

DESIGNING A PLAYGROUND FOR ROMEO AND JULIET

by

ANA LUISA ESPINOZA VACA

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ABSTRACT

The production of *Romeo and Juliet* took place at the Telus Theatre in Vancouver from 21st to the 30th of January 2010 as part of the UBC 2009-2010 program. It was directed by Catriona Leger, costumes by Carmen Alatorre, lighting by Conor Moore, original music by Mischelle Cuttler and Patrick Pennefather. Set design was done by myself as the main topic for this thesis.

The word playground in the title points to both the play culture associated with the theatrical event as well as the physical space for play. Building off of the notion of the childhood playground, I sought to illuminate the theatrical space as one which is literally a place of play-not only as a space in which one *views* a play, but also a space for actors to *physically* play (that is to explore and create). The stage would not be a constricting place which limits the actors movements, but rather, a flexible and open space to perform (a necessity, given the physicality of the show). The playground is for kids as the playground is for buffoons in my set.

As I desired to deviate from the traditional notions of theatrical space, I also sought to break the conventions of traditions of Shakespearean staging, creating a non specific place or time and inviting the spectators into the sense of festivity. The shape of the theatre in combination with the design allowed for the actors to use the whole space whether it is in or between the audience, on top of a balcony or in the grid. Since this side-play was a necessary factor in eliminating the fourth wall, the space needed to be

a seem-less integration between audience and actor to facilitate such interaction. Thus, the set was designed to crawl into the audience's space. By extending the existing architectural elements of the theatre and working them into the design the theatre became an unencumbered, expansive space for play.

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DEDICATION

A mispadres

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis describes the design process for *Romeo and Juliet* and analyze whether the design and solutions were the most appropriate for the production and its effectiveness with the audience. Was it effective to create the set I designed with my characteristics of a vaudeville and cabaret with a non-specific time period for a physical performance for the audience, the director, and the Theatre staff in general?

It is divided into three main topics: preparation, design process and analysis. The preparation topic includes my personal research towards the play and the physical and logistic constraints the play came with. The design process topic is the most extensive part of this thesis, this process is best described by the journal I kept throughout the creation of the play, followed by a brief description of the conceptual approach and rehearsal process. For the last part, an analysis of the play questioning what work or did not work after the process was finished, as well of a brief summary of the criticisms and reviews the play received.

The script is taken from the text *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet* written in 1599 usually known as the second quarto edition. Reference images were mostly taken from a selection of set design books specifically from the *Ballet Russes* era.

2 PREPARATION

2.1 Research

2.1.1 Buffoon and Clown Styles

I would have never imagined I would be designing a Buffoon and Clown style show when at age eleven I was selected to be the buffoon for my school's nativity play. I never knew why I was selected, the director just knew I was a very young ballet dancer.

This part of my research gave me a glimpse of what was buffoon and which one would be the appropriate design approach for such show. It is my understanding that when the director refers to buffoon she is specifically referring to the specific character product of the Lecoq school or any of their followers. Many times the buffoon is referred in North America as the European clown, a very vague description of such an interesting character, but there is a deeper theatrical and most important for me, a peculiar aesthetic value.

Such aesthetic value couldn't come from another place other than from Italy, actually, comedians can be tracked down all the way back to Greek times. England and France are the other two countries that hold credit for the development of the different clown styles, each one offering their own aesthetic values.

It makes a lot of sense that Catriona decided to make one of Shakespeare's most famous play in a buffoon style. It was Shakespeare himself who enjoyed the introduction of clowns in his plays. "In a number of his plays, Shakespeare incorporated *commedia*

elements, as well as dumb show (*The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*). (Lust, 40). Taking all the characters in the play and transforming them into buffoons would be more than interesting to watch.

Set design might not be the biggest content included in most of the writings, but certainly there are important factors to consider. “Before the Italian actors performed at the court of Charles I in 1673, Ben Jonson, in collaboration with the stage designer Inigo Jones, presented masques with Italian stage innovations (*The Masque of Blackness*, 1605) and used stock characters, such as Captain, possibly inspired by the *comedia*'s Capitano. Although the Italian masque, which eventually found its way to England, was a light form of entertainment consisting of pantomime, music, singing and dancing and an adaptation of the *fabulae atellana* of ancient Italy (Broadbent 1901/1965,98) in England the poetry, set design, and costumes of the genre became lavish and pompous.” (Lust, 40). The use of Italian masques are going to be included in our show during the party scene, our costume designer thought the inclusion of such elements would add up to the show.

It is important to highlight the meaning and intent of the director's buffoon. Her background comes from the Paris school of buffoons. In Paris in the mid twentieth century different mime schools developed combining different styles in one. “Lecoq's global training method fused the art of the clown and the buffoon, juggling, acrobatics, spoken text, dance, plastic arts, and all of life with body movement, opened up new directions for physical theatre. In 1978, Marceau opened his Ecole Internationale de Mimodrame de Paris and taught workshops in America. Decroux, Barrault, Marceau, and Lecoq inspired many mimes and

theatre artists to discover multiple styles of twentieth-century movement theatre that, in turn, enriched other stage arts.” (Lust, 66)

A student in the Lecoq school studies clown and buffoons. “The clown's small, red nose-mask develops comical movement and is a tool for searching for one's won clown and humorously playing up one's weaknesses, revealing the true self in relation to others.”

“After studying clowns, the Lecoq student moves into the world of buffoons, whom he portrays as mocking, one-legged, one-armed beings with hunchbacks, living between gods and devils and bringing to light many truths. The study of clowns and buffoons is important in Lecoq's training program because he believes that the theatre should return to a more tragic dimension. And it is the clown who reflects the human condition's absurdity and alienation:

The clown has replaced the hero who no longer exists in the theatre. We search for our clown, the one who grew up in us and which society no longer allows us to express. Though it offers an element of great liberty, where the individual finds he can be himself, I also represents an experience with solitude.” (Lust, 101)

2.1.2 Arturo Ui, Cie Theatre Company

This small French company was the one responsible for the representation of Bertolt Brecht's Arturo Ui. I was able to take a close look at their production pictures that are posted on-line. An article written by Anaïs André-Acquier written in the online journal *Les Trois Coups* might describe with a lot of precision what the director Patrick Rabier wanted to accomplish in terms of style. “*Arturo Ui, farce bouffonnee s'est inspiré de l'univers cinématographique: des films d'horreurs du début xxe siècle, des filmes de Tim Burton et du film le Dictateur de Charlie Chaplin.*”

What will happen if you happen to mix the 1910 Frankenstein movie, Beetle Juice and Charles Chaplin representation of Hitler?

2.1.3 Yard Dogs Road Show

This small company started performing in the streets of Portland, Oregon; today, they tour around North America and perform in alternative theatres. In May 2007 they visited Vancouver, performing at the Commodore. The spectacle “involves elements of the circus, vaudeville, and cabaret...the ensemble performs an eclectic range of tunes between and during acts by a sword swallower, a fire eater who impersonates Elvis, and the Black and Blue Burlesque girls, among others. The latter perform as dancing dolls to the cartoonish, junkyard instrumental “Blockhead” and get steamy during the torchy vamp “Read Light”...Guitar Boy shows off some Jimi Hendrix-style *riffage* while wearing an Indian-chief headdress and Lone Ranger mask”.

Important elements to capture from Conner's review of the show were the inclusion of live music, Burlesque dolls and fire. When talking about the historical moment they are trying to represent, Eddy Joe Cotton (member of the show), says "he's no historian, though he does read about and talk to old vaudeville and circus acts... for me, it's almost like a past-lifetime experience. For all of us, it's like we're reliving lives we've had before."

2.1.4 Diaghilev and Russian Stage Designers

The reasons why I picked this book to show Catriona were two: first one, my passion and personal experience performing as a classical ballet dancer and the second one is that in order to have a perfect performing space for physical theatre there is no better object of study than the one designed for classical ballet. The reason why I picked the Russian Ballets is that they were the firsts ones that revolutionized the performance world with their eclectic and incorporation of different artistic disciplines in order to enhance the visual space and therefore enhance the audience's experience.

It is interesting to mention that one of the artist that were brought to the Ballet Russes was the famous clown Pierrot (*Petrushka* and *Carnaval*). With this the Russian ballet was integrating comedy with classical ballet, meaning that the spaces would also reflect a comedy aspect. It is not clear how comedy is represented in the different set designs but my own interpretation is the bold use of colors, the caricaturization of characters from the east and the free handling of scale in many of their set and backdrop pieces.

Pierrot was mostly recognized as a mime, the line that divides the meaning of mime and dance is sometimes difficult to express. “To distinguish between dance and mime, Decroux describes dance as lyric art and mime as a dramatic art. While the modern dancer might interpret dramatic themes, he does so with predominantly lyrical movements. The mime on the other hand, works against the pull of gravity, less lyrical and more dramatically than the dancer...For Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) – stage director, designer, and author of *On the Art of the Theatre*- the theatre is an extension of dance and mime where words are less important than visual elements.” (Lust, 73,77)

The book *Diaghilev and Russian Stage Designers* is circulated by the International Exhibitions Foundation who put together the world wide recognizes exhibition called “*Diaghilev and Russian Stage Designers*”. Important designer names appear in this collection: Bakst, Benois and Gontcharova, but between them an artist called Alexandra Alexandrovna Exter designed a set that spoke to Catriona and I.

Alexandra A. Exter was born in January 6, 1882 in Belostok, Russia (now Poland) and died in March 17, 1949 near Paris. She has been classified as a cubist, futurist and constructivist; member of some of the most influential groups as the Union of Youth and Jack of Diamonds. “Her extremely original designs have great strength and richness of color. She worked in Tairov's Kamerny Theatre, Moscow.” (Diaghilev and Russian Stage Designers, 58)

The work by Alexandra that attracted our attention, was originally painted in 1929, *Décor for a review. Project (Don Juan: ballet (?), produced at the Cologne Opera House,*

1927). The image we were looking at was in black and white, after doing some research about the artist, I found out the drawing with its original colors.

What we thought were positive and negative stripes as a backdrop, turned out to be a light pink to black to bright red to black again drawn in a diagonal. The ladder is represented in a brown color, which might represent wood, and the bright costumes in yellows white and black contrast perfectly with the color stripes in the back.

This drawing is associated with the Otello and Don Juan set of three paintings for the set. The thin legs of the multiple ladder like set and the lighting high contrast is common in these three drawings. The most important characteristic on the one drawing from Catriona's point of view was the dancers' interaction with the set. In the left side one can see two acrobats one is sliding down one of the poles, and another one is hanging from it. The stair structure is occupied in each level by different dancers, each one is a small stage of its own. What we thought were circus like costumes, are stylized bright Spanish costumes represented by the flair in the skirts and the flamenco position of the dancers.

2.1.5 Notre Dame floor and lighting

Notre Dame Cathedral. This was not the first time I've been inside this very iconic cathedral but this time to capture a very different moment. There were a series of candle holders as tall as 3 feet high, they were holding little tea candles, the effect was wonderful. (figure 1) There was the reflection of the little lights on the chequered floor; it spoke to me as

a perfect way to describe solemnity but also romance and death. It was the cathedral illumination that attracted me the most, apart from the candle holders, the way the columns were illuminated and the way the light entered through the stained glass rosettes.

The theatrical effect of such candle light accommodation was breathtaking, I could not figure out why in the moment, but I was able to take a couple of pictures. In the pictures there are three elements that I believe were the main components of such arrangement: the checkered floor, the number of little lights, and the theatricality of the place accentuated by the long columns holding the Gothic interior.

The checkered floor is as impressive as the whole cathedral, doing some research I was able to look at the whole pattern of the floor. The floor designed is sectioned by area, each one of them has a different pattern on it. It is interesting to point out the labyrinth in the center of the nave made by stone is a reason of hundreds of years of creative interpretation, truth is that in it the names of the builders are inscribed.

The checkered pattern of the floor is characteristic of the Gothic style, the “new” Gothic style taken by the English, the old North American saloons, the dinners from the sixties and even the pattern found in surrealist paintings by Dali. A floor pattern like this one, might be as eclectic as the intention of the play itself, the severity of contrast and the use of lines is interesting enough to create a theatrical environment.

2.1.6 Palais Garnier Red Boxes

I was lucky enough to get tickets for the Ballet National de l'Opera de Paris for the production of *Proust ou les intermittences du Coeur* by Roland Petit. Apart from the magnificent foyer of the Palais with its endless hallways full of arches and shiny floors, the interior of the theatre is very dramatic. I asked myself about the use of red in all seating and heavy curtains. What does red drapery do to make the interior of a theatre so attractive? I know in its time it was a symbol of the *bourgeoisie*, in today's time I feel it means that a very good show is about to begin, a sense of importance and theatricality integrated into the audience. I was seated at the back of one of the side boxes; it would be great that the Telus theatre can become a little Palais Garnier, it does have the boxes, and a scale that can be used in a similar way. (figure 2)

This emblematic theatre in Paris was the inspiration of the novel *The Phantom of the Opera*; served as model for buildings around the world such as Washington's Library of Congress; redesigned by Baron Haussmann and is currently the main house of the Paris Ballet. The exterior of the building is Neoclassical and the interior is mostly Baroque (still kept the original design by Garnier).

The main characteristic of its interior space, especially the auditorium is the red velvet covering all spaces that are not painted with gold leaf. The red not only absorbs some of the sound but also gives the air of sumptuousness and royalty. Velvet was originally invented in the Middle East, the finest of its kinds were woven from silk, later velvet was produced in parts

of Italy. The interior of the Palais Garnier was created in the Italian style, velvet would be one of the main components in the furring of the boxes.

The accommodation of the boxes are not only designed for a perfect perspective view but also used to frame the picture perfect woman and men dressed in their fanciest clothes. This characteristic inspired me the most, given the amount of boxes in our theatre and the coldness of the present materials, the addition of warmth would be ideal.

2.1.7 Proust ou les Intermittences du Coeur

In my stay in Paris I was able to watch the ballet created by Ronald Petit, based on the novel by Marcel Proust "*A la recherche du temps perdu*"; the set is by Bernard Michel, lighting by Jean-Michel Desire and costumes by Luisa Spiantelli. Set in the period of the Belle Epoque some pieces reflect the style of the time and others disconnect entirely from creating an surrealist atmosphere.

The show was absolutely wonderful, the ballet was musically and technically perfect, and the *decors* by Bernard Michel extraordinary. For me the ballet was mainly about love in its different presentations, there was a specific scene with three male dancers and a female dancers performing almost naked in front of a very illuminated scrim that made the bodies look like dancing dark profiles. For me this scenery trick is a perfect way to be able to glorify the bodies of dancers, also it does beautify an act of love that can look almost obscene to the bare eye of the audience. Would this be a good way to illuminate the love scene for?

The ballet consists of two long acts each divided in three *tableaux* in the middle of act two the previously described scene appeared. The performing stage was pushed down stage almost at the proscenium line, a scrim that covered the whole stage was dropped down and the dancers were choreographed to move in front of it, really close to it. There was a warm amber wash that covered the whole scrim, I believe the light source was coming entirely from the back in such way that the audience was only able to distinguish the silhouettes of the dancers. There was no front light lighting the dancers, we were only barely able to see a little reflection of light from the dancer's bodies. The effect was admirable, I was able to distinguish the dancers lines with no interruptions, it was like the brain is able to distinguish better when it is in a black and white environment.

2.1.7 Pere Lachaise Cementery

I was really interested in paying respects to the great artists and personalities buried in this place. Between my favourites: Chopin, Moliere, La Fontaine, Isadora Duncan, Oscar Wilde and Edith Piaf. There was a very interesting feeling with the combination of tombs between very beautiful tree framed streets. (figure 3)

2.1.8 Montmartre Streets

Montmartre streets were significant for me because of the perspective and the winding lines coming down the mountain. It was the last bits of the cabaret era that one can imagine while walking in the streets that make you imagine the place back in its Moulan Rouge period.

It is clear that Haussman was not able to touch this part of the city, the “disorganized” way of the streets give the impression of a picturesque environment. There were a couple of things I noted during my visit in terms of perspective: the effect of a winding road and its perspective and the scale of buildings and street when the streets are narrow and the height of the buildings is bigger than the width of the road.

I have to remark that the streets coming down from the mountain was my favourite part of the day. The streets are very narrow and are surrounded by eight story buildings, the road is covered in cobble stone, and the perspective achieved by the combination of these physical characteristics is very special and unique. The wiggly streets make the eye have no precise vanishing point, mental note. (figure 4) Almost at the bottom of the hill, there was an iron rod gate, just as the one Catriona showed me before, but this one had a distinctive aspect, through the gate, a beautiful courtyard was visible. (figure 5) How is this gate used in this case? Is it a door, a window, or a frame?

2.1.9 Carnavalet Museum

The museum’s architecture and landscape was what attracted me the most, especially one hallway in the 17th century mansion. The centre courtyard is a very good example of a classical French garden, what was really unique were the ivies crawling into the archways that divided the two courtyards (figure 6). My favourite hallway was one with chequered floor placed in diamond orientation. The hallway is divided into two by suspended archways, in one side stairs go down to the bottom level, and in the other, one is able the length of the hallway and the entrance to another chamber. What is remarkable of this space is the combination

with stone and marble chequered floor and the depth framed by distinct ceiling shapes. (figure 7).

2.1.10 Place des Vosges

This is not an Italian plaza, the scale is different, but the feeling of enclosure is magical (figure 8).

2.1.11 Fragments from Samuel Beckett directed by Peter Brook and Micheline

Rozan in the *Theatre des Bouffes du Nord*.

Since 1974 Peter Brook runs this theatre for his company. What is really remarkable is the architecture and the charming look of the ruin the interior of the theatre is. After the extravagant and saturation the city of Paris can have to the eyes, watching this show opened my eyes to the beauty in the simplicity of what an effective set design can do for a play. Throughout the show apart from a couple of props used on stage, there was a subtle red line projection delimiting the proscenium arch, in other scenes, the back wall was illuminated in yellow, and that was basically it. Simplicity is essential in new theatre?

2.2 Constraints

Designing *Romeo and Juliet* had different type of constraints; the first and major one would be the theatre itself, the Telus Studio, the second one would be the need of the space to be apt for physical theatre, and the third would have been budget and labour constraints.

To start with the Telus constraints I have to first point out that as an architect, the space is an ideal moving one that allows for creativity to flourish, the moving towers mechanics is a priceless addition that in the end more than being a constraint it became a huge asset. The Telus has the capacity of moving the towers in a round configuration, horse shoe, or proscenium like shape. All of them present their own capability, Catriona wanted to create a theatre on the round so that she could have actors running around throughout the space and not limiting the acting in just the stage area. It was my intention since the beginning to create a focal point for the audience, if you close out a space entirely, there would no be room for any type of big item or big statement given the budget and technical limitations we had. In addition I wanted the lighting to be an essential part of the design, and creating even the smallest backdrop would be enough for my design proposes. There was a need of adding two backstairs so that actors were able to access the second tier of the theatre without interfering with the main exits visible from all angles.

In the end we decided to open the theatre on the round and place a gap right in front of the cabin. The decision was assertive in many ways, it allowed for a main entrance and a focal point, the down side of this configuration is that as in any theatre in the round, lighting the actors correctly will cause problems with the audiences being blinded by the lights.

Sight lines with this configuration were 90% right in every spot the audience would sit down. The problem would be the audience sitting right next to the gap, those two towers and the seats in the bottom would be unable to enjoy the whole scenario and lighting effects.

At the beginning of our design process and almost one week before tech weekend the curtains became another big issue. First of all fabric material has to be fire proofed, second of all the budget was not big enough to get fancy materials such as velvet of any kind. I had to settle for cotton red fabric sprayed with fireproofed liquid. Second of all, we wanted to use the vertical space by hanging silks and allowing the actors to climb and perform aerial dances. This implied safety and budget issues, the silks used for such performances way above our budget, and the staff was not prepared or willing to take on the responsibility of hanging a student from the centre of the theatre down. I wanted the actors to interact with the set, to be able to manage the curtains and untie them and tie them again in different places. The fireproofed material was overly itchy and unsafe for direct contact to the skin.

The last one and most frustrating constraint was the budget and time constraint. The first big cut was for the curtains and the inability to use a certain fabric that would have allowed to perform movement on it. The second big limitation was the inability to find fire proof ivies that would include little lights on them, I ended up building them with my own hands by cutting metal sheets and painting them individually. Those ivies would have to be assembled into ivy shape form adding LED lights for the balcony scene. LED light were such a huge impediment because since the beginning the lighting designer thought they were not

diminishing the amount of work required frightened everyone. In the end they turned out to be manageable and the students earned a lot of labour hours building them.

The big metal door that was designed to be at the centre of the theatre was supposed to be strong enough to carry the weight of the actors so that they could climb and play with it. The first response was a big no, there was not enough material to build it, and they were not willing to take any safety responsibility. In the end the door turned out to be strong enough to carry any weight, but it was too late in the process to change the choreograph around.

I would say that the major personal constraint was the lack of experience in the field and making everyone trust me.

3 DESIGN PROCESS

Before any formal meetings or e-mails between me and the director about , there was a previous work experience that we shared one year before. Catriona Leger and I started working together in 2008 where I was assigned to be the designer and she director for *Trojan Women* at the Dorothy Sumerset Studio. I have to admit that the production was the first one for me as a set designer; I had previously worked as an architect, but never designed a theatre production. I never talked or met with her before, I had two options to choose from for the Theatre 500 productions, so I emailed both directors and picked the first one that replied; Catriona did in less than a day already asking to meet me to talk about the production. For me this was decisive, because a director, who thinks about the design as an essential element in their production, is the type of director I would always prefer to work with. The design for the production turned out very well, but most of all, we found out common interests and gave each other the creative freedom we are best accounted for. (figure 9)

When I was accepted to the MFA program, I never imagined how new, challenging and interesting experiences I was going to encounter throughout the very short two years of the program. During my second year I wanted to work in as many productions the theatre school could offer me, I was lucky enough to design two main stage ones, one which became my thesis theme. The first one was *Master Builder* directed by Gerald Vanderwould and the second *Romeo and Juliet* by Leger, each one so different than the other, but sharing one very essential element: they were both going to be held at the Telus Theatre. (figure 10). I would not say one turned better than the other, but working with *Master Builder* first gave me the chance to learn about the space, not to mention there was a time where the work was

overlapping one another. I remember that was around the time me and Catriona started talking about the ideal shape for the production.

I remember getting advice from my supervisor Ronald Fedoruk about the many possibilities for the space, the creation of an alley and removing some pieces of the floor were some premature ideas that were discussed, but Catriona had something else in mind. She was never convinced that specific shape would allow the flow of movement she was trying to achieve. Catriona told me about her inclination towards handling based on her background, experiences and a lot of her own personality. She has been an actor and clown for many years, part of the training she received was in France where she was heavily influenced by Buffoon and Clown styles, it was definitely her intention to use these influences for her thesis production. In combination with Catriona's background my classical ballet and architectural background helped me understand space differently and use space as a tool helping actors instead of restraining them, characteristic that I strongly shared with the director. At this point we knew the space for the play to be performed was going to be the Telus, a place as challenging as it is full of possibilities.

3.1 Journal

February 27, 2009

At this point I have the understanding that Catriona has been discussing the period and style of the production with our costume designer Carmen Alatorre. Carmen is one of my dearest friends in the faculty which I shared a brief work experience in the past in the production of Full Monty in March 2008 where she was costume designer and I was her assistant.

The first set of images that Catriona shared with me was the makeup for a production of Arturo Ui in 2005 by The San Harkand and Cie Theatre Company in Marseille, France. (figure 11) The actor's faces in full makeup caricaturization human features accentuating lines of expression with heavy makeup that might be described as a grotesque clown, a Buffoon. The use of white base makeup combined with deep shadows and very expressive black mouths and eyes gave me the creepy feeling of an aesthetic dark comedy. Right away I knew this production was going to go against many given Shakespearean traditional makeup and aesthetic standards, and that I would need to create something as punctual as the makeup but more subtle for the eye.

The second sets of images were taken from the Yard Dogs Road Show web page gallery (figure 12). This is a company that describes itself as a "hobo cabaret, a living patchwork of vaudeville and rock and roll". Same case as the one before, this site does not give strong hints about their sets but they carry a strong aesthetic makeup and costume

concept. This style might be well described as eclectic, taken corsets from different periods, vivid fabric patterns, the sensuality and humor of an empowered cabaret dancer and the feeling of rust and age in everyone's attire. For me, the images meant freedom of period and style adding a little bit of worn out glamour and twisted sense of humor.

March 24, 2009

It took approximately two weeks to organize a visit to the Telus Theatre, several emails between Catriona, Wendy Atkinson and myself finalized when we visited the theatre on Thursday March 26th at ten in the morning.

March 26, 2009

Catriona and I met already at the interior of the theatre. It was not the first time I was in the site, there has been a production of *Medea* a year before that set really high standards for future productions and use of space. For that production, the towers were placed almost on the round, eliminating three front towers which served as set and backdrop for the play. I remember two very assertive decisions made by the set designer; one was the creation of an intimate space, where little table lamps were placed in the lower level tables, and second, was the use of the catwalk as a performing platform for the actors.

When we arrived to the place, the towers were placed in a horseshoe shape, pushing the remaining backstage against the wall. To me, this was a performing room twice as big as I remembered that small and intimate space was suddenly stripped and open. There were

several rows of chairs placed in the semicircle, shape that appears to be the ideal placement if you intend to use the theatre at its maximum capacity. I took a close look to the structure of the towers, the number of catwalks, the materials, booth lighting and registered everything in my camera. We didn't want to jump into any conclusions about a final configuration, and had many questions about the possibilities and technicalities of it. First of all, we didn't know if we could remove the floor, how many towers were mobile and the cost of moving them would be.

Another elemental question came to us, how many people in the audience we would want our production to have. Even when we initially decided not to jump into conclusions, we were thinking about what we needed to do in case we wanted to create an alley. Should the tower below the booth was mobile, were we able to open a pit? My coming production of *Master Builder* was going to be produced before *Romeo and Juliet*, and I was going to be able to work at the Telus with a specific configuration before deciding what the fait of *Romeo and Juliet* would end up looking like.

March 28, 2009

Mail from Catriona: "After meeting the other day, I have been looking back at the text and think it would be a good idea to get back to basics/essentials. I started to become confused by all of the possibilities open to us and am going to start looking at images of Italy - specifically Verona (but other places too) - and seeing how they effect my reading of the text. When I was in Italy I saw many, many villages/towns built "in the round" and I think that this could be helpful to look into visually or draw inspiration from. Here's a link to an image that speaks to me, particularly given what we touched upon the other day:

<http://www.travelplan.it/img/verona4.jpg> . (Figure 13) Also, I spoke with Ron after design class on Thursday and he said that moving centre the tower from below the booth wouldn't be possible - it's anchored there and is not able to move. He suggested that we remove seating from there and that way use it for entrances and to create the alley-like/in the round effect.” To start with, this picture has a very different character than the images we have been discussing previously. There are three important characteristics to look at: the first one is the colour and lighting in it, there is a sepia tone and light coming through small windows; second, there is the feeling of an intimate public area achieved by the scale of the buildings and the central gate, there might be a proportion resemblance to the Telus theatre; and third, the central gate gives direction, and frames two entrances to the space. My first reaction towards this photograph was to give the theatre the character of an Italian piazza, I might want to get rid of the central tower to create a gate entrance, and a very characteristic floor treatment that might resemble cobble stone in a specific pattern.

The second part of the email reads as follows: “I have been mulling it over and am starting to warm to the idea of using the tower as Juliet's balcony (if sightlines are not an issue) - I think the more we can use the space the way it is (with creativity), the better. With that, what do you think of the idea of using the in-the-round as a way to create the feeling of an Italian Piazza? Seating on the floor area could be caf-like to give the feeling of street plus the towers as homes above. As well, I have some ideas for the tomb scene that are inspired by your suggestion of forced perspective.” Her idea to my understanding is to use the theatre as a coliseum, and use the tower below the control panel as Juliet's balcony.

Maybe we should schedule another meeting in the Telus? Or even just have a coffee? And when are you leaving to go to Mexico?" I was going to leave to Mexico and Catriona was going to go to Ottawa.

March 29, 2009

Very late that night I replied, "I have been saturated with work. But let me think about it, I have been a couple of times in Italy as well, especially in the south" The idea of the plaza was kept in my mind for the rest of the summer.

April 9, 2009

There were a series of emails regarding the schedule of next meeting on April 15 at the costume shop. At this point I was doing some obvious research about past productions, especially past ballet productions. Catriona and I had been talking about using acrobats and dancers for the production, she was going to be a choreographer as well as a director, also, there was going to be a live band with original music playing. My research was going to be about studying sets designed specifically for dance, my intention was to create a space for movement.

We met at the Pendulum café at UBC. I brought with me a couple of my favorite design books: *Diaghilev and Russian Stage Designers* and *Design for Performance/ From Diaghilev to Pet Shop Boys*. I bookmarked some past productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, a very interesting floor treatment, and while we were flipping the pages of some Diaghilev's past

productions Catriona pointed out an image of what it could have been a design for Don Juan's Ballet painted in 1929.

Past productions of *Romeo and Juliet* were not appealing to us regarding the style and period they were designed for, but there was one that attracted our eyes in terms of lighting and colors. The scenes was designed by Nicholas Georgiadis for the ballet production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the tones for The Market Place were rusty sepia and the ones for the tomb were some blues with high contrasts. (figure 14) There was a picture of a painted floorcloth designed by Deanna Petherbridge for the production of Bloodlines. It was a checkered floor, manipulated to create movement in the space, the tones were sepia colors one darker than the other one. This image spoke to us as cabaret; would we use a checkered floor for our piazza? In that sense, we would create an inside/outside feel, we can also suggest comedy, a circus like feeling. Most Italian plazas have cobbled stone placed in a specific pattern, and some old neoclassical houses kept their checkered floor as a representative characteristic of their big party rooms. Overall the Don Juan's Ballet image was the most representative for Catriona, and we kept going back to look at the characteristics that were important for us. (figure 15) The image is backed by positive and negative stripes that go from wall to floor, in the stage there is a thin stair, which runs from left to right; on the steps one can see actors in their circus type costumes doing their acrobatics.

April 16, 2009

I sent an e-mail to Catriona wishing her a good trip to Ottawa and I attached the Don Juan's Ballet scanned picture from our past meeting, she said she wanted to keep the image

in her mind while she was away. Later that day Catriona replied “Here is that site:

http://mangiafuoco.canalblog.com/albums/representation_14_11_04/index.html “ I must had

lost the location of the Arturo Ui production that originated and led our design intentions.

May 21, 2009

Opening night for *Ten Nights of Dreams*, a show directed by Matthew Romantini, choreography and performance by Colleen Lanki. I was part of the projections design team. Designed two full “dreams” and finished a third one. The project took a lot of time to accomplish, since we were designing in combination to the choreography, lots of workshop time and projection experimentation. The show was a success with all nights sold out. Should I use projections in *Romeo and Juliet*? The show required a lot of technical equipment and specialists; would we have the time to integrate projections to the show?

May 25, 2009 – June 8, 2009

Took a plane to Paris, I’ve been wanted to visit the wonderful city by myself to get inspired and to experience other type of culture. Catriona has mentioned this city a lot and I wanted to experience some theatre and some hidden treasures that I’ve yet to discover.

It would be important to point out different places and situations that influenced me directly into the design of the show, looking back to how the play ended up looking; it is not a

coincidence the final result. My travel notes and pictures are an essential part of my research.

June 13, 2009

Took a plane to Mexico

June 26, 2009

Jay Henrickson, our production manager wrote an e-mail welcoming us to the 2009/10 season, the document was the production Assignments as of current date:

Show: *Romeo and Juliet*

Venue: TELUS Studio Theatre

Tech Weekend: January 16 & 17, 2010

Open: January 21, 2010

Close: January 30, 2010

Design/ Management Assignments

Director: Catriona Ledger (Thesis)

Set Design: Ana Luisa Espinoza (Thesis)

Lighting Design: Conor Moore

Costume Design: Carmen Alatorre

Sound Design: Patrick Pennefather

Production Management: Jay Henrickson

Stage Manager (faculty advisor): Bob Eberle

Scenic Artist: Lorraine West

With Conor, I also shared a previous experience; it was at the production of *Trojan Woman* that he was designing lights as well. My previous relation with the lighting designer was very pleasing, and he is a great character to work with, I was confident that he was going to do his best in this show.

I don't remember when was I noticed by the Technical Director (Keith Smith) himself he was going to be the one for *Romeo and Juliet*, but I remember it was a pleasant surprise. His knowledge and creative solutions helped ease the technical and budget difficulties that came on the way.

July 7, 2009

Another email from Catriona saying hello to all the designers involved in the project. Her attitude is always positive and full of excitement.

August 16, 2009

The director is back from her trip to Ottawa, I start feeling the pressure to come up with renderings and drawings.

August 27, 2009

Less than six months to go! Today I had a meeting with Catriona and showed her three initial renderings for three different scenes. The first one was the image of Juliet's room, second was the party scene and third the tomb. This first sketches showed several features that I kept all the way till opening day: the theatre in the round without the front tower, the first attempt of a chequered floor, hanging red curtains/silks, the placement of lighting behind the opening of the towers, audience seats and coffee tables on stage and the led lights forming an ivy coming out form the centre. (figure 16) My intention was to have some sort of set that would become different things throughout the play, something that can be mobile and mechanical, these four posts would hold the bed up and then serve as railings for it to go down, acrobats would be able to climb and slide down form them as well. The curtains would transform into the silks acrobats would be dancing and hanging from. Features that were erased were the rococo bed, the aerial acrobats and four posts in the middle of the stage. In the future we would slowly discard the possibility of using aerial acrobats due to time, budget and safety concerns.

Catriona initially liked the look of the renderings and I think she needed some time to process them, so she waited a few hours and then wrote me an email later that day. "Let's step back for a second and forget about everything that came before. I remember you mentioning an interest in having the set be able to appear and disappear. I would like to see if there is something that we can come up with that is simple simple simple. In keeping with my European Vaudeville/Circus motif, can we look at the possibility of the actors building the set

and taking down as each scene requires? Each scene is a circus or vaudeville act. This means that we won't have as many levels but I can live with that. What if, for example, the balcony is built of a pyramid of chairs or if it's Juliet on stilts. This is more in keeping with what I envision for the entire show and is ultimately simpler and more effective. Have a think on that and I will see you on Sunday."

August 28, 2009

I wrote "I agree in going back a few steps. I was building a little model for the theatre last night and it really made me think about what we are doing (not that my recent design is not glorious, hahaha). My original idea for my thesis was about movement and allowing the actors to move. Also a movable space. The space is perfect to speak in three dimensions, so let's think that way. I'm going to show you what I'm about next Sunday; I think you will really be interested in some of the processes that will help us come up with a great design. I'm not even thinking about style (although I could not help myself try different shapes for those legged pedestals) or embellishments at this point, just back to basics.

I needed to stop the production of renderings and go back to basics: build a little model of the theatre and try to design in it. These will allow me to easily think about proportion scale, but most of all try to have in mind the shape and the different features the Telus theatre offers. I wanted to create a three dimensional map of the space, I don't want the design to be flat, the intention is to use all the space in between, every tower and catwalk is a possibility. I built some scaled pedestals and placed them in different way on stage, this way Catriona will

be able to visualize easily and would help me discard or embrace the idea of the famous pedestals. (figure 17).

August 30, 2009

Catriona and I had a meeting today, I am not certain what we accomplished in this long meeting but we shared a lot of ideas, looked at the model and fantasize about the set for several hours. It was the first time I was really able to look inside Catriona's mind and imagination, her apartment was covered in kraft paper, there were notes everywhere and little drawings in between. When we took a close look to the model with the pedestals it was really easy to discard the image and move into a new direction. She started describing the play as she imagined it would happen, the way she narrated the story sounded as a continuous very musical way of presenting things. She described movement all the time, choreographing the actors in between scenes would mark the end and the beginning of scenes, she always mentioned set pieces or actors being as smoothly movable as possible.

There was a series of little sketches of the floor plan of the theatre where I experimented with the sight-lines and geometric characteristics of the space, there was not a definite intention but just to find out applicable shapes to the space. I don't think I showed this to the director but kept them to myself.

I was trying to come up with an idea of a climbable object until she showed me an iron rod gate and suggested we could use it as our main feature. Two things were very attractive

to us, the first one was the ageless feel of the curls, and second was the sturdiness iron can offer and serve as a climbable playing ground for actors.

I believe this is when I started worrying a little bit about the budget, I knew that costumes was going to be a great expense, and that I needed to pull out an incredible idea so that the theatre school may want to even consider spending a little bit more on set.

Catriona sent me the picture of the iron rod gate, this would remind me of the importance to integrate the idea into the design and play around with its possibilities. This was the end of straight lines in the design and the beginning of curling elements.

September 16, 2009

I've been working on the idea of the iron rod gate, I have some sketches and ways we can use the gate for the actors. I met with Catriona today and showed all the sketches I have been working on. From what I remembered is that she liked the spiral checkered floor very much, so this would be the starting point for everything else. I definitely put the gate in between the gap on the towers in order to give some direction and to create an outdoor and inside feel for the same space (figure 18). I want to extend the lines of the spiral floor to become the start of the squiggles of the door, also for them to become the ivy crawling to the top of the towers (figure 19).

In the beginning I wanted the door not to be in one place by itself, I wanted it to move inside the space completely, or to have some detachable pieces that could become the bed

or the balcony (figure 20). I also imagined the gate to have some depth, giving space for the actors to sit and crawl easily.

After having the meeting with the director she was convinced that the balcony was going to be built by the actors and that there was no need for us to build anything for it. When talking about the bed, she repeated and reminded me of the use of benches or stools, and that those might be put together and form the bed or any other furniture or set piece we needed. She described that a buffoon this locked creature that was let out, a rusty and leftover feel would always come together with it. We imagined the floor should be treated in an aged type of way, maybe some old blood stains would show the use and tear of it.

I reminded myself to contact scene painter Lorraine West and talk about the floor, being a centre focal point in my design.

September 27, 2009

I received another e-mail from Catriona asking me to go back to the idea of having a number of little cabaret tables for the audience and removing them to form set pieces. "Organic pieces that can be assembled and taken apart in surprising ways to create levels and locations are my top priority". I started forming a mental picture of how these coffee tables would look, the idea of an outdoor *café* was also in my mind so a little round coffee table was part of the idea. If we had as many tables in the ground floor/stage we can fit, these would become part of stage pieces, the actors would need to push them together and form set pieces with them.

October 2, 2009

Meeting with cat at green room, maybe we did not stayed there. I don't think we talk a lot about the play, first production meetings had started for Master Builder, but maybe that led Catriona to write the very extensive e-mail later that week. We scheduled a meeting with Sarah Rogers and Ronald Fedoruk, thesis supervisors for Catriona and I respectively to happen next week.

October 4, 2009

The director emailed me with several questions she has been working on, I think as part of her blocking and staging. Follow is a shorter and resumed version of this email:

To start with she sent me a chart with time and location, in which she described 10 different settings: the theatre, Verona street, room at Capulet's, outside Capulet's house, Capulet's hall, Capulet's garden, Friar Lawrence's cell, Juliet's room, Mantua street and Capulet's Tomb. This was very helpful, since I could identify exactly what places she wanted to identify in the play.

After reading the chart she described how she envisioned the play, most of it was to put in words what she and I had thought about the play, and some were points I had never thought about before. "In this production I would like to create a historic, universal world, a non-specific setting with a sense of history that is comprehensible to an audience. I would like

a simple, unified sense of design that enables the play itself to breath. If the historical time is restricted, the ambiguity of the text is also restricted and the humanity of the play can be limited”.

She already answered questions such as time frame, feeling of each scene and, which text they would use (1623). The events in the play take seven days with “one unrepresented day”, things happen in real time with night and day events. Shakespeare would place love at night and death in the mid day, a sense of speed throughout the play (quickly falling in love, marrying and dying). A differentiation of character between private and public and the shift between these two spaces, scenes of Friar’s cell followed by public ones, and scenes of Juliet’s room by Friar’s cell ones. The nature of the play would always be clandestine.

The ten environments would be achieved by change of light, actors, music and “simple pieces that can represent many different things”. And the balcony, garden, and tomb would be achieved with actor’s bodies.

I had a very clear idea of what Catriona wanted and I wanted, I have been working in the new renderings that would put all we discussed so far. I resumed the scenes into six very distinctive sets, each one with different lighting, position of the gate and placement of tables. I especially used lighting to change the character of the play since the lack of space and the need of simplicity on set were a given.

October 5, 2009

Meeting with Catriona, Ronald Fedoruk and Sarah Rogers. I had never been more certain and ready than for this meeting, I knew the time has come for me to start having a definite set and to start working on some definite construction documents. I brought with me the six renderings: Capulet's hall, Friar Lawrence's cell, the garden, Juliet's room, Verona street and the tomb scene.

The first image that I showed was Capulet's hall, (all images were from the same view point and were a combination of 3D modeling and a lot of coloring). The image showed the already seen and discussed floor red curtains hanging from four different points, the theatre dimmed sconces, and the gate. The gate would be placed in the gap between towers backed with a white cyclorama that had a strong red light in the background, tables would be in the cabaret position.

The second image was that of Friar Lawrence's cell; this image had no red curtains on it, but a strong white light would come out from the gate making the profile of the curls of the gate draw on the floor. The lines of the gate would preferably project on the actor's faces as a sign of being enclosed and trapped.

The third image was the image of the garden; the image showed half of the towers and the gate itself being covered in ivy, this ivy would have a light of its own. The feeling of this scene is magical and romantic, a sense of mystery and danger should also be perceived. The

balcony scene would occur during this type of lighting and set and the hole set is bare for the actors to form the balcony.

The fourth image, Juliet's room; in this image the softness and palatial feel is kept with half the curtains swagging at the top of the catwalk. The bed is placed in front of the gate, this one becomes the headboard, and the bed is done by the pieces of curtain that were once hanging from the ceiling. A soft and red light implies romance and intimacy.

The fifth image is the one of Verona street; a feeling of being outside is done by turning the sconces on and giving the theatre the impression of being a plaza. There is a suggestion of adding light to the tables.

The sixth and last image is the one of the tomb. This one appears with the gates open and with glowing ivy. In the back a slit of light comes through the curtains and into the stage, a sign of death. The tables are placed in a cross shape in the middle of the set to direct the audience into what it would become Juliet's tomb. (figure 21)

The design was welcomed in a very positive way by everyone present in the room. Questions started emerging, especially questions about the tables and the way we could use them as set pieces. Another important point of the conversation was a new aspect of the set that has not been brought by me or the director, the need of an elevated platform in the centre that ideally would move and disappear throughout the play.

In response to the platform questions I started throwing the idea of creating a semi rectangular platform that would continue through the opening and that would finish in the ceiling parallel to the one in the floor. Sarah and Catriona would not like the idea of having a rectangular shape since that would create edges in the way actors would play. There was a couple of foolish responses from my part saying I was against circular platforms previously suggested by Sarah, they seemed to me obvious and not interesting enough especially when the space itself is a circle. Ronald kept quiet and tried to understand where all this was going, he asked me to listen to how Catriona was describing the action (in a fluid spiral way, one thing happening in one level and other three in another).

Mobility of the set pieces/tables was a must. I came up with the idea of a puzzle, the tables would come together and form a puzzle, this puzzle would become the elevated platform. Everyone in the room seemed to love the idea and the meeting was over, solving all set initial issues and giving the director a more concrete idea of what was going on. A future very soon meeting would have to happen soon, so that Catriona would have the tables with herself and that she would be able to play with them in different positions.

October 9, 2009

I met with Catriona to talk about our puzzle pieces. I have been working in integrating the shape of the tables into the floor's drawing. I want all the lines in the overall design to have a reason, not only to be placed there because they are needed. I started re-designing the floor drawing having in mind I needed twelve tables, the number is the number of tables

we can put around the stage giving the impression of a cabaret or a plaza. Also, the lines would have to go up and shape the gate and ivy that crawls up the towers.

I wanted the tables not only to come together as a puzzle, but to have different heights depending on their position, and Catriona needed them to all be able to nest. She also needed the two or three larger tables to come together and to be large enough to represent a bed and a tomb. I worked on a set of twelve in four different levels, the shorter would be one foot height and the tallest three feet; the effect of nested stairs would be another effect we wanted to achieve with the position of them.

After a couple of meetings and with Ronald's advise we figure out we just needed eight tables, actually just seven, since the tallest ones would form one strong and movable pedestal. I also augmented the size of the pedestal so that they would be able to use as a dancing stage and fighting arena, this piece was too big to be able to be moved by actors so Keith Smith (Technical Director) decided to integrate air casters in six points. The big pedestal kept the desired shape that matched the floor and the other six smaller tables, they color scheme also matched the checkered floor pattern. I would have wanted the big pedestal to be split at least in two, but the need of moving it fast between scenes and stick them together was too big of a problem. In the end the six tables lost the meaning of being in harmony with the pedestal, which had very thick legs to house the air casters, compared to the lighter smaller looking tables.

October 31, 2009

I have heard from Catriona that she wanted to integrate some circus stunts into the play to be able to achieve the cabaret/circus feel; we always thought that the scene with the highest potential to achieve the feel was the party scene. Fire and black light were always in mind when thinking about the play.

Catriona cast Barbara Kozicki to play two very important roles: Sister Lawrence and an entertainer in Capulet's party scene. Barbara was planning to juggle with fire and do a black light performance as well, aspects which needed two very important characteristics in terms of set and lighting: everything in set needed to be fire proofed and the need to add black light lamps. The lighting designer had some difficulty to be able to get the black light paint to glow under the light, in the end the effect was achieved although it was not too clear to the distracted audience. In terms of fireproofing the set, major design decisions needed to be made, all curtains and fabric needed to be treated with fireproof liquid, and the ivy needed to be made from a fireproof material other than plastic.

Later in the process, Janet Bickford (props), ran a couple of fireproof test with the ivy we had in stock, turned out that even with fireproof liquid the ivy would be highly flammable. A tough decision needed to be made, the only material that came to our mind was to use tin like leaves. I suggested it was a type of craftwork that one easily find in Mexico, and given that I was going to go there for Christmas holidays I made the suggestion of bringing them.

November 2, 2009

Barbara contacted Jay Henrickson and Keith Smith to talk about the fire in the play. She made sure to point out she had ten years experience, that she carried personal liability insurance and that she was already familiar with the fire permits at the Vancouver Fire Department. The director and I hoped that the fire would become a reality in the show.

November 4, 2009

Took a plane to Mexico

November 5, 2009

I have been working on some sketches for the tables, but was still indecisive in the way they could work out (figure 22). Later today I received an e-mail from Barbara telling me that they were setting up a time to do a fire demonstration for Jay. This was good news! They would consider the use of fire.

November 8, 2009

I received the first edited draft for the play along with casting list and contact list. Stephanie is requesting contact names for my assistant. I have been told that Jessica Jeffrey is going to have the job of my assistant; in the past I was also told that Mandi Lau was going to assist me. I received news from Mandi later in the process, that she was not going to be

available for the dates *Romeo and Juliet* was going to happen, although she later turned out to be a great photographer and filled me up in a couple of meetings. I knew I would need the most help at printing Vectorworks documents and finish drawings; and Jessica's skills with that specific platform are "pretty rudimentary".

November 10, 2009

Flew back from Mexico

November 13, 2009

Another email from the stage manager about the December break, rehearsals will stop December 22nd and will resume January second. I started to get worried about how to break the news about my already booked flights to Mexico I was going to leave December 14th and come back January fifth.

November 18, 2009

We had our first production meeting today; in my brief career as a designer I believe these meetings should be called Design meetings with a couple of other things. I am always very nervous about the first and last meetings.

I remember having a conversation with Catriona before this meeting about the general attitude towards the play, we knew there were going to be a lot of elements that will cause a

lot of trouble. I suggested her that she could make an initial announcement of a yes attitude towards things, and so she did.

I started by saying I was working on the model and showed the initial renderings that not everybody has seen before. I was asked for scaled drawings for material ordering, especially the door, which needed the most material. Then I explained the function and shape of the twelve tables, metal should be needed to hold the tables steady but light enough to be able to be carried by actors. About the door, I thought we could use rebar for the embellishments, Jay suggested they would need something stronger than rebar for the frame.

In the initial conversations about the LED lights for the ivy, to whom every one since the beginning had many concerns. Jay asked me for the total length of lights needed and colour required, he said it might be too expensive.

We moved on into the drapes; for this Janet needed drawings and quantity. There were issues about fireproofing the material, in the past the liquid had damaged the fabric. They were going to look for fabric that is inherently fireproofed.

November 20, 2009

Information about textiles was sent from Jay Hernickson, we had agreed on doing some research about possible materials.

November 23, 2009

I scheduled a meeting with Conor today. He was not present at the first meeting, so we went through the play and showed him the renderings in detail. He was very excited and was going to work in our options. I sent him a *Vectorworks* file of the ground plan as we were talking.

I have been having back and forth conversations with my assistant, I thought that we could work on the model together, although that never happened. I finished the model by myself.

November 24, 2009

I sent PDF's files for the door, the towers and tables to the production staff. I made the mistake to send them in decimal feet dimensions, which Jim replied "we don't have a tape measure for that". Big mistake from my part, need to fix these drawings as soon as possible. (figure 23)

November 25, 2009

What a nightmare! I have been working in the model all night and as soon as I was able to go out my building and start walking towards the theatre it started pouring rain. I ran inside and opened a trash bag and tape it around the corners of the model, it was barely enough to cover the top. As soon as I stepped out, wind and rain started ruining the model, in

the middle of my journey I decided to protect my model and go inside a building. I decided to call a cab, wet, ripped by the meter and late I arrived to the production meeting.

I showed the model, some pieces were falling apart because the rain bent the edges and the glue stopped working in the lateral walls of the theatre. Conor asked about the accurateness of the floor paint in the model, it showed purple tones; I replied the print was not accurate and showed color chips of the real tones. The cloth hanging from the centre donut raised questions about functionality during the play and the mechanics of it. After the meeting I discussed with Ronald, Sarah and Catriona the mechanics of the curtains in detail and finally decided on having only two of them come down and be detachable. Lynn asked me for a fabric estimate and set drawings.

About the doors, there were several concerns: they will need a pivot to be able to open both ways, they need a support frame and practicality other than opening and closing. I emphasized that the adornments could hide the structure frames, and Catriona mentioned that if there was a possibility of the doors to be able to support weight it would be only depending on the budget. Jay pointed out that there was little time and that we would not be able to start the build before the break.

There were another set of questions for lighting, LED lights and their functionality. I agreed on building some adornment tests (hemp rope plus black ivy plus LED lights plus curled rod) with different tones and show Catriona the final look of the glowing ivy. After the meeting I built the models, Catriona looked at them the next day and was very pleased with what she saw. The big problem was to make the fireproofed leaves.

I appreciated Catriona's email later that day, "I'm sorry I didn't take the time to tell you how impressed and inspired I was by your model today. Very exciting! Thanks so much for doing such a wonderful job. I have heard many positive comments about it and though you should know that it looks great! Catriona ". Sarah Rodgers wrote: "I agree- it is gorgeous!"

November 26, 2009

Keith was worried about the need for the tables to nest together. Since the legs were far apart and long enough to cause them not to be as stable as needed, several attempts in adding a base were made. In the future we would discuss all the positions needed for the tables and if they really needed to be all the way nested.

November 30, 2009

Today I received an email from props asking me for direction in terms of the fabric for the curtains. They wanted to know if it was sheer or cotton, and the fullness of the cloth. Also fireproofing of the fabric would cost \$1224 and therefore they asked me to cut the swag around the towers.

I replied that I was open to use any other fabric in stock, even if it was another color. Cotton broadcloth was the way to go just as long as it had a nice looking swagging effect and that the three feet wide piece would make the trick. The only possibility was a horrible blue organza that was flaky and caused allergies to people.

December 1, 2009

A very busy day, I kept telling everyone that the things they need are going to be ready right away, I should not do that.

There was an initial props list by Catriona; important elements to look after were the two to three cloths to cover the tables to match the color if the curtains and six sheer sheets (five in beige and one in gray).

The cost of turning off the smoke detectors will be \$368 that this will obtain outside the production budget, "I am pleased that we will be able to have the fire dance as part of *Romeo and Juliet*."

The Technical Director is asking me to for details about the table leg thickness and bracing detail, he is completing the steel order. I started working on those details, hope to finish them by tomorrow.

While they were doing the fire test, Catriona noticed that hanging the curtains at any point will interfere with the sight lines completely. She suggested leaving them hanging down by the towers. I started working in detail drawings of the curtains so that everyone's questions and suggestions would be solved.

Props have been working on reducing costs for the fabric. They are worried that fireproofing costs will take all our budget, "if you can reduce the amount of fabric we need, it

would help a lot.” In the drawings I will try to have option B open in case we need to cut on fabric.

December 2, 2009

One of my assistants, Mandi, is not able to be at the design presentation on Sunday, but she offered to help with drawings or research. At this point things are becoming so urgent that I don't have time to organize it for someone else.

Another production meeting today, this time I brought with me drawings for the floor paint, detail drawings for the tables, front view and top view for the curtains and a new ground plan. Jay scheduled two paint days in January before tech weekend, January 9th the night of January 10th, he insist in me and Lorraine to meet face to face. (figure 24,25,26 and 27)

Discussions about tables were not concluding, there are still many questions in the air, and Keith might make the order with the information that we have. The curtain drawings clarify some questions, but still detaching points were in doubt. About the LED lights, later that night I remembered going to Canadian Tire and purchase all of their white lights, it was almost in the middle of the season and there were not a lot of them available.

Conor asked me to send him a section of the fabric swagging towards the donut so that he can place his lights in an appropriate position.

December 4, 2009

I had a meeting with Ronald today; I think we agreed on losing three tables and fuse the two taller ones into one. He also asked me not to be so detailed about the big table structure but just figure out the shape of it. This big one would be large enough to be a bed and a tomb. I made a new drawing of them and send them to Keith right away that evening.

The drawings showed the tables in two different configurations, one was forming two opposite stairs going to the top pedestal, and the other was them put together as a group. Keith asked if they will ever be placed as I initially drew them, to which I respond that it might never come together like that but that I was not sure.

December 6, 2009

Design presentations were held at the Telus theatre. The whole cast was sitting in a circle and Catriona made everyone introduce themselves in very positive way. Conor was not there for his presentation and he sent one of his assistants to represent him and talk about his design. I gave a little presentation to the cast of *Romeo and Juliet* and it was a very pleasant surprise to see everyone's faces being interested into what the space will look like for the play. They were especially attracted to the garden scene, where the glowing garden would appear. Carmen's presentation was also well received; everyone looked very enthusiastic and eager to start.

December 7, 2009

There are still questions about the amount of red fabric needed; Janet asked if 60 meters were still ok since she wants to order and get the formula for the fireproofing. My response is that 60 meters are fine.

Apparently \$200 of the original set budget was going to go to costumes. I was a little disappointed and decided I was going to talk to Catriona about that. There was a need to reduce the price of the metal order, so I decided to shorten the door a third of its original size while still having tall adornments at the top of the door simulating a full size door covering the entire gap between the towers (figure 28). I agreed on drawing some simpler adornments, which will also reduce the amount of steel. I have to work on the new drawings for the door tonight.

December 8, 2009

My assistant Jessica cannot assist to our production meeting tomorrow, she was in charge of fixing the curtains for the model, I have not seen the final result I hope she did a good job.

I'm worried I will not be able to attend two production meetings before the Christmas break; I emailed Mandi and asked her if she was able to attend those two meetings. She

replied that she was only going to attend the meeting of the 16th; I have no one to attend the 23rd meeting on my behalf. Jessica is going to be out of town as well.

Another production meeting today, I'm concerned about this being my last meeting before the break.

There are questions about the curtains, this time all four curtains are going to be detachable from the catwalk, Janet ordered 100 meters of fabric and was still unclear about the design. More suggestions and options were put on the table about the construction of leafs, props suggested fire screen mesh that THTR 99 students could work on and Keith said we could tie them with zip straps.

The Technical Director asked Catriona how much they are going to be moving the big pedestal around, to which she replied "they will be moving it a lot". Keith said he will be building air cast legs for the table but that will imply that the legs will be wider.

I sent a PDF file to Stephanie with the shape and measure of the tables, I told her about the situation for the next production meetings.

We met Lorraine West at the Backstage lounge, this was a very relaxed atmosphere to have a meeting. I showed the drawings to Lorraine and she was impressed by the detail on them, I had included a grid that later on will help her draw the exact drawing on the floor. I told her that the design on the floor was the main feature of the set and therefore needed special attention. She started commenting about color, the print has some purple tones, but I brought

with me the paint chips with the exact colors we needed, and I would need to show her a big piece of wood painted with the color scheme I wanted.

December 9, 2009

Catriona contacted me and expressed her concern about the dimension of the platform being too small. It is interesting to make the recount: we went from two tables 3 ½ by 3 feet tables with metal legs to one long 7 by 3 feet platform on air casters, and now it seems that she need a big square platform? Catriona preferred the seven by five platform to accommodate the table.

December 10, 2009

I have been not taking full care of the curtain issues; I decided to work on some detailed fabric drawings that will show the curtains in their three positions in a front and top view. I sent the file to the scene shop today (figure 29). I added the eight or eleven pieces including the desired swag plus the four swagging pieces from the towers to the centre of the catwalk plus the four pieces of fabric form the centre of the catwalk to the floor giving me a total of 79.52 meters for option A or 92.22 meter for option B. The 100 meters ordered would be enough fabric. To these drawings Keith replied he was concerned about the fabric going all the way down where the audience will be sitting.

In the rehearsal report they are requesting set pieces as soon as possible, masking on the upstage towers, and rehearsal tables. They are considering placing the band in the

bottom level of the upstage-left tower and lose four seats by going that, in our initial conversations we never discussed losing seats for the band, for me this will not imply any difficulties, just need to crunch audience members tighter together.

December 12, 2009

This Saturday morning was one of the many times I felt I did not know about the subject, in this case it was painting. I proudly showed Lorraine West what I thought it was a nice combination for the checkered floor, I made two different combinations for her to look at. Right away she started mixing and matching colors, she started doing her own squares with a much better notion of tones. The first colors came out too dark after they dried out, until we finally hit a very nice tone of off white and dark brown. We finally agreed on the colors, a very nice touch was the splatter of “dried blood” all over the area.

December 14, 2009

As I'm packing my bags to go to Mexico I received an email from Sally. None of my assistants are available for the December 20th and 22nd rehearsal. Keith is not making any promises, but I'm pretty sure he is going to have the platform ready for tomorrow. He is asking me for a new seat count with the new cuts to the upper stage left seats to the theatre and to clarify where the fabric will be placed in its off stage preset position.

Before I board the plane, I managed to finish the PDF with the new seat count and send the 180 seat theatre configuration to Keith. About the curtains, I have not received a concrete decision to whether they are ever going to leave their original position.

The production meeting took place without my presence, my assistant Mandi Lau was there on my behalf to take notes and to clarify certain questions. She showed everyone the piece of floor with the sample we developed with Lorraine, asked when the tables were going to be ready, and told that the LED lights have been purchased and needed to be painted. Keith responded that the tables were going to be ready by tomorrow and Janet needed the measures to make tablecloths for them; Catriona then asked how much space was there backstage to store the big platform, to which he responded he thought it will only be placed upstage of the gate. I think the tables were not the big concern of the meeting, but the LED lights were the most difficult thing to work with. Everyone expressed their concern, Keith wanted a definite plan before starting to work with them and said they are not able to be dimmed, Conor was concerned if the lighting instruments were to obscure the view of the lights, Janet was going to go away for holidays and was concerned about the labor, and Catriona wanted to have a plan from me by tomorrow if not the lights would be cut down from the show.

In response to all comments made during the production meeting, I sent some emails regarding clarifications and decided to respond to the lights issues after I give it a lot of thought. The first one I wrote was to Conor, he was concerned that the LED lights will interfere with the lights hanging in the second tier of the balcony, so I asked him to send me an elevation of the towers with an approximate visual of his lights. Anyhow, the design of the

ivies is organic and they can adapt an wrap around the lights without ruining the focus that the lighting designer decides.

In the afternoon, Mandi attended the stumble through and sent her notes to me later that day as well as comments on the issue of the LEDs. During the rehearsal what was really interesting is that they rehearsed the balcony scene in the second tier on the stage left tower, meaning that the balcony is going to be a balcony itself. The piano was going to be placed on the ground level of the same tower, there is still no decisions whether they are going to use a real piano or a keyboard, in which case, there will need to be a casing for it.

After today's reviews I felt I have failed to be there for the team. One day not present and a original and essential idea can be cut for good from the show. I was afraid that cutting of the lights were a response of me not being there. I knew that I needed the director's backup to fight for our original ideas, so I wrote her the following email:

"I read the e-mail and I'm very sad that the lights mean a big problem to everybody, still I find hard to understand it. For the design purposes I think the curls with the ivy and lights is essential. It creates the atmosphere, and change the character of the theatre in the round. It also integrates the set into the audience space. Please do not get angry when the lighting guys make fun of the "Christmas lights" that they insist in calling them, they are wonderful! I insist! It obviously mean more labour and maybe that is why everyone is hesitant. I take full responsibility on the construction of them, and I'll get 99 students to help me finish the job. I will need a rehearsal schedule for January, so I can see when I can work on them, it will

maybe end up being at night. I'm also going to be at the Telus when the paint of the floor happens.

For the concern about the ivy being fireproofed, I'm making my best to find tin leaves here in Mexico, (they are very cheap). So, if I do not find a replacement for the leaves, then I would be inclined to cut them, but not until I make that effort”.

From past experience I know the best and cheapest places to find metal in Mexico City, I'm also familiar with its characteristics since I used to build models with it. In terms of labor.

I also consulted my supervisor and asked for his opinion about the lights. He later replied telling me he that “part of the process is to learn when to fight for those battles”. He told me he usually make decisions by “comparing the potential design impact of the effect, versus the amount of effort, cost, blood, sweat and tears required to create the effect”. To show me how to do that he listed five elements in the following order of importance: tables, gate, drapery, cyclorama and ivy lights and pointed out the design benefits and building requirements for all of them. In a few words, the ivies were only to be used in a decorative sense, only used in one scene, not dimmable and labor intensive; which made total sense in every aspect, a professional might have cut them and figure out another way to illuminate the garden scene.

In my personal taste, a show needs to have a surprise and sublime moment to it, especially when the set does not change dramatically from scene to scene. The moment

where the ivies will light up is the balcony scene, one of the most important and memorable scenes of all times, I need to make it as memorable as possible.

It was a wonderful surprise to receive an email from Catriona later that day apologizing about not backing up the plan to use the LED lights for the ivy. "If you say they can work, then I believe you- they looked wonderful when you showed them to me in the shop and I am sure you will find something beautiful to replace the leaves". This email meant the world to me, since the design relationship and the integrity of it depends at some point entirely on making compromises and sometimes putting one's foot down. The decision was made in my mind.

The director also let me know that the balcony scene was going to take place at the second tier, and that the problem only lied on where and how does the Telus allow Romeo to climb from. She suggested the possibility of using the curtains or the gate if it ends up being climbable.

She has already blocked the whole play using the middle platform but she is afraid it will not work at all. She hoped it can be stored out of the audience's sight during intermission in order to be able to use all of the stage space it needs. She is waiting for the other tables to be ready so she can have a clearer physical vision of the whole thing.

Conor sent me his comments about the placement of the lighting instruments hanged from the second tier balcony. About my request to see an elevation he sent me a rough elevation of the tower with only two symmetrical instruments one in each side of the balcony. He said that they might be three of them but that he will not have a clear idea until the final

stumble through, and that the effect of a garden scene might be achieved by having each tower instrument to glow just slightly plus the tower scones. I will have to make sure the lights on the ivy go around the instruments, I am almost certain there will be no problem since the lights will just disappear once we have all ivy turned on. I have to risk the fact that it might end up looking awful and that if the effect is not looking the way I thought all my effort will be done in vain.

Conor and I exchanged emails to confirm the positions of the cyclorama and traveller.

December 15, 2009

I had some time to figure out the seat count for the theatre and I sent a floor plan and a perspective to Keith with the seats. My concern was that from the 180 seats we had initially, we would end up with 174 seats.

Stephanie asked me for the measurement from the bottom row of towers to the second row of audience to tape it out. Later that night I replied that there was a six foot six inch space not including audience's legs. She also asked me about the possibility to have Romeo hiding inside the trap for act 3.3 and the way he could get inside. The technical director replied that they will need to add another day's work if they wanted access to the trap, or to use the ventilation system. This will mean it can take up to five minutes for the actor to be led through the passage and that to be aware of the weight on top of the upstage trap door.

December 16, 2009

Pops is asking about the fait of the ivy on the towers, she made the calculation of the expenses so far and there is no money left for it. Stephanie is asking whether the largest table can be hidden behind the towers or travellers, it seems that it is a possibility.

The large table was presented today for rehearsal.

December 17, 2010

I asked about a rough approximation of the dimensions in plan for the stairs, and showed in a PDF that if the stairs were to be built in the suggested way, the large platform will be able to fit underneath the stairs. If the cyclorama and traveller be flushed to the catwalk, then there will be not enough space. Keith replied by saying that the stairs were done and that they will come perpendicular to the tower, the only way to fit the unit was to move the traveller and cyclorama and scrim upstage.

The last request to props was to have a soft bedding for the bed (platform). Janet is “juggling things to fit a budget inadequate to the design concept”. I need to work on a design for pillows and to figure out if they are finally using the curtains as sheets for the bed. In response to this issue the stage manager clarified that they are still using the curtains for

bedding, that they only need to pillows for the bed, and that if some sort of padding is too expensive it is not a must have for the play. She asked me to suggest something to Janet, in terms of fabric it can be something else probably matching the colour of the floor.

December 18, 2009

I made sure Janet knew about what I was doing regarding the ivy, I went and purchased metal sheets for 32 dollars total, this will guarantee to be fireproof. The leaves will be painted my myself and installed before tech weekend, and that there was a fifty percent chance to be able to pull everything together with the lights but that I was going to take the risk. Catriona was actually relieved about the leaves situation she previously thought that the leaves were going to be the ones not making it.

I sent her a picture of the bed with the pillows. I suggested a couple of red pillows, preferably to be velvet with a centre detail, or pieces of the curtain fabric that were left.

December 21, 2009

Today is the last meeting before the holidays and I have no one to take notes for me, I hope my emails have been enough, although I think the proximity to the holidays will cause some insecurities towards all aspects of design. I noticed Ronald Fedoruk attended the meeting, I hope he can make some smart suggestions about upcoming issues.

It was a pleasant surprise that Keith, the technical director passed on the notes for today's meeting, I thanked him very much for this. Several points were discussed, table

heights, balcony access, shape of upper stage right stair to house the large table, plan for the vine effect, the gate, curtains, soft goods (cyclorama, scrim, traveler and masking), band area and seating plan.

The director is asking me to take the height of the large platform down six to eight. The technical director says that the pneumatic tanks will dictate how much we can shorten the legs, since the mechanics are inside the legs. He is asking if we need to reduce the rest of the tables as well. I replied pointing out the new dimensions in a PDF drawing, which embarrassingly I sent with inconsistent measures.

Table heights would not be changed, only the height of the large platform. Balcony access will consist of a very discrete structure to strengthen the second level railing and the addition of lino and gaff tape coverings in areas that are tread on. The upper stage right stair is going to be placed in between the towers by removing the black panel, this will allow the housing of the large platform underneath. There are questions concerning the system to release the curtains, the placement of them impedes some blocking. The cyclorama, traveler, scrim and masking are left to the end to house stairs and platform.

The seating plan is still in the air, there is no definite one and the Telus is enforcing a minimum of 180 seats.

Lynn asked about the detail in the ties for the curtains, would a bow be enough or something else.

The stage manager is asking about the flexibility of the position of the drapes in the towers, she mentions that Romeo and Tybalt use the space where originally a curtain was placed.

December 22, 2009

The rehearsal report mentions the existence of audience seating accommodating 180 places. They plan to remove the first downstage curtains set at the end of intermission, the second set has not been set yet. Jessica, one of the design assistants, was able to attend to today's rehearsal and made some comments about it. Some important points were: we need masking at the back of the upstage stairs, the pillows are already done, tables are heavier than expected and there are concerns about the sturdiness and final look and Jim still have some questions about the vine construction. She sent some images of the theatre with seating and the tables.

December 22 – January 1, 2009

During this period I started the construction of the leaves. I first had a mold done with the shape of vine leaves and afterward I cut them into the shape. I had planned to send them to metal cutter place, but the material was too thin and light to be able to hold the machine pressure. I proceeded to cut them by hand, with the help of other six friends and family. Initially I planned to have a couple thousand, since my intention was to cover at least six towers with it. In the end I finished cutting all the material. I knew the next step was to call all 99 students for help. The process will be the following: painting of hemp, leaves and light cables, weaving the lights into the hemp, attaching it to a wire, attaching it to the towers and

finally adding the leaves. It was quite an ambitious project, but I was sure I was going to get lots of labor from students that needed several hours to complete their courses.

January 4, 2009

I'm back to Vancouver. I'm sending some renderings to be shown in the show's website and program. Jessica is attending today's production meeting, I think I will not be able to attend the meeting. Notes include: the need to paint the leaves in black, the decision about adding another leg for the tables so they do not tip, there are questions regarding the electric keyboard and a way to hide it and the fireproofing is turning out to be a little more expensive than predicted but the fabric will arrive tomorrow and it will take a night to dry out. I feel really bad about not being able to attend the meeting, but I felt physically exhausted after being at the airport at four am in the morning and having to change flights in the US.

January 5, 2010

First thing in the morning I went to the shop to show the leaves that had been cut in Mexico. Right after I arrived Jim was very upset about me not being present at the production meeting, I apologize and moved on, there were many things to attend. The frame for the gate was already being built, they asked me to physically do the curls myself with the help of Madeline. They said they were not able to risk the fact of bending the curls and matching them to the other side. Maybe it was not my job to physically build my own set, but I took it as a challenge and as a reaffirmation to everyone that I was committed to the project.

I started by measuring the curls on my computer, this way I was able to calculate the length of the curves and cut the metal tube. After cutting all the pieces, I started bending them, the process turned out to be more than challenging, the material was extremely rigid and special tools and tricks needed to be done. I started by drawing the curl in the floor and visually start working with the bending machine, after having a desired shape, I needed to repeat the same shape to mirror the same curl for the other side of the gate. I finished the process at night and left them placed on top of the frame so Jim was able to weld them into the structure.

Lorraine West is requesting renderings of the table color pattern, also she need to see the colour ship of the Ox blood I showed her in our meeting. We are going to be painting Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

January 6, 2010

The curls are being welded into the structure, then, the whole thing needs to be covered in foam and painted in black. to be painted in black.

Conor Moore sent me a preliminary LX plot for the show with elevations of the towers. It was a pleasant surprise to find out that in the second tier of the adjacent towers of the centre there were no hanged lights. With this information I'm sure that the instruments and the ivies will not interfere with each other.

January 7, 2010

I sent the renderings Lorraine requested, we start painting tomorrow. I hope it is not too late to send them. I am making sure there are students to be helping out, the floor is a huge part of the design and need precision and many hands. I have both of my assistants coming to help, three other students are joining as well.

January 8, 2009

We are working on painting everything in black, after having the hemp and cables painted we started weaving them together. The difficult thing to achieve in this process is to keep all LED lights facing the same direction, keeping the hemp with no swags in order to hide the cable to look like ivy branches.

We started to paint at five in the evening. I noticed Lorraine have my drawings covered in a transparent plastic on a rigid base, this was definitely a good sign, this meant my design was going to be drawn with precision. We started by painting all the stage in white so that the colors would stay true to the ones we previously matched. Second step was adding two different tones using brushes to keep the smudge looking natural, this would become our light tone in the checkered floor. Only Lorraine, my assistants and I were present, students did not showed up for the call, apparently there was miss-communication.

January 9, 2010

After finishing painting with the base color we localized the points I previously marked on my drawings to use them as the base of a grid. Fourth step was to draw the grid in chalk making sure the lines were straight, this was easily made with a thread covered in chalk. Third step was to draw the grid of my checkered design, this was probably the hardest part since the curves needed to be smooth and continuous. We started painting the dark checkers there was some skill required to make them look natural, I quickly got a hold of the technique with Lorraine's instruction. She was in charge of making the edges look clean, finally we finished the whole stage. The tables were finished as well, the big platform will be kept in the same color.

The set is becoming a reality, the floor makes a lot of sense adding mobility and character. Still we need to add the ox blood finish to make it look even more dramatic and not so stark. Lorraine told me that this one of the most challenging projects she has ever worked on, and that she really enjoyed the process. This to me meant a lot, given she is one of the busiest and experience scenic painters in Vancouver. (figure 30)

January 10, 2010

The paint job caused such a sensation that more people are adding to help with the floor, it seems that when people see things become a reality and they like it things start to go easier. I noticed they even "signed" the floor with their footprint in one of the edges.

January 11, 2010

Today's production meeting is probably the first one in the whole process that I did not feel nervous. Everything is moving really fast, everyone is more confident to see some results on set. I have students that are helping with the ivy construction and will be ready for tech weekend. There is still lots of talk about the fabric for the curtains, the consensus consists on having the downstage curtains removed after the intermission. The curtains need to accommodate Romeo, and there will be a trial on Wednesday or Thursday. There will be some rosettes added to the ties in the drapes, they will not be finished until Monday.

I watched today's run through, although the floor is finished there is no gates or drapes hanging down. I noticed some details in the paint such as drippings inside the trap door, also the floor in front of the tower that we are going to be used is smudged in black exactly I originally designed it. The problem is that that space is going to be used and exposed, there are no seating in front, I suppose that my absence on Sunday was the result of this mistake. In the end there was little we can do to fix the problem, just hoped that the lights, and ivy covering it will help dissimulate the black smudge.

January 12, 2010

We moved all set pieces to the Telus studio. It was really rewarding to watch how the gate was installed, the technical director was so precise that the gate fit right into place with no modifications to be made. While I was organizing students to finish the ivy, I started placing the foam covering on the curls that have been previously painted in black. This is

when we realized that the lights inside the foam tube were not be able to fit inside, so I decided to cover it without the lights inside, and to later add hemp, lights and leaves as if it was ivy crawling into the gate.

I stayed at the theatre to watch another run through of the show. I know it is too late in the process to decide the fate of the curtains, but they are still not up and we need to see how they are going to work. Props sent a very detailed email about technicalities and characteristics of the fabric, in few words the fabric turned out to be stiff and toxic after the fire retardant treatments. Janet advise us not to use the curtains for the bed sheets nor to play with it at all, she suggests working on a red gauze to be used as sheets and to not release the curtains at all during the play. Before the rehearsal I had one second of Catriona's attention to decide the curtain detachment issue, we finally decided we would keep them attached.

January 13, 2010

Exciting day today in terms of building, I learned how to use the Handy Herman. To be honest I have been learning something everyday, coming up with solutions every time they expect an answer and accept criticism from everyone involve.

All the curtains are up, including some rosettes. I cannot ignore the fact that the rosettes are a little bit flat, but the curtains look incredible, especially when Conor focused some red lights pointing towards them.

January 14, 2010

I starting placing the ivy on the towers, I will need students to start sticking the leaves on top of them. During rehearsal today they asked me if they can apply some UV sensitive paint on the latex paint currently on the large table, Keith says its fine to do so.

January 15, 2010

I have a line production of ivy leaves, all students are helping me out to finish by tomorrow's beginning of tech weekend. This is the first time I plugged in the lights to see how they look like on set and it looks magical. We worked until late till we finished covering all branches with leaves.

January 16, 2010

We were looking at lighting cues, I suggested to make a bigger and more defined moon. The rest looks amazing, the back cyclorama is working perfectly well in term of setting up different moods during scenes. Me and the director think colors should be bolder and dramatic.

During lunch hour, I ran and painted the edge of the table with fluorescent paint. The result was not to evident, but one can distinguish it from the second and third tier.

January 17, 2010

The first run through with fire caused a lot of excitement. Everything is coming together smoother than I expected, the lights add a lot to the design.

For the second run, Keith connected the LED lights into a dimmer, we found out they were able to be dimmed! What a surprise, in the end they work and the look is sensational. During the run through I was just waiting for the balcony scene for the LED lights to softly appear, and they did. Everyone had good comments about the look, I am so glad I finally saw it happen.

January 18, 2010

Two days before the preview, everything looks almost in place. I decided to add lights to the crown of the gate. The middle curls are going to be covered in leaves without lights. All day I spent working on the top of the gate.

January 19, 2010

I finally finished the ivy! I acquired the ability to work on the dark while lights are being focused. The set looks very similar to the last renderings, I could not be more pleased by the final result.

January 20, 2010

Today is the preview, I heard the theatre was to the fullest of its capacity. I decided not to be present since I wanted the whole experience of an opening night. To my bad fortune the air system of the large table failed since one of the actresses pulled the hose and let the air escape by mistake. I heard it was a loud and long noise, and Juliet needed to be carried out to the stage by the actors. Keith immediately fixed the problem and made sure a specific trained actress do the trick every night.

January 21, 2010

Opening night, the show is sold out. I was really excited to be in an audience seat and enjoy all the show and pretended it was my first time watching the show. The result was wonderful, not only did my set turned out looking as spectated but the quality of the acting, the music, the costumes and the lights worked together in unison.

I have not heard a bad comment, everyone seems to have come out with a big smile. Double curtain call tonight.

January 22, 2010

The show was completely sold out! There is a line up every time for audience member looking to get in last minute. In general the run of the show was smooth, some problems with

audience taking flash pictures of the theatre before the show began and of the balcony scene with the LED lights on. I wonder if the ivies caused an impact? I feel really flattered.

January 25, 2010

Catriona asked me to do a design tour today for a class. I really enjoyed it, seems like everyone is going to see the show

January 27, 2010

Photo call is today, I was late for five minutes and didn't get in the full cast picture. I'm wondering if I will get any credit, or if people will remember me as the designer of *Romeo and Juliet*. Should have I been more involved in the publicity?

3.2 Conceptual Approach

My conceptual approach would be to create an eclectic space difficult to identify for physical theatre that would resemble a cabaret/romantic/vaudeville yet surrealist environment.

I am taking a major decision by painting the whole playing floor and convert it into a checkered winding pavement a combination of Notre Dame floor and Montmartre streets, the floor should be appropriate for an interior as well as an exterior scene. The colors I'm taking are old rustic colors of browns with dry blood splatter on top of it. This painted floor would be

central view point for the people sitting in the boxes. The non-orthogonal lines would imply a surrealist setting yet a resemblance of a historic undefined space.

Second big decision is to build a giant wrought iron rod gate that would create a major entrance utilizing the full height of the space. The shape of the details would be exaggerated in scale to imply a certain level of buffoonery with the past.

Third decision is to add ivy leaves that we can turn on and off around the central point of the stage. Ivy leaves are usually related to outside French Gardens and symbolize fertility of life, but they can also be found in cemeteries, where they climb buildings indicated the passing of time and death in the winter season. Adding LED light will create an illusion of romanticism with a little bit of naivety, the light should only indicate the lighting of young hearts.

Fourth decision is to add warmth and royalty to the metal furred theatre by adding curtains. The curtains should go around the whole theatre to mark the totality of the playing space and to frame different sections of it. The red will imply a certain air of *bourgeoisie* that would fit the story of two rich families.

I want a cyclorama and a scrim to project a soft backdrop and to be able to define silhouettes during intimate scenes. The love and death scene should take advantage of the profiles generated by the actors. The moods of the play should be defined by the different colors of the lighting in the cyclorama.

The space and set pieces will allow the total use of space in a free way. Breaking the set pieces into table size ones would give the director the freedom of choreographing the play with more freedom than constraints. The set pieces should be able to be arranged in groups to create certain shape, such as puzzle pieces, at the same time they should be flexible enough to be a set piece by themselves. They should be sturdy enough for actors to be able to move them and light enough for them not to be centre stage in any scene.

I want to create a playing field for actors, a place full of possibilities and at the same time shelter a land of dreams and stories.

3.3 Rehearsal Process

Many things changed throughout the rehearsal process. It was a very satisfying learning experience in the end, but I have to admit it was sometimes devastating. Three major things changed in the process: the position of the balcony, the shape and size of the tables, and the purpose of the curtains.

The balcony scene was probably the first thing one think about when going to watch *Romeo and Juliet*. Catriona changed her mind three times in the process, her approach towards physical theatre was to explore creating a balcony with actors. The first try was to carry Juliet an have actors become columns and steps, the idea was immediately put aside. The second approach was to have Juliet on top of the set pieces provided, the set pieces would form a tall single structure, the difficulty in getting tables secured and safe enough to be climbable made the director change her mind again. The last approach and the one that

became the final one, was to utilize one of the balconies or boxes already provided by the theatre, the only down side would be the loss of seats for the audience. I would have preferred using the centre of the door for Juliet to climb, and adding a pedestal for her to be sitting comfortably. The last decision was made in a rehearsal where I was not present. In the end the position of the balcony allowed Juliet to move freely and Romeo to have a solid surface he could climb on to.

The independent set pieces also changes throughout the process, at the beginning the design intention was to have three sets of tables able to nest and disappear from the set. Each set would contain four tables, the biggest and tallest would join together and form the tomb, bed and pedestal for the dancer. The result was that the bigger tables were not sturdy enough and not big enough to be able to function as wanted, so I ended up fussing them together and augmenting their size about 40% more. The nesting became irrelevant in the end, given that the placement of the tables would never need to be places exactly one beneath the other one. The big table was big enough for it not to be able to be carried, so the addition of air casters were needed.

The curtains were another thing that change throughout the process. They started from being silks hanging down and climbable, to fixed decorative elements. I am still wondering how big performing companies deal with the fire safety regulations, I don't think it has being a limitation in terms of using fabric, but future research might be good in order to be able to use fabric again.

4 Analysis

4.1 How did or did not work

Due to the small seat capacity of the Telus we have a total sold out and people were lining up outside the theatre in order to get tickets. I would start with what worked and later move into what did not work. The fact that the audience did not notice or did not found these as a limitation is another story.

The floor: Since the beginning I think the floor worked perfectly. There was very little change in the design since the beginning. Painted by a professional the painting looked exactly alike as the one I draw in scale. The colors were assertive, they did not interfere with the actors and worked with the color palette of the costumes, and the shape and scale of it was precise.

The ivy: I believe by the sound of the audience awing when the balcony scene started and the LED light lighted the space, I think this was an assertive point. This might have been my most precious moment given the difficulties and incredibility of the whole concept.

The cyclorama and scrim: A partial success, I believe Conor made the right choices, the continuously changing backdrop changed in every case. Too bad that because of the configuration of the stage many were not able to admire the effect. The creation of silhouettes was spot on, in fact I wished they used the elements of silhouettes more in the play.

The iron gate: As an entry and exit device it created a majestic movable piece, however, it was not climable as had been initially intended. Covering the rod with foam was a great idea from Ronald, the scale of the tubes went well with the scale of the decorations and floor.

Set tables: I do not think people in the audience realized these were puzzle pieces, nor they were able to nest inside each other. The massive table on air casters was too massive for our initial concept, and for me it looked out of scale. Maybe thinking about separate table pieces would have been a better idea, and a separate pedestal with another language a lot better.

Physical model versus digital model: I had two meetings where I presented a physical model. The first one was back in August and the second one at a production meeting, I have to admit that the power of a physical model explains what a thousand words or renderings can't. Maybe as a designer it is easy to understand the design in a 3D model, but for the rest of the team it will always be better to see a small scale theatre arrangement. The first sketch model was really helpful in terms of discarding what could have been a bad design decision, and the second one helped to explain the technicalities of the almost finished model.

4.2 Criticism and Reviews

I describe four very different reviews for *Romeo and Juliet*, all reviews were found on-line except publicity snapshots that showed up in printed press versions. First review is from Mark Robins owner of gayvancouver.net; second one is by Ed Farlon founding editor of

reviewvancouver.org; third is from jesse-nominated playwright Andrew Templeton for plankmagazine.com and fourth from Kate Barbaria for ubyssey.ca.

Robins review has a very positive tone and ends with a nice note about the future generation of actors and technicians. He points out that even when the play “pulls elements of burlesque, cabaret, buffoonery and even, dare I say it, some images inspired by the recent *Twilight* frenzy” it still “manages a cohesiveness that helps to put a new and ultimately entertaining spin” (Robins). Never in the design process did we think about adding some vampire (*Twilight*) tones to it, maybe elements of lighting and white makeup have given the impression of it. While he recognized the intention of using the theatre as a stage, Robins mentioned the actors were “a little timid” in this respect.

To my surprise he dedicates one paragraph to the technical aspect of the play. He expresses: “lighting mostly subdued which works well...costumes are absolutely scrumptious”, “Ana Luisa Espinoza's set design is smartly minimal given Leger's use of the entire theatre as the stage”. (Robins) I could not be any happier when somebody describes my set as “smartly minimal”, the intention was well received and translated to this member of the audience.

Next review to analyze is the one written for reviewvancouver.org. Ed Farolan describes the play as a “truly refreshing approach to this iconic tragedy”. If our intention was to create something out of the box and new this reviewer thought it was accomplished. “The Shakespearean Globe Theatre atmosphere was just right for the way the Telus Studio construction was built” (Farolan). The reviewer is right about making the comparison to the Globe Theatre and the Telus, maybe it was not that evident before the dressing and the

current configuration of the space though. I might say that initially I thought the Telus Theatre might have a lot of restrictions, it also has a lot of possibilities.

Third review is the one from Andrew Templeton for *Plank Magazine*. This review is quickly summarized in his title “*Romeo and Juliet: too much fun*”. Although the author keeps criticizing the director for mentioning the word “fun” too many times in the program and making the play lose its poetical meaning, he is moderately happy about the take on the Capulets.

He argues that the will of creating an over the top scenario diminishes the most important moments such as the first time Romeo and Juliet encounter each other. I agree that the party scene with the huge platform in the centre interfere with such an important moment. Maybe cutting the black light number and extending the encounter moment would have been more assertive. He supports this by writing: “Leger is so focused on fun (in this case, creating a carnival-like Bouffon-inspired setting) that she misses telling the string story that is supposed to be supporting her inventiveness ...We don't reveal in the pleasure of this moment of desire and discover (which is a shame, as it's a sensation I wouldn't have minded taking out of the dark, black theatre).” (Templeton)

Templeton expressed some discomfort towards the take on the members of the cast such as calling Mercutio a mix of Kramer from *Seinfeld*, and thinking that taking the church aspect away from the show was wrong. He had his second and last positive comment: “The performance of the two actors in the final death duet is stark and compelling and Leger

provides a suitable frame for moments which are truly transcendent.” (Templeton) He never describes the moments he was referring apart from the last scene.

Last review to analyze is the one from Kate Barbaria for ubyssey.ca. The tone of this review is very positive and one can clearly guess it was of great delight to this reviewer. One cannot ignore the fact that the Barbaria might not have the experience in writing reviews the others have and might be a little biased by the fact she is a UBC student. Nevertheless, I have read some very honest and negative reviews in this paper, and that the young public is sometimes the most difficult to please and attract to such events.

She expresses: “ *Romeo and Juliet* far from being a plodding production of love and lost, is a fantastic, creepy, carnivalesque celebration of performance art. It's hot, mod and totally out of control.” (Barbaria) I believe all of those elements were placed in the production and from the sound of the review it is what it made it appealing. It is important to notice that when she is about to finish her review she mentions “the beauty is in the details, from Romeo fixing his hair to getting stuck on Juliet's balcony”.

Overall the reviews were showing an interest in discovering this new take. I would say our concept was well expressed, there was no negative comments about the design and at least we were able to create an unpredictable take on the play.

Figures



Figure 1: Notre Dame interior candles



Figure 2: Red boxes at Palais Garnier



Figure 3: Pere Lachaise Cemetery



Figure 4: Montmartre Streets



Figure 5: Iron rod gate



Figure 6: Carnavalet Museum garden



Figure 7: Carnavalet Muceum interior



Figure 8: Place de Vosges



Figure 9: Trojan Woman



Figure 10: Master Builder



Figure 11: Arturo Ui poster, Sam Harkand and Cie



Figure 12: Yard Dogs Road Show. Hutleen, Hilary (Sonoma Hills, 2009)



*Figure 13: Verona Borsari Gate,
www.travelplan.it*



Figure 14: Romeo and Juliet designed by Nicholas Georgiadis

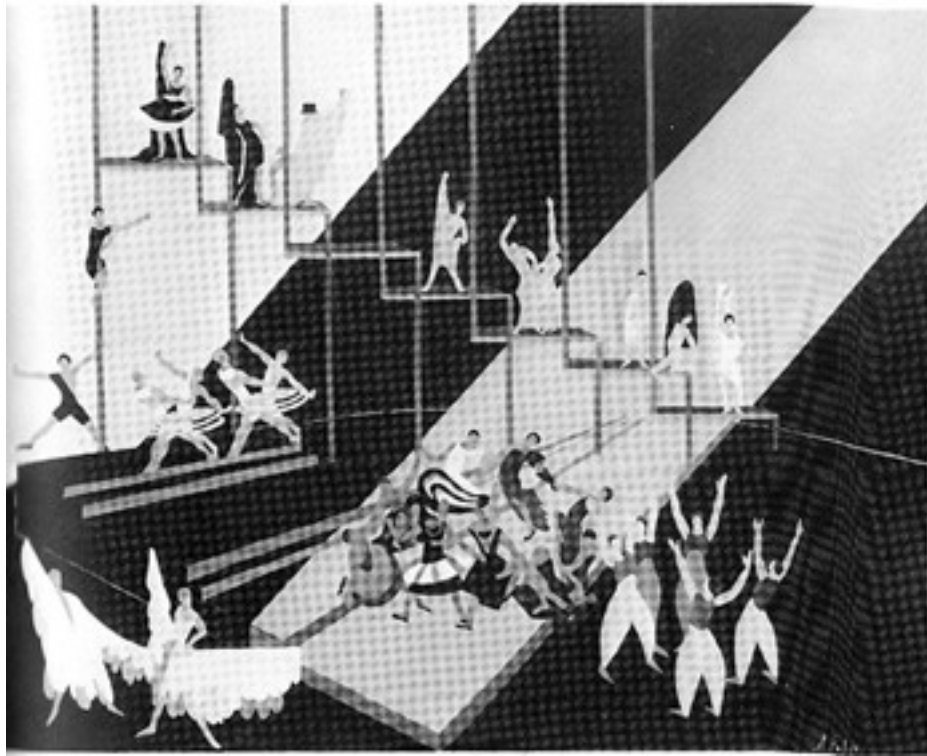


Figure 15: Don Juan Ballet project. Exter, Alexandra (Cologne, 1927)



Figure 16: First sketches. Room, party scene, tomb



Figure 17: Study model

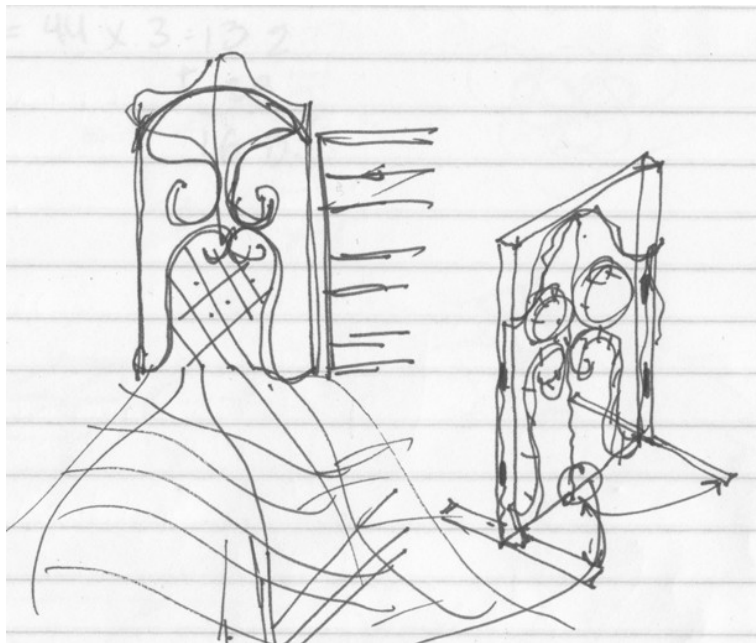


Figure 18: Sketch of door



Figure 19: Crawling Ivy

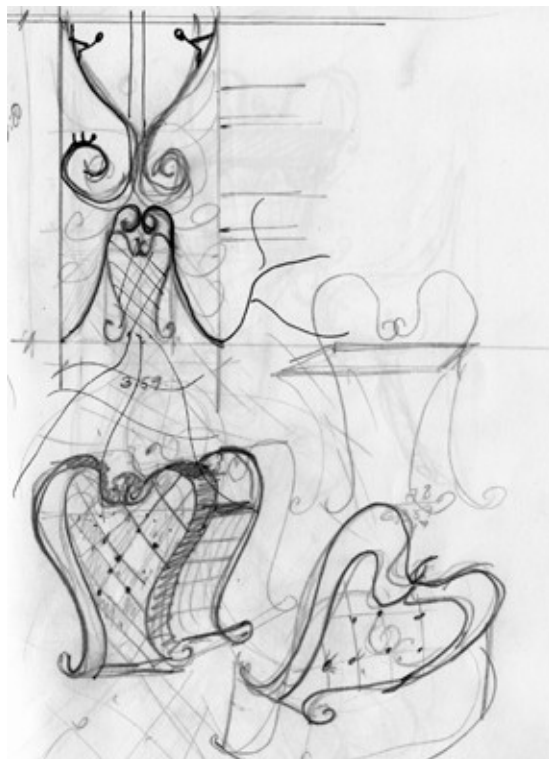


Figure 20: Door composition

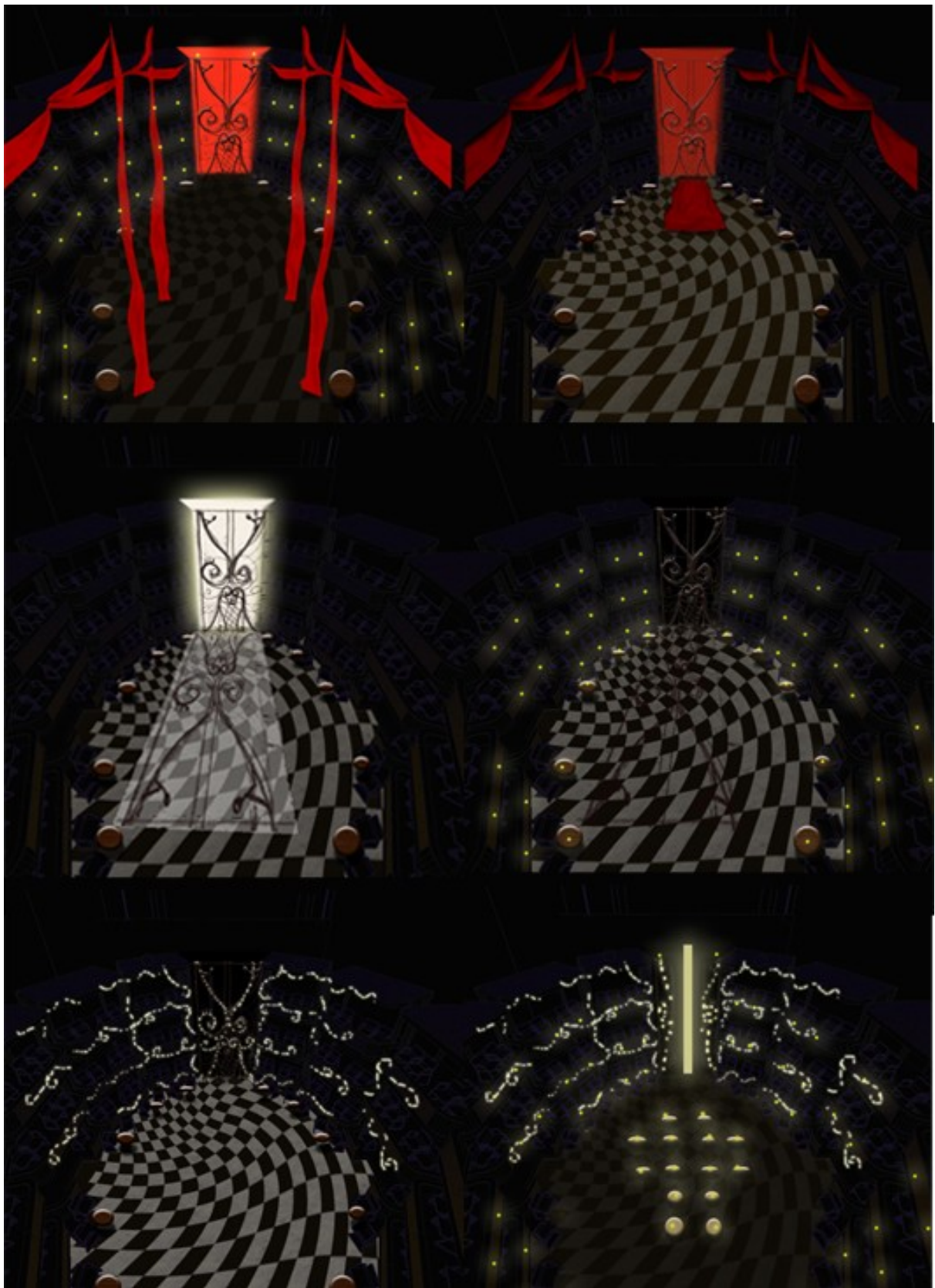


Figure 21: Party hall, frier's cell, garden, Juliet`s room, Verona and Tomb

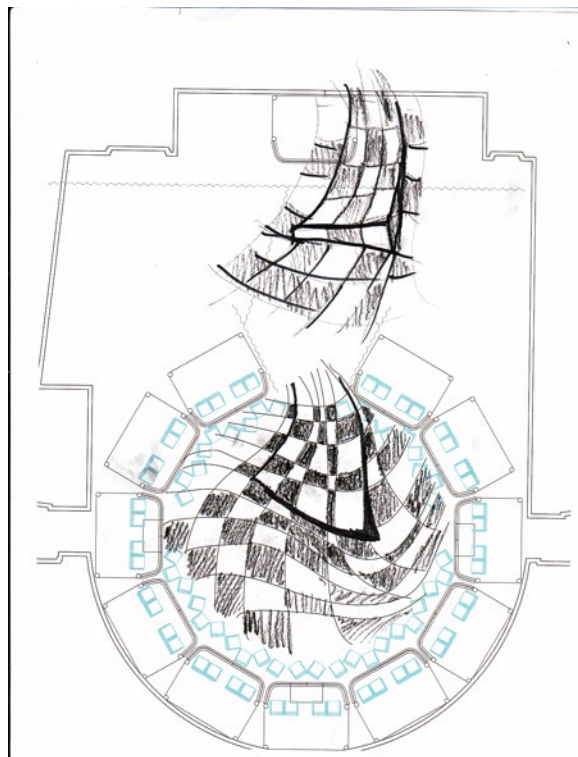


Figure 22: Table drawings

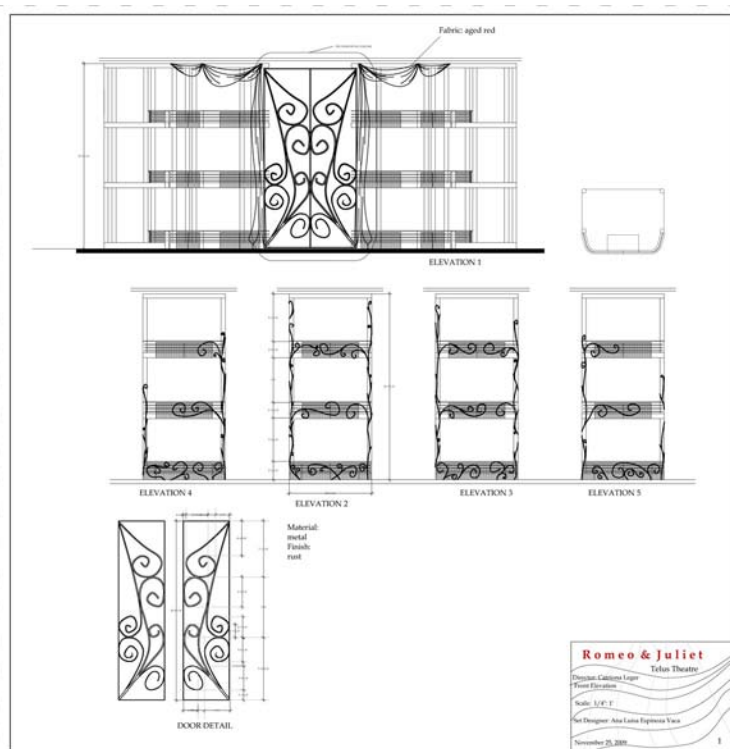


Figure 23: Towers and door drawings

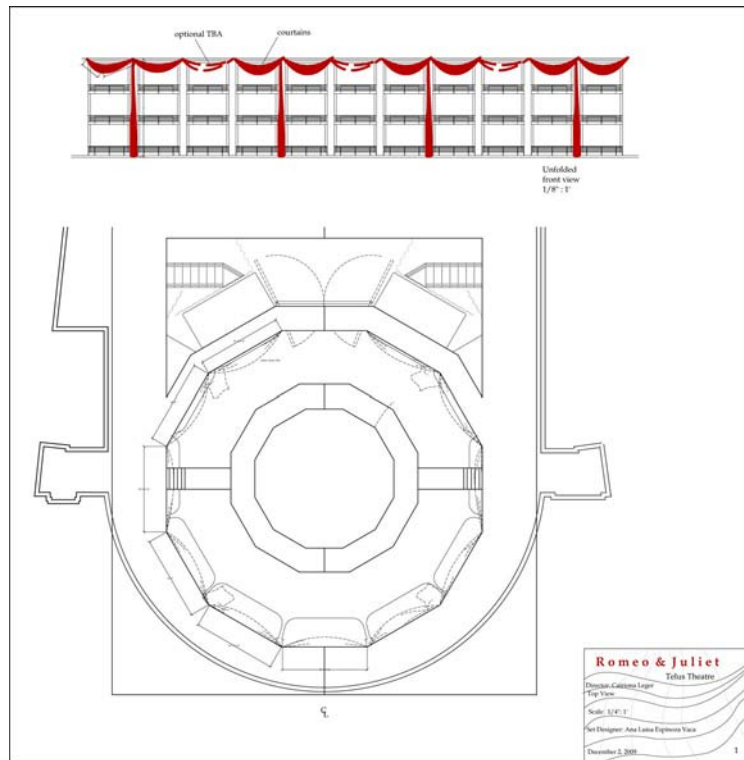


Figure 26: Curtains

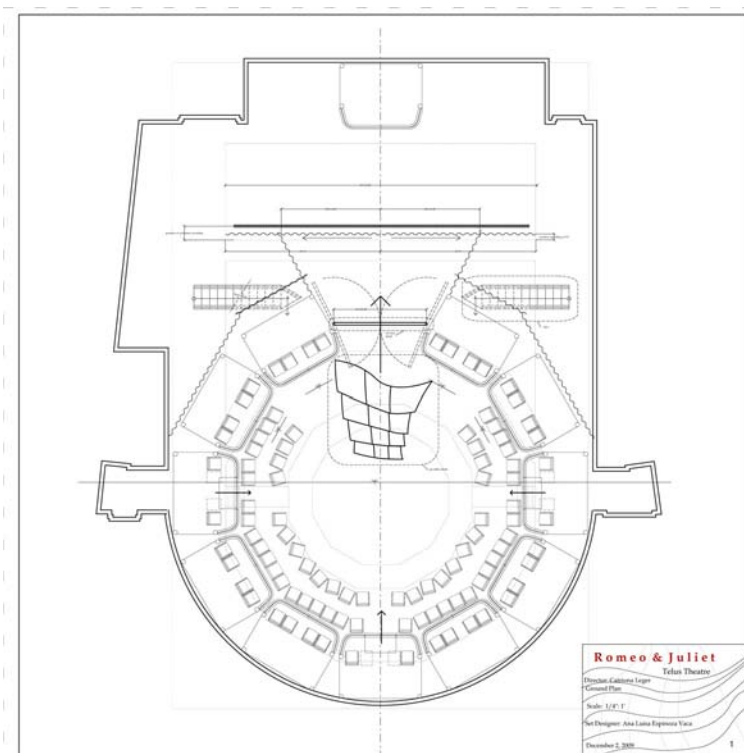


Figure 27: Ground Plan

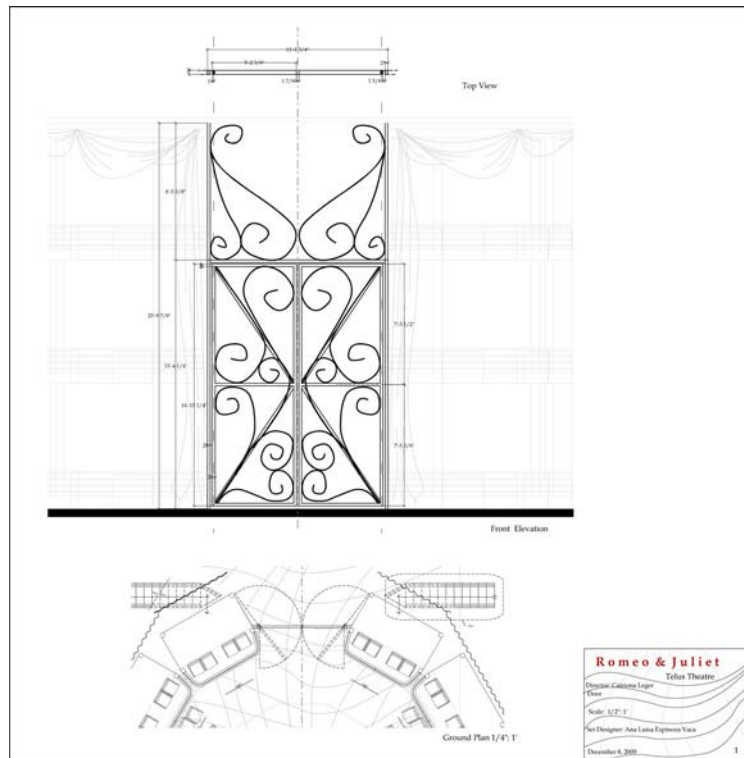


Figure 28: Door drawings

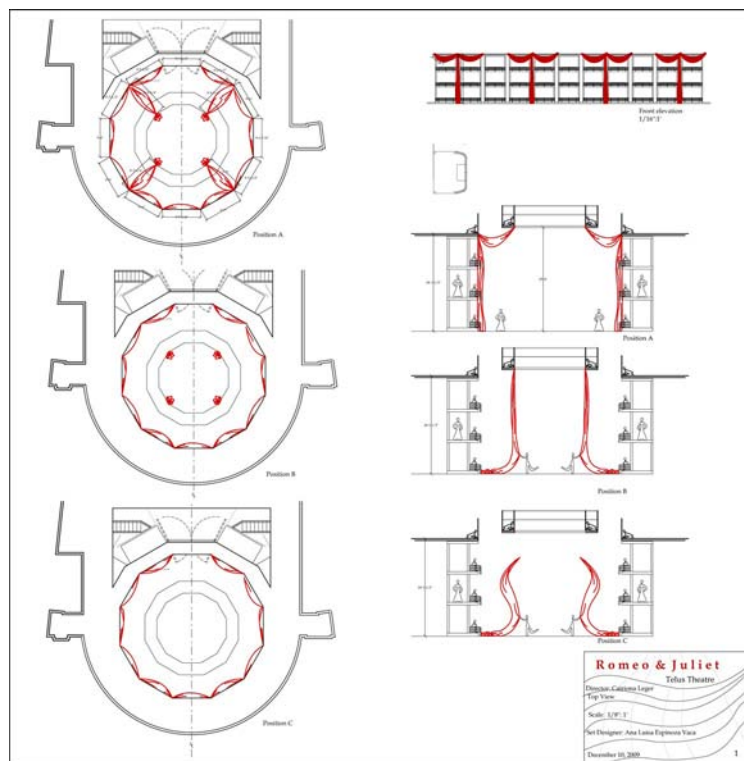


Figure 29: Curtains



Figure 30: Painted floor

Images (production pictures)



Image 1: Verona streets



Image 2: Fire juggling, party scene

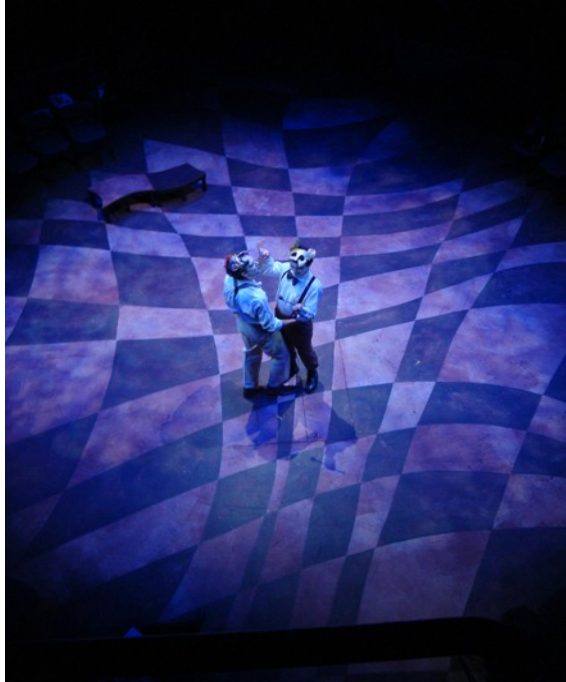


Image 3: Verona streets at night



Image 4: Use of balconies



Image 5: Balcony scene, LED lights on



Image 6: Love scene



Image 7: Death scene



Image 8: Garden scene



Image 9: Ivy profile



Image 10: Iron rod gate

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