; the colours and isolation she managed to create look amazing. The Russian snowstorm looks fantastic - better than I could have ever imagined.

I went over some sound cues with Stacy. She’s done a fantastic job picking some great music to bridge scenes and something I never considered – underscoring - it really helps push the Bouffon style in the second act and it’s so much fun. The actors like it too. I’m very happy I decided to go this route with the sound rather than with the Foley. That would have been another huge job to work on and there’s no room on stage for it anyway.

Saturday and Sunday were both excellent days of tech. It was a bit tense sometimes but I didn’t feel it was out of control; 10 hours is a long time to work. The set breaking apart looks amazing and I think it’ll be a great moment for the audience. Just when you think you’ve seen it all, there’s more! The tech. weekend gave me the opportunity to work with the actors on details. Between cues I scrambled up on stage and quietly gave them detailed and specific acting notes. I made sure I didn’t disrupt Breanne’s work as she had hundreds of cues to learn.

This weekend turned out to be great and the actors were really embraced the notes I gave them. I think it made a huge difference to take some of them off quietly and give them specific notes. I hadn’t had the chance to talk to each actor individually about specific moments and actions so this was my opportunity and it worked out really well.

We were supposed to do a run at 2:00 p.m. but the set coming apart was really time consuming. I had a very specific idea in mind and I wanted it to be the way I envisioned. After about an hour and a half of just working that moment I got what I wanted. Everyone was happy and, most importantly, everyone felt safe. We finally got to
the run at 7:30 p.m. and we threw everything at the actors and crew we could: costumes, lighting, sound, props and the set breaking apart.

They did a magnificent job! They are well on their way to making this their show. I gave very few notes - I think my little chats really worked. During the run Tom watched to make sure the storyline was clear and I watched for details in the performance. It was a great combination. Tom had some fantastic ideas about Anais’ storyline. He made some suggestions that really helped Jocelyn connect a few more moments. She’s such a solid actor that throwing her new ideas at the last minute didn’t throw her. In fact it made her performance even better and she found more detail in her moments.

Tom had some suggestions for Becky and Kevin to strengthen their storylines. They both took his notes and are doing great work. Becky just needed to drive towards her revenge further. Kevin needs to push his need to survive this crazy world; he’s doing a great job. It’s a tough position to be in, he’s in a comedy but he can’t think he’s in a comedy. The journey has to be real for him and the stakes high or we really don’t have much of a play.

These last few tech. runs have been very interesting. Alyosha’s obsession with “feet” is a very important issue for him. I didn’t really attach much importance to it but now that I see it play out I’ve asked Kevin to track it through and raise the stakes. In Innaurato’s play The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie the grandfather character is also totally obsessed with “feet.” I guess the “foot” obsession in The Idiots Karamazov was his contribution to the script. Another thing I missed was Alyosha’s attachment to his bird, Kukushka. It’s the only thing he owns so when Ivan squashes it it’s a huge moment
of despair for him. I talked to Kevin about raising the stakes of his relationship with Kukushka. If he does I think it could be very funny.

I'm very confident with everything that happened on tech. weekend. Everything looks so amazing, the set, lights, costumes, songs and Stacy's sound score is so much fun. It's worked out better than I could have ever imagined. The actors are doing an amazing job. I can relax now and hope an audience embraces this wacky show everyone has worked so hard.

March 16, 2009

Here's a fun e-mail from the props department. I think this shows their level of dedication and commitment to the production.

Hi Chris,

I was not satisfied with the way Ernest's brain matter looked when it was thrown on stage. It bounced too much and didn't look gory enough. So Lynn and I are making our special gelatin "guts" recipe. This entails colouring very concentrated gelatin and stabilizing it with cheesecloth. We can add hair and gray "brain" bits. It will go splat when it's thrown but not fall apart and, though it will look wet, it is not.

It will have to be refrigerated each night and we will have to make fresh every few days. We are happy to do this.

I will stick around until five thirty to introduce the crew to it.

Be prepared to be grossed out.

We have created three small stacks of fake books to go under the
chaise. They are taped together so they will stay in their configuration. I was able to see the dildo quite clearly from the first few rows. It spoils the gag is it is seen before it appears, so whoever presets it at intermission should be careful to do it discretely and place it behind some books.

Jeff is the only one who actually eats part of the sandwich. I asked him what he wanted in it and he said "bologna". So if he complains, he has only himself to blame.

I have rigged a spare plug for Anais (to come out of her ass). If the one you have falls apart, you can put the new one on the chain and it should be strong enough to last the run, even if it gets yanked out by the chain.

I'll see you at 5:30 tonight, though i will not stay for the fun.

Cheers,

Janet

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March 17, 2009

First run with an audience, THTR 120, about 80 in the crowd. They had a really good time and it was just enough for the actors to get the idea of how this play works. I only had a few notes for the actors. Something I learned for Stephen Malloy, don’t give the actors too many notes before they open.

Tom had a few more detail notes for Jocelyn. Now that she’s going down this slightly new path it’s opening other possibilities for her and she’s finding a few more
nuances in her character. The shift was slight but I think significant and brought out some new details in her performance as well as clarifying her objectives in Act Two. We shifted her objective at the moment she spots Alyosha from wanting everyone to love and admire her to needing to possess Alyosha specifically above all else. This sets up a much stronger tug-of-war between her and Father Zossima and gives the whole scene a more dynamic energy. Then we tracked her pursuit of that objective through the subsequent scenes. When she sang her song she was more vulnerable and heartbroken because she didn’t “win” him. Then, after the song, when Alyosha walks back through her door, the stakes are much higher as she focuses, beat by beat, on all the steps necessary to hook her fish and successfully reel him in. None of the blocking changed, none of the actions changed but, with the stakes and intention shifted, the entire scene has much more clarity. As well as ensuring that Act One pushes forward to a satisfying climax (so to speak), which it hadn't quite been doing yet, this shift clarified Act Two for us as well. Now that she’s conquered him, she can move on to develop and execute the rest of her plans for exploiting him including making him into a pop-star and offering him up as a sacrifice to save her diaries. This slight shift has really helped her through the confusion in Act Two.

Kevin started to “play” the comedy so I took him aside and gave him a talking to. He understands the difference but I think his instinct to go towards the comedy is hard for him to resist. I’ve had several conversations with him about this during the rehearsal process so he understands what he’s got to do. I can only hope he can make Alyosha’s journey through this play important. All the other actors are doing a fantastic job. It’s not that Kevin is doing a terrible job he just needs to play the depth of Alyosha’s pain. He’s come a long way and he’s bringing a lot to the character. He just needs to go deeper, be
more vulnerable, more innocent, more lost, confident and more secure. I know there a lot of conflicting and complicated aspects to the character but that’s what it needs to be to work. I’m confident he can do it.

March 18, 2009

A very small house (maybe 35 people) but they laughed louder than the night before. I only had a few notes for the actors - a few details about blocking. I don’t want to overload them; I think they are in good shape. Kevin was terrific at maintaining Alyosha’s journey and living in his pain. He made it important and the stakes were high. There were a few “comedy” moments in his performance but he didn’t go too far with it. I’m very confident that he’s in the place I want him to be. I can only hope he continues to go deeper. And not play the comedy. I have to mention that Jeff has done a fantastic job with Ivan. He struggled in the beginning but I think his Ivan is so complicated and complex it’s funny.

We have one more preview then that’s it; we open. I’m going to take the time tomorrow to concentrate on sound levels and cueing. I’m also going to brighten up many of the lighting states. They look really great but I need them to pop a bit more. (Comedy needs brightness).

I also want to mention Breanne Jackson, the stage manager; she has done a fantastic job. She’s very organized and for a show this huge - she’s kept her cool and has run everything very professionally. I think she’ll do very well in the professional world.
March 19, 2009

Opening night! It worked; people laughed, a lot! I was hoping that people would laugh, of course, it’s a comedy, but people laughed! What a great night. What a relief to know that this production works. I’m very happy.

March 25, 2009

I saw the show last night. It was a very interesting audience. There were not as many students in the house as I had hoped. It looks like the older crowd showed up, so it was a very subdued group, but they really enjoyed themselves. It was good to see an audience who understood the literary jokes and were not so interested in the clown or comedy elements as much.

The actors did a solid show. I was worried that they would start to push the comedy and throw out all the hard work we did but they kept it tight and I was really impressed. The pace was a bit slow but they still held it together and moved it along. There are still four shows left, and from what I hear, it’s selling well.

It’s been very interesting to finally sit back and watch the show from beginning to end. Through all the chaos and comedy – a story emerged. I have to thank Tom for his attention to that aspect of the production. He encouraged me to work hard with the actors to clarify their individual stories and I think it paid off. The clarity he brought to the comedy made this a much funnier play. Theme was something else that emerged for me as I watched the play. In my directorial analysis, Chapter Two-Part One-Theme, I didn’t answer that question because I thought it would limit my possibilities. For me, and it maybe very different for other people, the theme that emerged for me is: “you can’t help people who can’t help themselves”.

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March 28, 2009

Closing night. I was pleased but I could see that some of the actors were starting to ‘play’ the comedy. I guess that’s normal. However, a few of the actors really understood the boundaries and ‘played’ very well with the audience. I’m very happy this whole adventure worked and everyone had a good time working on it. It was certainly the biggest challenge of my directing career, but well worth it.
Chapter Four: Reflection

I can honestly say that this production of *The Idiots Karamazov* was a success. It far exceeded my expectations, more than I could have imagined. It was far more entertaining and thought provoking embracing the darker side of the human condition than it would have been just playing for laughs. From the very beginning of this process, I knew, that in order for this production to succeed. I had to work very hard with the actors to achieve this. During the rehearsal process we worked at clarifying scene objectives and actions to determine their characters’ major desire. The hard work everyone did paid off resulting in a very successful production.

I had two goals that I wanted to achieve with the production. My first was to determine if I could make this 35-year-old script relevant for today’s audience. And my second was to find ways to improve on my directing style and techniques.

I determined that I succeeded with my first goal in a few ways. The first was when I was sitting in the theatre listening to the audiences’ reactions. On the three occasions I attended, audiences were fully engaged. Many people laughed, some screamed in shock, and a few spoke back to the actors. One moment in particular stands out for me. In act two-scene one when Djuna Barnes spreads mayonnaise on Alyosha’s buttocks. I heard a young man yell at the top of his lungs “OH, NO!” followed by an uncomfortable laughter. This was exactly the type of reaction I wanted to incite from the audience. I wanted the audience to feel free to yell, scream, and laugh at anything they wanted to. This reaction, along with many others I heard, indicated to me that after 35 years this script is still relevant. I also received several positive e-mails from audience
members and people who worked on the production who commented on the production and how they related to it.

My second goal was proven by the actors’ performances during the run. I was determined to follow many of the rehearsal techniques I had learned and read about during my two years here at UBC. The single most important technique I used was to ask the actors to follow their impulses. I encouraged them to answer their own questions and make their own decisions. I of course did my best to guide them and encouraged them to determine for themselves if their choices were, not right or wrong, but more or less appropriate. This method worked very well for me. It took some time in the rehearsal hall for actors to embrace this method but ultimately when they did the results contributed to the success of the production. This method was a major shift in my directing process. For years I had always given answers to the actors’ questions. I also preplanned many aspects of the production, blocking, for example. Although I did write an extensive directorial analysis and made a number of choices and decisions prior to starting rehearsal I didn’t plot out any specific blocking choices. Using this new method of directing was very liberating and many times surprised me. Actors would ask me where they wanted me to have them make an entrance. I would simply ask them to chose one of the seven options and see if it works for the scene. Many times they made really great choices that surprised me and helped shape the scene.

Doing the directorial analysis gave me a clear direction and vision for the production but I don’t think it completely mapped out exactly what and how I was going to work during the rehearsal process. I believe that it’s very important to have a vision for
the production; however, it’s another to have a rigid detailed plan that doesn’t allow the other artists to make a contribution to the process.

The actors’ contribution to the process was evident throughout rehearsals. All of the actors made strong choices, some I never would have imagined, and incorporated them into their characters’ super objective. They trusted me to guide them through the process because they knew my overall vision of the play was clear. The actors’ didn’t stop working when rehearsals stopped and performances began; they continued to work making their character’s objectives clearer and stronger during the run. This is something I encouraged the actors to do during the run of the play to keep it fresh for them and to continually connect to with the audience.

Krissy Jesudason, for example, playing Djuna Barnes, was constantly working to make her character’s journey stronger. In Act II, Scene 2, her character introduces Alyosha Karamazov to the “Palace” stage where she “warms the audience up”. In the script Djuna speaks directly the audience. On closing night a few audience members responded to her and she responded back. She was in the moment following through with her impulses. From the very beginning of this rehearsal process, even in the auditions, I asked the actors to acknowledge their impulse and act upon them.

All of the actors found the freedom to follow through on their impulses. I mention Krissy because of the difficult journey she had in this rehearsal process. She had a difficult time being in the script and at the same time being open to “play.” So to see her in front of a sold-out house “playing” and acting on her impulses was for me an indication that I succeeded in bringing these actors through a rehearsal process that allowed them to own the production and that their contribution was honoured and valid.
The process behind The Idiots Karamazov was a culmination of my two years at the University of British Columbia. I came back to school after twenty years to learn more about the directing process. I believe I accomplished that goal. There are three major aspects to the process of directing that I will take with me as I return to the professional world of directing. The first is the amount of research and reading I did about the play and playwrights to prepare myself for this production. In the past I had always done some research before going in to rehearsals but never to the extent that I did on this production. It gave me a clear understanding of what the play was about and what the playwrights wanted to say with their play. This work supported my vision; which enabled me to communicate my thoughts and ideas to the design team and acting company in a clear and comprehensive way.

I’ve always considered myself to be a “nurturing director”. It has its positive aspects yet it has its negative aspects as well. The most significant positive aspect to my nurturing style is that I allow artists to make mistakes, be bold, and take chances and know that I, as their director, won’t shut them down. The most significant negative aspect to being a “nurturing director” is not getting exactly what I want from an artist and losing valuable time because I was too afraid to hurt his or her feelings. I came face to face with both sides of being a nurturing director on this production. At a certain point, I felt as if I was very close to losing this show because I was too nurturing and supportive and not direct enough. I was working way too hard to protect an artist’s “feelings” or “emotional state of being” rather than being direct and totally blunt about what I wanted. The success of the production relied on this individual artist to start making the kind of choices I needed him to make, particularly when it came to embracing the genuine emotional pain.
of his character and not just playing the surface comedy. With one particular actor, this approach did not work. I tried to get what I wanted from this artist but I wasn’t being totally direct. I kept nurturing him hoping he would finally understand and come around. Finally, Tom took me aside and said that, in the case of this particular actor, a blunt statement about the potential damage done to the show, and to the perception of him as an actor in the eyes of the audience, if he did not push himself further, might, in fact, be exactly what he would respond to. Given that the opposite approach was not working and that his resistance to my direction was truly the last and biggest obstacle preventing me from realizing a vision of the play based on hours of research and a strong conviction that this was the correct approach to the material, there was too much at stake not to try and reach him this way. I did my best and was as direct as I could be in my own still ultimately nurturing fashion. Fortunately it worked. I finally got what I wanted from the artist and his performance was great and the production was a success. I was proud of myself but realized that that conversation should have happened much earlier in the rehearsal process.

I know I’ll never be one of those “brutal” directors. However, I have to learn how to be more direct and, for the sake of the show, to worry less about the actor’s personal feelings. This, by far, is probably the number one aspect of my directing style that I must improve upon. I have to find a balance between my nurturing directing style and being direct about what I really need from the artist; even blunt if a particular performer or designer in a particular situation calls for it.

As I mentioned I feel that the director’s textual analysis I wrote for this production was another element of the process I found invaluable and will always create
one for future productions I direct. However, after rereading it I found that the scene and character analysis sections were incomplete or too vague. For example, the analysis I did for the character Anais Pnin was very general and vague. I wrote that her major desire was “to be loved and admired by everyone”. It wasn’t until the last few runs before cue to cue that Tom suggested getting more specific: “wanting to be loved and admired by Alyosha”. This slight shift informed the entire second act making the entire story more clear and specific for all the characters. Next time I write a directorial analysis I will endeavour to be more specific when it comes to scene synopsizes and character’s major desires and shifts along the trigger and heap philosophy in scenes. However, I can’t help thinking that no matter how specific I get, I won’t make those specific discoveries until I start working with the actor in the rehearsal hall.

Finally, the biggest impact these two years and directing The Idiots Karamazov had on my directing process was the work I did in the rehearsal hall. I can only describe this shift in one way, be as prepared as possible with a strong vision, as much reading as research as I possible can about the play and the playwright but always be open to other suggestions and ideas.

I realize in the professional world of theatre I won’t have the luxury of time on my side; a year and a half to work on a play is a long time. However, I will attempt to incorporate as many details as I possible can when working on plays in the future. I believe these major shifts in my directing process have made me a better director and I feel confident that I achieved the goals I set out to accomplish when I started this process.
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Appendix A: Production Credits

University of British Columbia

Department of Theatre and Film presents:

The Idiots Karamazov

By Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato

March 19 to 28, 2009 – Frederic Wood Theatre

Director ~ Chris McGregor

Set Designer ~ Rachel Glass

Costume Designer ~ Jenifer Darbellay

Lighting Designer ~ Ereca Hassell

Sound Designers ~ Patrick Pennefather/Stacy Sherlock

Composition ~ Patrick Pennefather

Stage Manager ~ Breanne Jackson

Cast

Maria Luisa Alvarez

Leather Girl 5

Veronica Baylie

Leather Girl 2

Kim Bennett

Leather Girl 4

Jon Horn

Palace Security
Harrison Cowan
Fyodor Karamazov

Jocelyn Gauthier
Anais Pnin
Ali Glinert
Grushenka 2

Will Goldbloom
Dmitri Karamazov

Kristine Jesudason
Djuna Barnes
Jeff Kaiser
Ivan Karamazov

Ian Labat
Altar Boy 1
Kevin Labat
Altar Boy 2

Moneca Lander
Leather Girl 1

Mikael Masson
Joaquin Pnin (corpse)/Altar Boy 3

Fiona Mongillo
Leather Girl 3
Michael Neale
Father Zossima
Tianna Nori
Grushenka 1
Maryanne Renzetti
Mary Tyrone Karamazov
Becky Shrimpton
Constance Garnett
Kevin Stark
Alyosha Karamazov
Simon Thistlewood
Ernest Hemingway
Russell Zishiri
Smerdyakov Karamazov

Production Team

Chris McGregor
Director
Tom Scholte
Faculty Advisor, Directing
Rachel Glass
Set Designer
Jenifer Darbellay
Costume Design
Ereca Hassell
Lighting Designer

Patrick Pennefather
Composition/ Sound Design

Stacy Sherlock
Sound Design

Breanne Jackson
Stage Manager

Madeline Copp
Assistant Stage Manager

Anna Gustafson
Assistant Stage Manager

Jon Horn
Assistant Stage Manager

Novem Fung
Assistant Stage Manager

Keith Smith
Technical Director

Maria Fumano
Assistant Technical Director

Jay Henrickson
Production Manager
Jean Driscoll-Bell
Costumes Supervisor

Janet Bickford & Lynn Burton
Props Supervisor

Andrea Rabinovitch
Movement Coach

Gayle Murphy
Voice Coach

Zoe Green
Assistant Set Designer

Chantelle Balfour
Assistant Costume Design

Jui Kang
Assistant Costume Design

Basha Ladovsky
Assistant Costume Design

Conor Moore
Assistant Lighting Design

Jeff Hitchcock
Assistant Lighting Design

Hana Johnson
Head LX
Jenny Keucks
Follow Spot Operator

Jeff Hitchcock
Light Operator

Jenny Kuecks
Lighting Crew

Stephanie Olson
Music Research

Yeon Kyeom Kim
Sound Operator

Megan Gliron
Props Head

Claudia Cantoral
Props Assistant/ Scenic Painter

Emily Griffiths
Props Assistant

Ahna Dunn-Wilder
Props Assistant

Jill Wyness
Make Up

Steph Meine
Make up Assistant
Lorraine West
Scenic Artist

Laura McLean
Scenic Painter

Katy Schroeder
Costume Builder

Kumiko Takahashi
Dresser

Saghar Bazargan
Dresser

Gabby Holt
Dresser

Agustin Guevara
Running Crew

Ali Maasoumian
Running Crew

Megan Kennedy
Running Crew

Mayss Naber
Running Crew

Zeid Shaban
Running Crew
Ella
Running Crew

Chap Chan
Running Crew

Acknowledgements

Dr. Bozena Karwowska (UBC Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies), Dr. Jutta Eming (UBC Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies), Hallie Marshall, Vancouver Playhouse, Arts Club Theatre.
Appendix B: Production Photos

Photos by Tim Matheson

Illustration 1. Act 1 - Scene 2

Rebecca Shrimpton - Constance Garnett
Illustration 2. Act 1 ~ Scene 7

Rebecca Shrimpton - Constance Garnett
Simon Thistlewood – Ernest Hemingway

Illustration 3. Act 2 ~ Scene 5

Rebecca Shrimpton - Constance Garnett, Kevin Stark – Alyosha Karamazov
Maryanne Renzetti – Mary Tyrone Karamazov
Illustration 4. Act 1 ~ Scene 12

Kristine Jesudason – Djuna Barnes
Jocelyn Gauthier – Anais Pnin

Illustration 5. Act 2 ~ Scene 2

Maryanne Renzetti – Mary Tyrone Karamazov
Illustration 6. Act 2 ~ Scene 2

Kevin Stark – Alyosha Karamazov

Illustration 7. Act 1 ~ Scene 13

Michael Neal – Fr. Zossima

Kevin Stark – Alyosha Karamazov
Illustration 8. Act 1 ~ Scene 9

Michael Neal – Fr. Zossima
Kevin Stark – Alyosha Karamazov

Illustration 9. Act 1 ~ Scene 9

Kevin Labat – Altar Boy
Michael Neal – Father Zossima
Ian Labat - Altar Boy
Illustration 10. Act 1 ~ Scene 2

Russell Zishiri – Smerdyakov Karamazov
Jeff Kaiser – Ivan Karamazov
Will Goldbloom – Dmitri Karamazov

Illustration 11. Act 1 ~ Scene 8

Harrison Cowan – Fyodor Karamazov
Illustration 12. Act 1 ~ Scene 6

Tianna Nori – Grushenka 1

Illustration 13. Act 1 ~ Scene 13

Monica Lander, Kim Bennett, Maria Luisa Alvarez, Veronica Baylie, Fiona Mongillo-Anais’ Leather Girls
Illustration 14. Act 2 ~ Scene 2

Moneca Lander, Kim Bennett, Maria Luisa Alvarez, Veronica Baylie, Fiona Mongillo - Alyosha’s Fan Club

Illustration 15. Act 2 ~ Scene 4

Moneca Lander, Kim Bennett, Maria Luisa Alvarez, Veronica Baylie, Fiona Mongillo - Army of Legs
Kristine Jesudason – Djuna Barnes, Michael Neal – Father Zossima
Jocelyn Gauthier – Anais Pnin, Tianna Nori – Grushenka I
Ali Gilnert - Grushenka II, Russell Zishiri – Smerdyakov Karamazov
Jeff Kaiser – Ivan Karamazov, Rebecca Shrimpton - Constance Garnett
Simon Thistlewood – Ernest Hemingway, Kevin Stark – Alyosha Karamazov
Maryanne Renzetti – Mary Tyrone Karamazov, Will Goldbloom – Dmitri Karamazov
Set Design by Rachel Glass
Photos by Tim Matheson

Illustration 16. Act One

Constance Garnett's Library

Illustration 17. Act Two

The Russian Snowstorm
Appendix E: Reviews

The Ubyssey

The Ubyssey March 24, 2009

The Idiots Karamazov

By Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato

By Kate Barbaria

Culture Staff

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The Idiots are brilliant.

The unpronounceable and incoherent The Idiots Karamazov is brilliant. It is by far the best show of the year presented by Theatre at UBC. The Idiots delivers a deliciously non-sequiturial ride through the West’s literary canon. With Becky Shrimpton (playing Constance Garnett) and Kevin Stark (playing Alyosha Karamazov) leading the raucous charge across Freddy Wood’s stage, the entire ensemble delivers a nonsensical and entertaining bash.

The Idiots is a show catering specifically to university students with a taste for the irreverent, from flamboyant priests to “sterile” intellectuals to an aging epileptic translatrix. Written by comedy masters Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato, the plot, or lack thereof, revolves around a hideous mistranslation of Dostoyevsky’s Russian classic, The Brothers Karamazov. As literary genres collide and reality and imagination mix, Dostoyevsky’s story arc is reconstructed through the mind of Constance Garnett. Becky Shrimpton explained, “The basic premise of it is that there’s this woman, Constance Garnett, who is a translator, and she is attempting to translate The Brothers
Karamazov. However, she is insane. I imagine Constance has been writing the translations for IKEA furniture, and this is why I ended up with a dysfunctional three-legged side table when I was under the impression I had purchased a sofa bed.”

The Idiots is far more spectacular than a three-legged side table. Every part of the show is pitch-perfect, from the troika to the body bags to Ernest Hemingway’s favourite rifle. Clearly, the BFA Theatre students have done their jobs this year. The audience will have the pleasure of seeing the best parts of the other shows from this year transported into a more refined, controlled delivery (if one can call multiple orgasms refined).

The actors are able to locate the physical drama of Gormenghast, the complex rhythms presented by Unity 1918 and the foreign challenge presented by Medea. The Idiots far and away outshines these previous attempts. The most marked change is the actors’ ability to create entirely new characters, rather than playing off of their most recent roles.

“The change is astronomical,” said Shrimpton. “Going from Gormenghast to Unity, for the first read, most of us were still playing out Gormenghast characters because we only had one day off between the two…and then going from Medea into this, the change was seamless. We are learning how to transform, and now, okay, this character is gone.”

Kevin Stark, Jocelyn Gauthier and Michael Neale give standout performances. They’ve been in the spotlight all year, playing leads in Gormenghast and Unity 1918, as well as in The Idiots.

Stark proves why he’s worthy of his altar boy persona-aside from his thin waist and charming falsetto. Not only can he recite homilies, but he has finally struck a balance between physical comedy and conviction.
Jocelyn Gauthier is absolutely hilarious in her role as Anais Pnin, a tragically broken writer wrapped up in her bizarre sexual desires and longing for attention. That simplifies it, of course. She also sings.

Michael Neale has the most entertaining role as Father Zossima. While Neale has played very physical roles all year, his skills fit perfectly within the irreverent dynamics of the show.

Constance Garnett, or rather Becky Shrimpton, is the guiding light in the chaos, and the best performance in the show. At once terrifying and hilarious, she establishes a thought out character, and holds an immense presence on the stage despite sitting in a wheelchair for the entirety of the show.

“She is absolutely insane in a way that has to make sense. She sits in a wheelchair for two and a half hours and doesn’t get up to get up. And that includes no pee breaks. And I have to go pee when I get nervous. So she’s been my big challenge this year, and I really respect her for that,” said Shrimpton. Her bladder might be exploding by the end of the second act, but her acting remains undiminished.

The inexplicable The Idiots Karamazov is the last show of the year for Theatre at UBC. It plays at Freddy Wood from March 19-28. I wouldn’t recommend that you bring your grandmother, but your English major date will be impressed.

ReviewVancouver

Theatre at UBC

The Idiots Karamazov by Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato

Dates and Venue 20 March 2009 Frederic Wood Theatre
The Idiots Karamazov? What is this? It is a glorious mish mash of 19th and 20th century literature. My first thought, what fun those two authors must have had writing it. Secondly, what fun everyone in the cast must have had rehearsing this intellectually witty romp, and thirdly what courage Chris McGregor has to attempt to direct this with its huge student cast. Both he and they succeeded brilliantly in presenting this incredibly intricate and scholarly send up.

Many of the authors mentioned in the script are obscure and their writing very dated. The central character, a Victorian blue stocking translatrix, Constance Garnett, is almost forgotten today, and her translations, in the light of present day learning, somewhat specious.

Other literary personalities appearing are also little known now, or are well known writers of the mid 20th century. Much of the dialogue also deals with the beliefs, or parodies of these, and the mixture of misunderstood and mixed up thoughts and words are delivered with speed and hilarity.

The scenery and costumes here are clever and varied, but always pleasing and appropriate. The sound and music are well in tune with the action and setting and Patrick Penefather’s musical compositions are an integrated, and well-realized part of this
multifaceted extravaganza. Lighting is always changing with the mood and spirit of each of the many scenes, and subtly highlights and isolates the small individual incidents.

Constance Garnett is on stage in her wheelchair through most of the performance, she is busy making notes, talking to various characters or just enjoying the ongoing singing and dancing, in some of which she joins with 21st century abandon.

With a cast of 21 actors, some of who play more than one role, much chorus and solo singing and dancing, this is a breathless but thoroughly entertaining performance.

Becky Shrimpton, as Constance Garnett is a Victorian lady in a wheelchair, who never misses a trick, frequently joins in with the choruses and scribbles away, frantically making notes and has some fast speaking speeches and much commentary, littered with spoonerisms.

Constance is attended by her butler, Ernest, a silent stone-faced gentleman’s gentleman, whom one recognizes later as Ernest Hemingway (Simon Thistlewood).

Kevin Stark, a talented actor with a great range as a singer, is Alyosha Karamazov, the central figure in the unlikely Karamazov family of strangely assorted characters, and of the play. He manages a multitude of conflicting episodes and personages with considerable aplomb. He and Constance are the central figures of the narrative and hold the whole multi-scene production together.

All the many roles here are well interpreted and characteristically performed.

Chris McGregor took on a mammoth task in choosing to direct this almost zany script and he produced, with his lively, well drilled and intelligent company and crews, a truly sparkling, fascinating and thoroughly entertaining show.

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Appendix F: E-mail Reactions to the Production

Hi Chris,

I really enjoyed the show tonight. What a difficult job - very well done. Bill neither fell asleep nor wanted to leave during intermission. I can't ask for more.

Jutta

Eming, Jutta. E-mail to the author. 19 Mar. 2009.

Hi Chris!

I didn't have a chance to catch you last night -- with all of the (well-deserved!) admiring! -- But I wanted to send you a note of congratulations on an absolutely spectacular show. I couldn't agree with you more that was one of the weirdest experiences I have ever had, but it was just incredible to watch.

You did a heck of a lot with one crazy script, and I was just blown away.

Thank you so much for that show. Congrats on all of your hard work.

I'll be coming again next week; I can't wait!

All the best,

Amy

Tipton, Amy. E-mail to the author. 20 Mar. 2009.

Hey Chris,

Had the pleasure of seeing a bunch of Idiots on Monday night. You did a fabulous job and clearly everyone in the cast bought into your vision and
seemed to be having a ball out there. Loved your casting - some really wild but controlled work by many in the cast. The young lady playing Constance was absolutely brilliant. Haven't seen such a fine nuanced performance of that caliber in a long time.

Thanks to you and your cast for a wonderful night at the theatre.

Cheers,

Wayne

Specht, Wayne. E-mail to the author. 26 Mar. 2009.

Hi Chris,

Congratulations! It was a fabulous show! You should be very proud. It was energetic and crazy and uh...well, crazy. I thought the students did a great job of keeping the humour in check.

Becky was hilarious and drove the action forward.

Again, well done!

Love Lisa

Beley, Lisa. E-mail to the author. 26 Mar. 2009

Hello Everyone!

First, I would like to congratulate everyone on an amazing, successful and fun run! It has been an absolute pleasure working with each and every one of you.

Thank you for a truly wonderful experience!
Breanne Jackson
Stage Manager, The Idiots Karamazov
Jackson, Breanne. E-mail to the author. 30 Mar. 2009.

Hey Chris,
Just wanted to let you know that I saw the show this week on Thursday, and it was bloody fantastic!!
Thanks for letting me be, a teeny tiny part of your masterpiece.
Well done, all!!

Steph

Olson, Stephanie. E-mail to the author. 30 Mar. 2009.

Chris,
It was a pleasure. Easily one of the best shows I’ve been apart of in y 4 years at UB and my 10 years doing theatre.
Thanks,

Jon Horn
BFA University of British Columbia.

Horn, Jon. E-mail to the author. 30 Mar. 2009.

Dear Chris,

Congratulations, so pleased -- and impressed -- your "Idiots" production went so well.

Hooray!
Best, Chris

Durang, Christopher. E-mail to the author. 30 Mar. 2009.

Dear Chris,

You brought out everyone's passion, commitment and bravery through your direction and guidance.

Thanks so much. This show was so much fun to work on.

Sincerely,

Gayle

Murphy, Gayle. E-mail to the author. 30 Mar. 2009