The Gift Horse: Creating and Directing a Winter Show for Caravan Farm Theatre

by

Courtenay Dobbie

Theatre Arts Diploma Mount Royal University, 1998
Theatre Arts Diploma Langara College, 2001

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ABSTRACT

The Gift Horse: Creating and Directing a Winter Show for Caravan Farm Theatre, examines the preparation, directorial analysis, and rehearsal process of The Gift Horse, staged at Caravan Farm Theatre from December 10th to 31st 2011.

My objective was to co-write, co-create, compose music for, and direct a meaningful family winter production for Caravan. To achieve this, my writing and creation partner, Erin Mathews, and myself, began researching and writing The Gift Horse in June of 2011. Upon completion of the script, my directorial preparation began. As a Caravan Farm Theatre winter production is told and performed at various locations over its eighty-acre property, with the audience witnessing the production from the back of eight horse-drawn sleighs, my directorial methods and goals were atypical to how one might prepare for an indoor theatre show, as detailed in this paper.

To that end, Chapter One provides a detailed directorial analysis of The Gift Horse, Chapter Two is a Production Journal reporting on the entire creation period of the play from the writing, to designing, to rehearsing, to its opening night, and Chapter 3 is a short reflection on the entire process.
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DEDICATION

For my brother – with whom my first stories were ever created.
CHAPTER ONE

Directorial Analysis

1. Initial Response to the Play

The journey of developing *The Gift Horse* included my discovery of the material by which it’s creation was inspired, writing it with my long-time writing partner, Erin Mathews, editing it, producing it, rehearsing it, and then finally presenting it at Caravan Farm Theatre for their winter production as part of their 2011-12 season. What started as a simple Japanese folktale became a full-scale outdoor production performed for seven thousand people of the North Okanagan and surrounding regions of British Columbia’s interior.

The idea of *The Gift Horse* began with my application for the position of Artistic Director at Caravan Farm Theatre in the spring of 2010. Part of the application process required me to submit an example three-show season to the Board of Directors consisting of: a fall show, a one-night part-theatre/part-party Halloween community driven theatrical extravaganza, a one-act winter production performed at various locations around Caravan’s eighty-acre property with the audience witnessing the show from horse-drawn sleigh, and a summer full-length play or musical production.

The task daunted me. I researched and considered countless plays for my submission: famous classics, Broadway productions, large scale musicals, Canadian plays, British plays, French plays in translation, American plays, the list goes on. No matter how many I read they did not seem the right fit for Caravan. They did not blend with the outdoor rural aesthetic of the farm, in which the productions are staged and performed; they lacked originality or reflection of the rural experience (many of them took place indoors), and they were too silly a drawing room farce, or too serious a Greek tragedy. I was forced to dig deep (very deep) into the place within my imagination where true, inspired, and creative ideas live. I had developed and produced original productions in the past many times. The only difference with this was that I had to consider the
suitability of these ideas in relation to Caravan Farm Theatre’s mandate and audience. I had never had to contemplate this before when developing new work; I had created what I wanted, with whomever I wanted, with whatever content I wanted. To my surprise, working within a given set of rules and circumstance only allowed ideas and inspirational source material to come to me more readily and easily than I ever imagined. The structure gave me purpose, and helped me to hone my ideas, scrutinize them more fully (especially in regards to story and theme) and permitted me to justify one over another based on the criteria of Caravan’s mandate: to produce outdoor, popular theatre to a wide and diverse family audience.

Having performed as an actor in winter show productions at Caravan Farm Theatre in the past, I knew that the first step in finding and developing an idea was that the story had to be somewhat ‘seasonal’. A Caravan winter show is a holiday tradition for many families; they bring their loved ones, often giving tickets to the show as Christmas presents, and enjoy the experience together as part of their holiday rituals. The story line had to explore themes such as family, love, tradition, forgiveness, acceptance, and charity without being trite, overly simple, or saccharine. I needed to find something smart, beautiful, meaningful, and refined in its premise and story structure.

Caravan Farm Theatre has a thirty-five year history of using horses in its productions - the horse has been a trademark and inspiration for the work of the company since its inception. Having never created a show using horses before, it became a personal challenge to discover what I could deliver. After much contemplation and research, I came upon the idea and storyline for The Gift Horse in a way that was embarrassingly simple. I went on-line and typed in ‘myths, horses, folklore’ and Google provided many suggestions for me; myths and folktales about horses, or with horses, from countries all over the world. After sifting through this exciting and overwhelming possible source material, the story that caught my attention immediately and one that I kept coming back to, was a Japanese myth called Moonflower (or how the Moonhorses came to Japan).
The following is the folktale as written by Illil Arbel, Ph.D:

Moonflower (or how the Moonhorses came to Japan)

The moon shone softly into the dark, bare little house, filling it with silvery mist. The woman walked in silently and sat by her husband.

"My honorable cousin, the mayor, refuses our request," said the woman sadly, "we are too poor to adopt an orphan."

"Did you mention that unless we raise a child in the tradition of our ancestors, we may never have better luck?" asked the horse-farmer.

"Yes. He knows that if you cannot have a child, you must adopt one to raise as your own, or the spirits of your ancestors will be displeased -- they need children and grandchildren to remember their names. But he feels he cannot risk the child starving. He pointed out that we don't have a single horse left, and the village can no longer help us."

They sat by the window together for a long time. They wanted a child so much, and now had no hope at all.

Suddenly the moon shone brighter, and a single moonbeam entered through the window. It wandered around, finally settling on a table. A small dot hurried down the beam, growing all the time, until a tiny silvery-white horse, no bigger than a mouse, came through the window. On his back he carried a red-flowering cherry branch, with most of the wine-colored flowers closed. A deep, comforting voice filled the room. "Do not be sad. I, the moon, will trust you with one of my children. Look at the cherry branch." One flower slowly, magically, opened its petals. Among them sat a tiny baby, the size of a fingernail.

"This is Moonflower," continued the moon. "She will bring you happiness and good fortune. However, she cannot marry an Earthman, and must return to me when she is eighteen years old. Use the years wisely, and all will be well. Now pick her from the flower and put her on the mat."

Moonflower began to grow, and in a few minutes reached the size of an Earth baby. Her hair was black as the night, her eyes bright as the stars, and her skin the color of a golden peach. She wore a pink kimono, embroidered with wine-colored cherry blossoms, and held a huge, magnificent star ruby. The little horse rubbed his nose against the baby's glossy hair, waved his tail cheerfully, and rode up the moonbeam. "Remember to use the years wisely!" rumbled the moon's voice, as the moonbeam slowly faded.

The next day the horse-farmer sold the ruby for a fortune. Some of the money was used for the improvement of the farm; some was safely saved
for the future.

Years passed. The horse-farmer and his wife did very well indeed. They greatly improved their horse-breeding stables, and warriors came from all over the country to purchase the best horses from them. But riches meant little to the horse-farmer and his wife, except for the pleasure of giving Moonflower everything she could wish for. So they did little else, good or bad, with their money.

Moonflower grew to be so clever, beautiful, and kind, that everyone in the village loved her, especially the mayor; he considered himself her uncle, and treated the family with much respect. Perhaps he thought it was really he who brought them this lovely moon-child by refusing their request! None of them could forget, however, that Moonflower was destined to leave them. She worried about it, too, because she loved her parents with all her heart, and was very happy on Earth, playing with the village children and helping to raise the beautiful horses. One day, when she was ten years old, she heard her mother say to her father: "when Moonflower leaves us, not only will my heart break, but the spirits of our ancestors will still be displeased, because there will be no grandchildren here on Earth to remember their names! They will not be satisfied with grandchildren on the moon!"

Suddenly Moonflower had an idea. She went to her parents and said: "I think it’s time I had brothers and sisters."

"The moon will not send us more children, my dear," said the mother, surprised. "He did so much already by sending you."

"I do not mean moon children," said Moonflower. "You are rich now. Surely the mayor, my honorable uncle, will not refuse to let you adopt some of the orphans in our village? They need a good home so much, and you will have children and grandchildren to carry on the tradition on Earth, even if my children must be born on the moon. The spirits will be pleased, and most important, the children will be a comfort to you when I am gone!"

They stared at her, stunned by her wisdom. The idea never occurred to them. "Perhaps the moon meant exactly that when he said we should use the years wisely," whispered the horse-farmer. "Yes," said his wife. "All this joy, all this money, and we did nothing in return... I will visit my cousin, the mayor, tomorrow morning."

The mayor was happy to oblige. As the years went by, he allowed them to adopt three boys and two girls, whom they raised with the same love and care they gave Moonflower.

When Moonflowers turned eighteen, her parents, though sick at heart, invited the entire village to a big birthday celebration. Golden lanterns glowed in the large courtyard, colorful paper decorations hung in the trees,
musicians played lovely music, and the tables were covered with enough food and rice wine to please everyone.

At midnight, the moon suddenly shone brighter, and a single moonbeam entered the courtyard. It wandered around, finally settling on a red-flowering cherry tree. Soft, hazy figures floated in it, first at a great distance and then closer and closer. The villagers stared, frozen with awe, as the figures materialized and one by one the moon people slid down the silvery beam, each riding a magnificent, silvery-white moon horse. They were cheerful and smiling, as beautiful and as well dressed as Moonflower. The women wore embroidered silk kimonos, the men dressed in the finest warrior’s outfits. They mingled with the village people, danced, drank rice wine, and acted just like old friends. The villagers very quickly lost their fear of the visitors.

One young man stood at a little distance, holding the reins of a horse. Moonflower thought he was the handsomest person she had ever seen, and could not help smiling at him. He must have felt a little bolder by the invitation, because he bowed to her and her parents, and said: "this is your horse, Moonflower, the one that brought you here. He lives in my stables, waiting for your return, and I rode him tonight. Will you do me the honor of riding him back to the moon with me?"

Moonflower smiled again. Somehow the return to the moon seemed just a little less tragic. Her parents smiled. They were still sad, but they felt the moon could not have chosen a better husband for their daughter than this well brought-up young man. Moonflower put her hand on the snowy head of her horse, and he nuzzled her gently. Then the deep, comforting voice of the moon rumbled through the courtyard: "My friends, you have used the years wisely, sharing love and good fortune with children who needed it. As your reward, you will not part from your daughter Moonflower forever. Every year, on her birthday, she will come for a long visit, and her husband and children will accompany her. It will be just as if she married into a good family in a far-off village!"

And so the birthday party turned into a wedding party, the most wonderful the villagers had ever seen, because the moon people started handing everyone many presents and surprises to further celebrate the occasion. Strange wines, foodstuffs no one had ever seen before, sweets for the children in the shape of stars, silk clothes and jewelry glowing with moonlight. The party lasted almost all night. Just before dawn, the moon people mounted their horses. The horse-farmer and his wife could let Moonflower go without the heartache of eternal separation, and with the expectation of many happy reunions. They stood and watched her riding up the moonbeam, waving until they could no longer see her. And as they turned their eyes back to Earth, they were surprised by one more gift from the kindly moon, a gift that reverberated through the centuries and still
gives joy today. Under the cherry tree stood two moon horses, male and female, glowing silvery-white in the light of the rising sun.” (Arbel)

My initial response to the story was absolute excitement. I had found it! It was an inspirational idea, a solid story and structure, a beautiful and tender message, and I could feel in my bones I could write and create a fantastic show using this as the backbone. The visual images were perfectly suited to the outdoors of Caravan Farm Theatre in winter; rolling snowy fields, crisp, see-your-breath air, horses and sleighs, and the themes of valuing one’s time with family, hearth and home, and the warmth of the unconditional love of a child, were all perfect. The tale was not flawless, certain aspects would have to be altered or changed to create more dramatic action and tension within the story, but it was a true winner. A beautiful winner that I knew Caravan audiences would enjoy with their families, friends, and a warm cup of hot chocolate.

2. Type or Genre of Play

Including The Gift Horse as part of my submission for the position of Artistic Director of Caravan Farm Theatre proved to be fruitful, as I was offered, accepted, and began the position officially in the fall of 2010. I inherited a season programmed by the previous Artistic Director for my first year, and then programmed The Gift Horse for our winter show of our 2011-12 season, and in the fall of 2011, Erin Mathews and I began writing.

The first discussion we had was what type of play we wanted it to be. We were using the Japanese tale as a guide, but could allow ourselves artistic license to mold this play into any type or genre we wanted. What we always knew, and kept very present in the back of our minds, was that Caravan audiences are made up of families, and those families consist of babies, children, teenagers, adults, and seniors, oftentimes attending together. Erin and I took this into serious consideration; we knew we wanted the piece to be appealing to all age groups, but we did not want to cater to any particular one as we felt it would lessen the integrity of the entire piece. What we wanted The Gift Horse to become in story, design, and premise was, we joked, like creating the theatre version
of an animated film by Pixar; strong appeal to viewers of all ages, well constructed and beautifully detailed stories with stunning visuals, broad, loveable characters, and meaningful themes. As such, *The Gift Horse* came to be a drama that had strong comedic elements and character.

The type and genre of the piece informed whom I would soon consider casting in the production. I would be looking for performers who had the emotional depth to inhabit the conflict and tension in the piece, as well as strong comedic chops, particularly with the character of the Moon and the performer playing both Harvey Willoughby and Tadashi.

Erin and I came to the conclusion that we could allow the tone, feel, characters, and emotionality of the piece to exist and take place in a world of its own with its own rules, time, space, and locations. This decision informed the writing, the design, and the direction as the design and costume departments were defining their own parameters in creating a fantastical and magical world in which the play lives. This allowed for an incredible freedom surrounding the choices and possibilities of the writing, but took much concentrated time to nail down what we really wanted the end result to look, feel, and mean to an audience.

3. Style

*The Gift Horse* had a surrealistic style with a fusion of Japanese aesthetic and country chic in design and concept. The text was written with large intention and emotion, with no real subtext in it’s playing; the performances had to be big, especially as it was performed outside. Erin and I wanted the style of the piece it to be like a live pop-up storybook with a clear and compelling story line, and bold characters.

To accomplish this there were two main areas upon which we concentrated. One was in the design, which needed to boast strong colors, lines, silhouettes, and textures, with Japanese influence and flare, and the other was in the performing of the text. There is a saying amongst veteran Caravan performers, that when performing in a Caravan production, one partakes in what has lovingly been called, ‘looking out acting’. This
means, the more a performer turns their face and body to the audience to say their lines (at the expense of not looking at your scene partner), the stronger their performance as it is loud, clear, and can be seen from every angle of the audience. Of course this is an overly simple term, but holds importance and meaning, in that the performance style in a Caravan production has to be so overly grand, oftentimes larger than performing in an eight hundred-seat proscenium theatre.

There are many unique, uncontrollable elements, which contribute to the necessarily larger than life style of a Caravan production, particularly as manifest in the actor's performances. They are as follows:

- **SEATING** - The audience is seated on horse drawn sleighs. They sit facing each other. This means they witness the production looking sideways, their bodies never fully facing forward.

- **AUDIENCE.** Families sit together. An adult may have a crying baby, a chatty toddler on their lap, be concerned if grandma can see. They may also, and frequently do, talk or comment on the show, as it is happening, which causes them to possibly miss key elements or story points in the production. Often they are talking and commenting on aspects of the show they are enjoying, and seem to be entirely unaware they are doing it.

- **TEMPERATURE** - The audience is cold. They are sitting, not moving, for an hour in temperatures that can range from minus five to minus twenty-eight degrees Celsius. If they are cold, they are distracted, meaning the performers and story has to be even louder and clearer.

- **OUTSIDE NOISE** - Children crying, children talking, a plane flying overhead, horses neighing, horses flatulating, coyotes howling, horse harness jingling, sleighs and wagons creaking, and whipping wind. The style must be big enough
and bold enough that if one or more of these factors come into play, the story and performances can stand on their own.

4. Space

Caravan productions are performed outdoors, on the land, all the time. The audience is transported by horse-drawn sleigh from scene to scene for the winter show, and the location of the summer production is never in the same place twice. This use of the land presents many opportunities and challenges when creating, directing, and designing a production. The land is the most stunning backdrop with its tall arching trees, ocean blue sky, open amber fields, and warm winds on a summer night. When contemplating set designs, many designers do not want to alter or add anything to it - it is the most beautiful setting for a play all on its own.

Despite all its beauty, the greatest challenge of using the land as a stage is the sheer vastness and grandeur of it. There is no ceiling, no walls, no backstage, no fly gallery, no orchestra pit, no blacks, no cross over, and no place to hang lights. Unlike the stage or playing area of a typical indoor theatre, there is no containment or focus of the action within the outdoor space; one has to determine and create it by means other than architecture.

There are various aspects of performing outdoors in a winter production I took into consideration when building and creating the design and space of The Gift Horse. These special considerations directly informed where the scenes ultimately ended up taking place over our eighty-acre farmland.

They are as follows:

- **TIMING** – The entire winter production, from start to finish, including the front of house speech, the scenes themselves, and sleigh travel time, can be one hour and not a second longer. The front of house speech takes five minutes, the sleigh ride fifteen to twenty minutes, and the drama of the piece, forty to forty five
minutes. We perform three shows a day at four, six, and eight pm and we have a half hour turn around before each show to strike and reset for the next performance. The cast, crew, and teamsters also have to eat their meals, a warm snack and dinner, in between shows.

- **DISTANCE** – Caravan Farm Theatre is forty acres of land at the front of the property and an additional forty acres of land at the back of the property. There are a few lovely, usable, locations in the front forty acres, but they have to be chosen carefully as the land is heavily treed, populated with various buildings, and can be crowded for eight teams of horses to manipulate their sleighs. The back forty acres of the property is a gigantic open field with trees around its perimeter. No matter what area of the farm is used, the front or back forty acres, or combination of both, the further the distance the sleighs have to travel, the shorter the action of the play. Yet it is also important the audience feels they had a decent sleigh ride as part of the winter show experience, therefore the distance from one scene to another is extremely important and carefully calculated.

- **LOCATION** – When deciding upon where the play took place on the property, I pondered two very important questions: What kind of scenes does the piece call for: interior, exterior, realistic, or fantasy for example, and what is the mood or feel of these scenes that can inform what kind of land they are performed on - barren fields for a dusty western, intimate forests for a heady romance, winding roads for a cop and robber thriller, dense thicket for a spooky Halloween horror, or open mountain vistas for grand tales of love lost.

*The Gift Horse* is about unconditional love, family, forgiveness, and hope. It is a folk tale drama, where intense focus is needed by the performers and audience to follow the story line. Four out of the five scenes take place in the family home of Jun and Rina Hara, a childless couple whose ultimate desire is to acquire an infant of their own. It is important that the audience feel they know these characters, they relate to them, and they feel intimate with them as if peering
through a frosted window of the family home as they arrive at each scene. Therefore when deciding upon the locations of the scenes, it made dramatic sense to stage the piece at various locations in the front forty acres of the property, where there is more warmth and intimacy amongst the tall, green coniferous trees, than if the sleighs would have traveled down to the wide open, Siberia-feeling, back forty acres of the land. The back forty acres is more suited to wicked, grand adventures than an innocent family drama such as The Gift Horse.

- **SLEIGHS AND HEIGHT**– Each sleigh is three and a half feet from the ground. When sitting, audience members are five feet from the ground and are facing each other. They turn their head sideways, to the right or left depending on which side they are on, to watch the show. The seats are not tiered or raked and one may be sitting directly behind someone else wearing a large hood, hat, or toque. The design of the production, therefore, must be high up, each location set and performers at least six feet off the ground.

5. **Audience**

Caravan Farm Theatre audiences range from babes in arms to senior citizens. They primarily come from the nearby cities and towns of Armstrong, Vernon, Salmon Arm, Enderby, Kelowna, and Kamloops, as well as Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, and often times abroad. Audience attendance figures have remained consistently strong and are still increasing, with an average of six hundred people attending the fall show, seven thousand for the winter show, and nine thousand for the summer show.

Attending a Caravan production is an experience like no other. In the winter show, there are sixteen horses patrons love to look at and pet before they board their sleighs. They buy hot chocolate with Bailey’s to take with them on their outdoor journey, sugary Christmas cookies for the kids, and they bundle up the whole family to venture into the darkness of the wilds to witness this theatrical event.
Caravan audiences are primarily made up of middle class rural, small town or small city-living people. They are families who have lived in the interior of British Columbia for many years or have chosen the small town or rural lifestyle. The productions, therefore, can and do reflect the rural, small town experience in theme and content, at the same time challenging its audiences with compelling, important, and meaningful stories.

It is important that a Caravan experience be exciting and memorable. With the use of the horses, the land, and the varying outdoor locations, Caravan audiences have come to expect nothing less than grand outdoor spectacle with meaningful narrative, plot, and characters reflecting their rural experiences and stories. Caravan Farm Theatre has the ability to continually surprise its audiences with every production, enticing them to attend again and again.

6. Given Circumstances

- **COMPANY HISTORY** - Caravan Farm Theatre is thirty-five year old professional theatre company based on eighty acres of farmland eleven kilometers outside of Armstrong, BC. Founded in 1967 by Paul and Nans Kirby, the, then called, *Caravan Stage Company* toured across Canada and the United States, pulled by horse drawn wagons. The eighty-acre property was purchased in 1978, and in 1984, Artistic Director Nick Hutchinson launched the Caravan Farm Theatre. The next twenty-eight years saw four Artistic Directors lend their unique and innovative aesthetics to Caravan Farm Theatre productions, strengthening and building its theatre, capacity, sustainability, and audience every year.

Caravan specializes in original work and innovative outdoor staging. The productions are typically newly commissioned works by Canadian playwrights that speak to and are inspired by the surrounding rural aesthetic and community. They are narrative in structure, epic in scale, magical in design and concept, and firmly rooted in story and emotional depth.
The 80-acres of land are the theatre: the ground the stage, the starry skies the backdrop, and the horses are used as stage machinery and character. Audiences are treated to unique theatrical productions using horses, wagons, sleighs, car, truck, bicycle, wheelbarrow, masks, large-scale puppets, grand costumes, and hand painted sets that create highly visceral worlds. Caravan Farm Theatre is governed by a twelve person Board of Directors who meet on a monthly basis. The staff’s current configuration consists of an Artistic Director, General Manager, Communications Director, Bookkeeper and Farm Manager. Seasonal box office, front of house staff, carpenters and chefs are hired from the surrounding areas. Actors, designers, technical directors, production managers, stage managers, and crew are primarily hired from Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Toronto, Edmonton and Montreal.

Caravan Farm Theatre is fortunate to own its venue, comprised of a scene shop, costume shop, wagon bay, tack shed, office building, washroom and shower facilities, cook shack, fourteen residency cabins, and our ‘Rain Venue’. During production and rehearsal periods the cast and crew live on the farm, with their meals prepared by professional cooks. This unique living experience deepens company connection and a tight-knit collective of artists is formed; one that works, lives, and eats together, thereby strengthening the work and relationships on stage.

The cultural and community history surrounding Caravan Farm Theatre is rich, deep, inspiring, and tremendously important to the kind of work presented. It is a legacy that must be honored and continued for years to come.

- **BUDGET**— The budget for *The Gift Horse* was around one hundred and forty thousand dollars. The majority of the production’s budget was put towards artistic personnel, crew, and teamsters. The set budget was two thousand dollars, the costume budget was two thousand dollars, the lighting budget was one thousand dollars, and the props budget was one thousand five hundred dollars. Given the
lean artistic budgets, it was important that we capitalized on the use of the land as our set as much as possible, as well as relying on in-kind donations from local companies by way of building supplies, tool rentals, excavation, and fabric for costumes for example.

### REHEARSAL SPACE AND LENGTH OF REHEARSAL PERIOD

The rehearsal period for *The Gift Horse* was two and a half weeks. It was only two weeks prior to my instatement as Artistic Director, but upon taking the position, I thought it necessary to the rehearsal process and to the overall quality of the production, to budget for and add an extra three days of rehearsal. Two and a half weeks is not a lot of time, but the rehearsal schedule was strictly adhered to with weekly goals in place and proved to be entirely manageable. The actors were smart, working professionals who knew how to rehearse properly and efficiently.

We rehearsed inside Caravan’s rehearsal space for the first week and a half of rehearsal. The space is roughly eight hundred square feet and is heated by a wood stove. The first task every morning before rehearsals begin, is to light a fire to heat the room. As the actors, stage management, and myself were coming into the rehearsal space with winter boots, we removed our outdoor footwear and socks, slippers, or runners were worn so as not to dirty our sacred space. The rehearsal space provides enough room to block scenes, focus on scene work, and get off book before we move outside. The actor’s performances can start out small and understated in the rehearsal room and, once we move outside to site, have to gradually become louder and larger. This type of rehearsing though is not necessary at the beginning of the rehearsal process, and it is an enjoyable process to be able to concentrate on the text and the blocking in a contained, warm, environment before we move out into the big, bad, outdoor scene locations.
- **LENGTH OF RUN** – Caravan’s winter show runs for three weeks over the holiday season in December. There are eighteen nights of performance, with fifty-four shows performed in total. There are one hundred and eight maximum audience members per show.

The rigor of performing three shows a day, six days a week, was important for me to keep in mind when directorially planning *The Gift Horse*. The key elements I took into consideration when preparing to direct the piece, how to attack it creatively, are as follows:

- **Blocking** – The blocking has to be precise, not overly demanding, and ultimately safe, especially when performing in winter conditions. As the audience is far away as well, it must be clean and purposeful.

- **Distance** – When writing and directing the play I had to allow time for the actors to run ahead of the sleighs in order to be at the next scene location before the sleighs and audience arrival. This was most important when writing the piece; Erin and I planned for early exits of characters in one scene so they could begin the next with a comfortable amount of time to get to the next location.

- **NATURE OF AUDIENCE** - Caravan Farm Theatre audiences are supportive, fun, lively, and intelligent. The majority of them have been attending Caravan productions for many, many years. They understand the outdoor element and bring blankets, rain coats, extra mittens and socks; they are hearty and tough, ready to battle any unpleasant weather. Having performed in Caravan productions before, they are some of my favorite audiences to perform for and are incredibly enthusiastic and supportive of the original work they have come to expect from the company.
EXPERIENCE OF ACTORS - *The Gift Horse* had five in its cast and two musicians. I cast four professional Equity performers from Toronto, Adam Underwood as Harvey Willoughby and Tadashi, Tim Machin as Jun, and Rachael Johnston as Rina, and Sarah May Redmond as the Moon from Vancouver. I cast Studio 58 student actor, Agnes Tong, as Suki, the daughter in the production. I cast Agnes as I wanted to find a talented young performer who could read between the ages of ten and eighteen, and I also wanted to cast an Asian actress in the role. I felt it was important to the story as the piece was based on the Japanese folktale. The character of Suki was the lead in the production, a very special girl as she was a child of the Moon. It suited the production that she was visibly different than everyone else.

The cast was fantastic. They each brought their heart and soul into the work and suited their roles to a tee. Though Agnes was a student, she held her own with the other professional members of the cast. I could not have asked for a better cast and I adored working with each and every one of them immensely.

7. Period

The outdoor setting of a winter production at Caravan Farm Theatre naturally lends itself to another time, another place, a world that is as beautiful as if you are living a fantasy. *The Gift Horse* then, is set in its own world, a magical land that follows its own rules. In the blink of any eye, much like pictures in a dream, the environment changes in the piece as one is pulled from scene to scene. There are so many stimuli, visually, audibly, kinesthetically in the natural environment, a person cannot help but have a highly visceral experience. You have no idea where you are in space, on the land, and there are surprising images, scenes, songs, inspired visuals, and characters around every dark bend. The piece has to be written and performed so broadly, there is no room for subtlety. This is a strength of the format, as dreams and fantasy are not subtle. They are filled with intense emotion, heroics, and challenges, drama that is larger than anything one goes through in their waking life. I knew this about the source material,
chose the material to work from for this exact reason, and was most keen to create this world when writing and directing the piece.

There is not specifically a ‘period’ of the play, however Erin, the design team, and myself, were influenced by, and did much research into, Japanese aesthetic and holiday customs, some of which were used in the play. We based design ideas from Japanese art and pictures, and especially Japanese winter images. The aesthetic is stunning - filled with elegance, playfulness, and raw beauty. We used the Japanese influence to help establish world and character, and when writing the piece, we felt it important to use different Japanese holiday traditions as part of the main action of the play. It helped us to keep the script fresh and different, presenting holiday traditions that the audience had maybe not seen before in relation to a western style Christmas.

8. Emphatic Element

The emphatic element of *The Gift Horse* is theme or idea. The most important aspect the audience goes home with at the end of the night after seeing the show, is the overall purpose, or feeling the piece gives them, especially as this is a holiday production and many are sharing their Caravan winter show experience with family and friends. The show has become an event that adds to their holiday time, their celebrations, and their memories.

The audience will not catch every plot point, every line, every smile, or facial expression of an actor. What they cannot miss, and what they must take away with them at the end of each show is the theme, or idea. The theme should not be prescriptive, too obvious, or domineering to the action and characters of the play, but one must walk away with a feeling of well being, of connectedness, of wanting to be kind to one another, and especially to appreciate one another during this special time of the year.

In order to achieve this as best we could, I encouraged the actors to start out smaller in the playing of the text in the rehearsal room, to allow moments to land, and dig deep
into the desires, the needs and wants of the characters. Although *The Gift Horse* takes place in an imaginary world, I wanted the struggles and relationships of these characters to be very real: situations or feelings that an audience can relate to and can see themselves in. When the performers began to live comfortably in those poignant places, we spent time turning those emotional corners quickly, discovering those beats, and then moving through them to create action that was alive, buoyant and did not wallow in any sadness or melancholy. I did not want the piece to be melodramatic; I wanted the playing of the material to be brave, real, and strong. After we had found the moments and then moved through them, the performers had to take all that they had worked on in the little rehearsal room, and blow it up large and loud in the great outdoors. When we began working onsite, the actors who had performed in Caravan productions before handled the transition from indoor to outdoor with ease, but the ones who had not, had a more challenging time meeting the performance level I was encouraging them to go to. It was taxing for me to convince them that they indeed were not going ‘too big’. One of the actors, Rachael Johnston playing Rina, commented that performing ‘large’ made her feel like she was acting in a bubble and that she found it difficult to have any connection with the other characters on stage as well as the audience. She was approaching the work as she had never approached it before, and this stumped her at first. It did not take long though for her to realize that all that she felt in the intimate, indoor, cozy rehearsal room was living inside her. She just had to let it live larger and louder performing in the great outdoors.

**9. Theme or Idea of the Play**

*The Gift Horse* is the story of a father who must learn to love his adopted daughter unconditionally. I wanted the audience to go away from the show with this theme central in their minds, as the show presented the notion that unconditional love, is the purest kind of love; the kind we all strive to give to others and accept for ourselves. It is a love that must be rejoiced in everyday among our loved ones.
10. Action of the Play

When writing *The Gift Horse*, Erin and I were determined to present the audience with a story that was clear, compelling, meaningful, and magical. Although the original Japanese folk tale was beautiful and provided us with the plot backbone on which to base our story, it did not have a solid central conflict. For many hours, Erin and I discussed what the dramatic tension, or conflict could be in the play. We worked to strategically plan out the plot so each character was affecting and challenging others, and we took great pains to make sure each one went through a dramatic change and journey by the end of the play compared to where they started at the beginning. We achieved this more successfully with some characters than others, but overall, we improved the dramatic action and tension of the play from the original source material.

The major action of *The Gift Horse* can be mapped out as follows:

**STASIS**

Jun and Rina are husband and wife who live a poor, childless existence and have recently come upon some particularly hard times. They are horse farmers and, at the start of the play, we learn they must sell their last horse in order to make ends meet. Although Jun and Rina are underprivileged, they have always hoped to one day have a child and have been on an adoption waiting list for a very long time.

The play begins when Jun returns home from selling their last horse for which Rina is not convinced he got enough money. She is disappointed and this disappointment leads her to feel more desperate and forlorn about her and Jun’s childlessness.

**Inciting Incident**

The intrusion, or initial dramatic action of the piece takes place in the Scene One of the play, when Mr. Harvey Willoughby arrives at the home of Rina and Jun, in the middle of their most desperate hour. Harvey works for the adoption agency and has visited the Hara home on Christmas Eve to tell them they have been approved for adoption. Rina and Jun are absolutely elated; this is the best news they have received in their entire
lives. Just as Rina and Jun are about to sign on the dotted line to finalize the adoption, Harvey realizes he has mixed up the Hara’s with another family. He explains the Hara’s are not approved for adoption, due to their financial situation, and will not be receiving a child. Harvey leaves apologizing to the Hara’s profusely for his mistake. The Hara’s despair upon learning this news is heavy and heartbreaking. So much so, that it beckons the Moon herself to float to earth and soothe them. She comes down from the sky, appearing on a moonbeam through their kitchen window carrying a large pink cherry blossom in her arms. She introduces herself to the Hara’s and gives them the cherry blossom as a remedy for their sorrow. Inside the cherry blossom, is a beautiful baby girl named Suki; a baby that the Haras may have as their own. The Hara’s are overjoyed, but the Moon warns them that the gift comes with certain conditions. On the child’s eighteenth birthday, the Moon will come back to retrieve the child to return with her, never to visit this world again. Rina and Jun protest but the Moon threatens that if they do not abide by her rules and accept the conditions, she will give them no baby at all. Jun does not think they should keep Suki; he is afraid of how hard it will be to give her back to the Moon when she turns eighteen, but Rina is desperate for the child, and begs Jun to let her keep her. Jun’s love for his wife forces him to concede and the Moon departs with a final warning to the couple: “Heed this advice: do not let this child’s impending departure cast a shadow over your love. Embrace every moment, and use the years wisely”.

**Major Crisis**

The major crisis of *The Gift Horse* occurs in Scene Three. Suki is now seventeen years old and is getting ready to go on a date to the ‘Festival of Snow’ with her boyfriend Tadashi.

Over the years, Jun has not followed the Moon’s advice. He has hardened himself against showing his love for Suki as he is afraid to soon let her go. In Scene Two, we see what kind of stoic relationship Jun has with his daughter, and then in scene three, the major crisis of the play occurs. As Suki and Tadashi are about to leave on their date
Jun forbids Suki to go. A fight between Suki and Jun ensues, sending Suki running out of the house with Jun in pursuit of her.

*Climax*

The climax of the play occurs in Scene Four, at the Festival of Snow. Jun enters the scene, frantically searching for Suki. The Moon is there to meet him and she is very, very, angry. She reprimands Jun for not listening to her advice when she brought him his child. Jun is mortified and ashamed and at first does not want to believe he has made such a mistake. He defies the Moon, which forces the Moon to threaten him to take Suki from him tonight, before the original deadline of eighteen years, if he does not love Suki unconditionally for the last year of his time with her. Out of desperation and immense love for his daughter he agrees, and promises the Moon to be a better father to Suki. He will ‘use his time wisely’.

*Denouement*

Scene Five begins on Christmas Eve, Suki’s eighteenth birthday with Suki, Rina, and Tadashi anxiously awaiting the Moon’s return. Jun enters declaring that he does not see her outside. He has become a supportive and loving father for Suki. His emotional and dramatic journey is the greatest in the piece. It is in his learning to accept what gifts his life has given him, no matter what their conditions or consequences, he has become a stronger and generous person.

The Moon is about to take Suki with her in the end, when Harvey Willoughby arrives with the most exciting news: Rina and Jun have finally, been approved for adoption. Jun has been saving money since his character transformation between Scene Four and Scene Five and he and Rina are financially stable enough to be approved for adoption. Everyone is thrilled, and as a parting gift for the Hara’s, the Moon gives them a Gift Horse: a beautiful white pony that will live as long as they and provide them many a handsome foal with which to start their new horse farm. She also gives Suki the gift of allowing her to visit her family once a year on Christmas Eve. Suki and the Moon depart into the starry night sky and Rina and Jun are content with their beautiful gifts.
11. Dramatic Metaphor

_The Gift Horse_ is like a moon lit night in winter. The light of the moon is a bright gift on a dark cold night, yet the frozen ground and air around you, are a reminder of winters harshness that can at once be beautiful and volatile.

12. Mood

I wanted the mood of _The Gift Horse_ to be a counterpoint between serene and tranquil and relentless and stern. I wanted the colors of the piece to be blue’s and whites, light gold’s and browns; nothing Christmas-like, no red’s and greens, traditional Christmas practices, gaudily decorated trees or fancy stockings hung from the chimney. I researched many Japanese winter images, Japanese Christmas cards and old vintage Japanese paintings of winter. These drawings were executed with a simple beauty in their clean lines and muted colors. I found a quality of discipline about them in the black, elegant lines of a single cloud in the sky or the slanted, delicately brushed roofline of a simple home. There was nothing overdone about these images and they were not particularly colorful or boastful in their execution. As much as I wanted _The Gift Horse_ to be light, airy, and sweet, like the flight of a tiny fairy, I wanted the reality of Jun and Rina’s agreement with the Moon to always be present; there were rules to follow, and if they didn’t follow those rules they would suffer the consequences.

13. Characters

**Moon**

- **Qualities:** tempestuous, powerful, dramatic, self-deprecating, caring
- **Metaphor:** a frightful tempest
- **Rhythmic or Musical Quality:** volatile, grand, dramatic
- **Major Desire:** To provide Rina and Jun a child to love
- **Main Action:** To teach Jun to love unconditionally
RINA  
*Qualities:* kind, caring, worried, strong, unsure, and supportive  
*Metaphor:* a mother deer with her baby fawn in a meadow  
*Rhythmic or Musical Quality:* a soft lullaby, soothing, pressing, slow, matriarchal  
*Major Desire:* To have a child of her own  
*Main Action:* To love Suki with all her heart while she is on this earth

JUN  
*Qualities:* scared, punishing, caring, unsure, confused, hurt, sad, and demanding  
*Metaphor:* a sailor lost at sea  
*Rhythmic or Musical Quality:* scattered, unfocused, and unpredictable, like modern jazz  
*Major Desire:* To have a child of his own  
*Main Action:* Jun will not allow his love for Suki to be known. He guards his love as one day he will have to let her go. His journey in the piece is to learn to love unconditionally.

HARVEY  
*Qualities:* scattered, over worked, clumsy, dogmatic, caring, helpful, over ambitious, over friendly, foolish  
*Metaphor:* a tired donkey pulling a heavy cart up a hill  
*Rhythmic or Musical Quality:* peppy, frenetic, but well thought out. Like catchy songs from old Broadway musicals  
*Major Desire:* To approve Rina and Jun for adoption and provide them with a child  
*Main Action:* Harvey finds Rina and Jun a child for them to love unconditionally just as Suki is leaving their lives forever. He is a hero but doesn’t know it.
SUKI  
*Qualities:* honest, full of life, joyful, impish, smart, and full of wonder, sophisticated, caring  
*Metaphor:* a single pink Japanese cherry blossom petal falling from a tree  
*Rhythmic or Musical Quality:* whole, beautiful melody, precise, quick, like a haunting violin solo  
*Major Desire:* To feel loved by her father and to see the world that she came from  
*Main Action:* Suki is the catalyst in which all the other characters react to. Her main action is to accept her father’s love, even though it was hard to find.

TADASHI  
*Qualities:* sweet, supportive, earnest, adventurous, generous, warm, kind, over zealous, honest, and compassionate  
*Metaphor:* a puppy with a big red bow around its neck  
*Rhythmic or Musical Quality:* plodding, slow, steady, like a warm Bob Dylan folk tune  
*Major Desire:* To take Suki to the Festival of Snow and to love her with all his heart  
*Main Action:* To provide Suki with support and friendship

14. Structural Elements

*The Gift Horse* is divided up into five scenes. The action of the play is about forty-five minutes long and the sleigh-ride portion of the production is about fifteen minutes long.

The five-scene structure of the play is very purposeful. We chose to have no more or no less than five, as we felt this was a perfect number of scene locations for the audience. I have broken down the scenes following the basic structure of dramatic action to better indicate why, and how important this magic number five is.
**Scene One** – *Exposition*. Basic Story line, characters, initial conflict are introduced. We send the audience to the next scene with a sense of foreboding and mystery.

**Scene Two** – *Development*. The basic story line continues. We see what has become of the action of Scene One, we get to know the characters, their realities, their given circumstances, and we gain a deeper understanding into the conflicts of the piece.

**Scene Three** – *Complications*. If Scene Five is the denouement of the play, then logistically major dramatic action such as the major crisis must occur in Scene Three, as the climax is in Scene Four. In Scene Three of *The Gift Horse*, the characters and story line are developed even further; we learn more about the central argument and character arc of the piece. The major crisis occurs, and we now care deeply about the characters and are anxious to see what happens next. We whisk the audience away to the climax of Scene Four.

**Scene Four** – *Climax*. The end of this scene dramatically changes the characters lives in the piece. They undergo the catalyst that launches them into a new state of being, much to the audience’s satisfaction. The sleighs then take us away to Scene Five, the *resolution*, where we will find out how the piece ends.

**Scene Five** – *Resolution*. The plot line is resolved. We close the production with a beautiful image of the gift horse herself. The story is wrapped up, the ending is sad but meaningful. The audience travels home feeling satisfied and moved.

Knowing I had five scenes to block and bring to life in two and a half weeks time, it was clear before I began rehearsals that I had best be as prepared as possible. As this was my first time directing a Caravan winter show, I was terrified that if I did not know exactly what I wanted for each and every scene before we began rehearsing, I would run the risk of getting lost in the rehearsal process. I decided to remain very rigid and structured in the rehearsal room, never rehearsing a scene for longer than I had scheduled for it, and running the piece as soon as possible. I broke down week by week as follows:
The First Three Days – Roughly block the whole play with a run in the afternoon by Sunday, before Monday’s day off.

The First Week – Have a second pass at all the scenes, rehearse on site (outside) by the end of the first week, start incorporating the music into rehearsals by the end of the first week.

The Second Week – Have a third pass at all the scenes on site, work teamsters, horses and sleighs into rehearsal, work on tightening bits, work with humans, music, and animals for each run.

In each scene, there is clear, dramatic action that justifies moving onto the next scene. In that sense, the structure of the play, being comprised of five scenes with very distinct storytelling objectives and importance, was relatively simple to rehearse, as the dramatic journey is precise. Myself and the actors knew where we were at all times in the story structure and what we needed to send the audience off to the next scene knowing and feeling. Caravan winter show structure is a blessing as far as rehearsal goes as the drive and impetus for the sleighs to move is built into the script. It is a natural flow that feels purposeful and informed.

In accordance with the aforementioned rehearsal goals of each week, I broke the rehearsal schedule up as follows before entering into the rehearsal period. I prepared the whole two and a half weeks schedule before going into the rehearsal room; I felt I needed to get a clear, long-term picture of where I was headed, and what absolutely needed to be covered in order for performers, teamsters, and horses to know the show as best as they can before an audience.

Friday, November 25th
10 Design Presentation, Meet & Greet, Read Through
1 Lunch
2 Company Meeting in Cook Shack
3 to 4:30   Read Through of Script Again (Cast & Stage Management only)
4:30 to 4:45   Break
4:45 to 5:30   Walkabout the property – go to different scene sites

**Saturday, November 26th**

9:30 to 10   Actor Warm Up
10 to 11:30   Scene 1
11:30 to 11:45   Break
11:45 to 1   Scene 2
1 to 1   Lunch
2 to 3:45   Scene 3
3:45 to 4   break
4 to 5   Music – Full Cast

**Sunday, November 27th**

9:30 to 10   Actor Warm Up
10 to 11:30   Scene 4
11:30 to 11:45   Break
11:45 to 1   Scene 5
1 to 2   Lunch
2 to 3   Scene 5
3 to 3:15   Break
3:15 to 4:15   Stumble Through of Play
4:15 to 5   Music – Full Cast

**Monday, November 28th – Day Off**

**Tuesday, November 29th**

9:30 to 10   Actor Warm Up
10 to 11:30   Scene 1
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1    Scene 2
1 to 2      Lunch
2 to 3:45    Scene 3
3:45 to 4    Break
4 to 5     Music

Wednesday, November 30th
9:30 to 10     Actor Warm Up
10 to 11    Scene 4
11 to 11:30  Scene 1
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1    Scene 5
1 to 2      Lunch
2 to 2:30    Scene 5
2:30 to 3 End of Scene 2
3 to 3:15    Break
3:15 to 5 Run of Entire Play

Thursday, December 1st 2012
(on site)
9:30 to 10     Actor Warm Up in Rehearsal Room
10 to 11:45  Scenes 1, 2, 3
11:45 to 12  Break
12 to 1    Community Clean Up (everyone who lives and works
on the farm takes an hour before lunch every
Thursday to perform various tasks to keep the farm
and our communal living and working environment
tidy)
1 to 2      Lunch
2 to 3:30    Scene 4
3:30 to 3:45  Break
3:45 to 5  Music

**Friday, December 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2012**
(on site)

9:30 to 10  Actor Warm Up in Rehearsal Room
10 to 11:30  Scene 5
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1  Scenes 1, 2, 3
1 to 2  Lunch
2 to 3  Run Play
3 to 3:15  Break
3:15 to 5  Music

**Saturday, December 3\textsuperscript{rd} 2012**

9:30 to 10  Actor Warm Up in Rehearsal Room
10 to 11:30  Scene 5 – Work with Whimsy and Kim (horse handler) on site
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1  Work Bits
1 to 2  Lunch
2 to 3:30  Work Bits
3:30 to 3:45  Break
3:45 to 5  Music with Musicians in Rehearsal Room

**Sunday, December 4\textsuperscript{th} 2012**

9:30 to 10  Actor Warm Up in Rehearsal Room
10 to 11  Rehearse with Whimsy on site
11 to 11:30  Tops and Tails of Scenes 1 through 5
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1  Work Thru – Scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
1 to 2  Lunch
2 to 3:30  Run Thru with Kim and Whimsy on site
3:30 to 3:45  Break
3:45 to 5  Music with Musicians in Rehearsal Room

Monday, December 5th 2012 – Day Off

Tuesday, December 6th 2012
9:30 to 10  Warm Up
10 to 11:30  Work Bits on site
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1  Work Bits on site
1 to 2  Lunch
2 to 4  Stop/Start Wagon Run with Teamster + Cast
4 to 4:15  Break
4:15 to 5:30  Music with Musicians in Rehearsal Room

Wednesday, December 7th 2012
9:30 to 10  Warm Up
10 to 11:30  Work Bits
11:30 to 11:45  Break
11:45 to 1  Work Bits
1 to 2  Lunch
2 to 4  Stop/Start Run with Teamster + Cast
4 to 4:15  Break
4:15 to 5:30  Music with Musicians

Thursday, December 8th 2012 - ** 2 to 10 Rehearsal Day
2 pm  Route Run with Teamsters
5 to 6  Dinner
6 to 8  Light Walk + Run with Teamsters
8 to 8:15       Break
8:15 to 10      Tech Run with Teamsters

**Friday, December 9th 2012 - ** 2 to 10 Rehearsal Day
2 to 3:45       Work Bits on site
3:45 to 4       Break
4 to 5          Run with Teamsters
5 to 6          Dinner
6 to 7          Prepare for Dress Run
7 to 8          Dress Run with Teamsters
8 to 8:30       Actors out of Costumes, Notes with Teamsters
8:30 to 10      Notes with Cast

**Saturday, December 10th 2012**
3 pm Teamster Call       Go Over Sleigh Route
4 pm                        Snack
6 pm                        1st Preview
7 pm                        Dinner
8 pm                        2nd Preview
9:30 pm                    Notes

**Sunday, December 11th 2012**
6 pm                        3rd Preview
8 pm                        4th Preview
9:30 pm                    Notes

**Monday, December 12th – Day Off**

**Tuesday, December 13th 2012**
4pm                        5th Preview
6pm                        6th Preview
15. Directorial Approach

Caravan Farm Theatre productions are performed outdoors. The production elements must be big, bold, beautiful, larger than life and the performances and story basics must be clear, understandable, and ultimately meaningful. Large-scale visual elements must be written into the original script as well as planned for in directorial preparations. As the land is the stage, the sky, literally, is the limit. Elements that could not be used in an indoor production such as horses, cars, real trees, real bushes, and often, real mice skittering across the stage, are very possible and exciting visual treats for an audience.

As Erin and I were writing *The Gift Horse*, we were not only concentrating on traditional story structure to tell a complete story, we were writing grand, visually pleasing theatrics. We were able to write such stage directions as ‘the moon descends into the kitchen on a moonbeam’ or ‘a beautiful, winter-white horse appears’, as we knew we were able to bring these words to life at Caravan.

In organizing and planning my rehearsal schedule and directorial approach then, I already knew the grand theatrics I was going to incorporate directorially into the piece, such as the stage directions detailed in the previous paragraph, and had many conversations with the designers as to how to achieve them. But there were also smaller, more detailed moments within the scenes that had to be in place in order for the audience to emotionally connect with the story and its characters. I knew this was far more important than any large visuals, as without this, we would never have cared and have been willing to follow these characters from one scene to the next.

As I was preparing my rehearsal schedule before rehearsals began, I thought about how I was going to construct a creative and healthy rehearsal room and practice and what that meant to me. As a performer myself, I know what rehearsal techniques or practices from a director I have appreciated and found the most useful, so I listed a few
of them out as a guide for myself as a young director. Some are simple and structural, some are more complicated, but they helped to launch me into the rehearsal process with clear directorial goals:

- **Punctuality** – I have always felt this to be very important. It is disrespectful when a director, actor, stage management, or other creative or production member of the rehearsal room team is late. It sets a weak precedent for the entire rehearsal process. I wanted to make sure that I was *never* late for rehearsals and that, if possible, I would arrive at least ten to fifteen minutes early. What is that old expression? If you are on time, you are already too late.

- **Respect of Others** – I directed a production once, where one of the performers had very strict religious beliefs, and before we started rehearsals, stated that he would appreciate it if there were not any swearing used in the rehearsal room. At first I was taken aback at this request; I did not know how I felt about my rehearsal room having such strict and explicit rules put upon it, but I chose to honor his wish. I found that by reminding myself not to swear when speaking to my actors or stage management during the rehearsal process, I became more careful of my words altogether, and was mindful of what I chose to say on the whole. My dialogue with everyone in the rehearsal room was comprised of words that came from an intelligent, informed, and logical place in my brain that helped me get my ideas across in a more detailed and specific manner. If you look at it simply, in times of crisis, a natural leader does not let his or her emotions get in the way of making informed decisions. As swearing is made up of words that are highly emotionally charged, and usually escape our mouths in times of extreme stress or duress, making a conscious decision not to say them, helped me remain calm, cool, collected, and more selective and informed in what I chose to say. This led me to the overall conclusion that a rehearsal room should be a place for creativity, inspiration, respect, and love. We should leave our judgments, biases, vulgarity, or bad behavior at the door to make room for the intelligent, mindful, and imaginative nature of our better selves.
• **Structure** – Follow the rehearsal schedule. Do not go over the time allotted for a scene. If the rehearsal schedule is going to change for the next day, make the changes as soon as possible. Try not to waste everyone’s time; do not call them actors unless they are needed, do not try and use actors when they have not been called.

• **Process** – In a traditional three-week rehearsal structure, I have always appreciated getting three passes (at least) of a scene, excluding runs, before previews or opening. The first pass to block it in and make some choices, the second pass to dig into the text, story, circumstance, emotion, and expand on choices made, and the third pass to dig even deeper into the aforementioned. Of course this is flexible depending on the needs of the actor, but it helps the performer know what kind of time they are looking at in order to find, create, and hone their performance.

• **Encourage Imagination** – Let the performers make informed blocking choices. Guide them, but do not dictate to them. As an actor I want to be able to feel where I should go on stage or what I should be doing by my own impulse. I do not want a map laid out for me before I am up on my feet. Impulsive blocking allows me to understand intellectually and emotionally why and how I am moving where and when.

• **Say Little, Move Little** – Be still. Be specific. As an actor I want a director that is still in their body; that I know is watching me in a manner that is concentrated and focused. If they move too much, it worries me; especially in the early parts of rehearsal, as I feel they want me to be further ahead in my process than I am. I also do not want a director to say too much in his/her direction to me. I want them to be succinct and purposeful, not overly stated or emotional. If I do not understand something they have said, or feel they have not said enough, I will ask them.
• **Gratitude and Appreciation** – Positive words go a long way. Always keep positive. Hitting a rough patch in rehearsal is natural and is going to happen, but everyone will come out of it; they always do. Rely on your people, do not micromanage them, but encourage them, and constantly praise. People like to know when they are doing the right thing, or headed down the right track in the rehearsal room. It leaves everyone feeling charged at the end of the day, and if an actor is happy, and a rehearsal room is happy, the production will be a happy one.

I had five professional, and very talented actors to help me apply my list in the rehearsal room. As they are seasoned pros, they did not need much of my assistance in finding moments of depth and realism. They were all intelligent, busy, and hard working performers, who with time and a little guidance from me, figured it out with ease. In each scene, we worked to develop strong character relationships and had many conversations about the emotional themes of the play: the bond between parent and child, forgiveness, letting go, and acceptance. We rehearsed each scene to discover character and moments, question motivation, and express feeling. Despite that the play was a folk tale, an otherworldly fable of sorts, we wanted the audience to be able to relate to these characters and their hardships. These characters were going through intense and important self-discoveries, and it was the responsibility of the actors and myself to portray them.

There were certain elements of emphasis in the play that added to the overall feel and mood of the piece and I wanted to make sure these were highlighted in my directorial approach. These elements were, the serene nature of the piece and story, the beauty of the Japanese influence in the design, and the emotional themes to which the piece spoke.

I had no idea if these three important elements would come together until I saw the show on the first preview. I had to trust that I had laid the groundwork and that the many
hours the designers and I talked about the feel and aesthetic of the show, and the in-depth work done with the actors in the rehearsal room, would read and pay off.

16. Design Words

I looked at many, many, pictures of Japanese winters, Japanese post cards, Japanese homes, fashion, and art. I studied Japanese Christmas traditions; there are not many as they do not celebrate Christmas the way Westerners do. I had an idea, design wise that all stemmed from the color blue. In all the Japanese photos I came across, blue was prominent. The traditional red and green of our western Santa Claus, mistletoe, cedar branches, or stockings hung on the mantle piece, are not featured in the Japanese aesthetic. Their decorations are white, icy, and light blues. The following is a list of ‘designerly’ words that I kept using, and that the designers and I kept coming upon in our research:

- Blue
- Ice
- White
- Stars
- Moon
- Opaque
- Bamboo
- Black
- Bright Red
- Clean lines
- Sparse
- Simple
- Without clutter
- Shine
- Japanese Fans
- Shoji Screen
- Colorful Kimonos
• Cottons, Furs, natural fibers. No artificial cloth such as polyester
• Pink Cherry Blossoms
• Birds
• Sparkling Snow

The script also calls for the Hara home to fade in color and palette as the story went on, as if the characters were getting sadder and sadder, their happiness being sucked out of them as the story progresses. My Set Designer, Phillip Tidd, and Costume Designer, Erin Macklem, loved this idea. This was something they could really sink their teeth into and they did. Erin and I did not expect them to get so excited about it, but it provided them a jumping off place, a way into the story, feeling, and journey of the characters: especially that of Jun.

17. Audience Orientation

As mentioned previously, the audience of the winter show is seated on horse drawn sleigh. They sit facing one another; they witness the show turning their heads, or bodies slightly to the side. They must sit facing each other for safety reasons.

The sleigh orientation can be set up in various ways however. Because the sleighs are moving, independent, floating entities, they can be set up in a thrust, proscenium, alley, in-the-round, or in banks - two and two or four and four. This provides some very interesting and imaginative ways to structure each scene. They could all be placed differently or the same for each scene.

The audience formation that I used for The Gift Horse was a thrust formation of the sleighs and then bleacher seating for the first and last scene. I chose bleacher seating for the first scene as I wanted the audience to be able to see the action well, making sure they heard and understood key plot points and characters. The audience came back to the first set for the last scene, as again, I wanted them to be able to clearly understand the plot pay off at the end, and clearly see Whimsy, our gift horse, as she
came down the hill towards the audience, the final, and most powerful image of the play.

Four of the five scenes in *The Gift Horse* take place in the Hara home. Set Designer, Phillip Tidd and I, wanted to establish a home set that looked comfortable, and relaxing, but was also open enough so the sleighs could be as close as possible to the stage.

**18. World of the Play**

This play takes place in a world of its own, it is not of real time or history in any regard. Within this world, there were a couple of rules that Erin and myself had to consider when writing the piece, and I had to contemplate when beginning directorial preparations.

The most important rule that the audience must accept and understand is that the Moon is a major character in the play; she is a living, breathing, live presence, that speaks, has emotion, and drives some of the main dramatic action of the play. Erin and I decided to give this character a heightened sense of dialogue; a more refined way of speaking compared to the other characters. This seemed to give her a regal and classical quality that was right for the world of this play. The Moon, cannot speak common vernacular, as she is a kind of god.

The other rule of this play concerned the fact that the main character of Suki was a child of the Moon’s; the Moon had brought her down to earth as a gift for Jun and Rina Hara. When casting the part, I felt the actor playing Suki had to be a different race then the rest of the cast altogether, and due to the Japanese design aesthetic and influence of the production, I was set on casting an Asian actor. I could have cast any other race if I needed to, as the main important story necessity was that Suki was different from everyone else in the piece.
19. Special Problems

The special problem of a Caravan winter production is the use of horses, and there are certain aspects of using horses that have got to be put into place before planning for the production can even begin. They are as follows:

- Eight highly trained teams of horses and their teamsters and shotguns must be assembled.
- The teams and teamsters must have ample rehearsal time to learn their patterns and routes safely.
- All technical preparations for the sleighs have to be meticulous for audience safety reasons.
- The teams must be able to pull eighteen people for an hour, three times a day.
- You cannot rush a horse and you cannot make them do what you want, when you want, all the time. You must exercise patience and be sensitive to the animal’s needs. What’s that they say about working with children and animals?
- You must care for these animals well being immensely. You cannot go ahead with anything if the horses and all safety practices associated with them are not adhered to.
CHAPTER TWO

Production Journal

The Gift Horse – Written by Courtenay Dobbie and Erin Mathews
Directed by – Courtenay Dobbie
Music by – Courtenay Dobbie
Set Design by – Phillip Tidd
Costume Design by – Erin Macklem
Lighting Design by – Stephan Bircher
Props Design by – Scott Crocker

I have been reading the following books in preparation to write, and subsequently direct The Gift Horse for Caravan Farm Theatre: The Bread and Puppet Theatre, Volume One and Volume Two by Stephan Brecht, The Living Theatre by Elmer Rice, and Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to Today by James Roose-Evans. I wanted to look at Bread and Puppet Theatre’s various creation methods and show images that incorporated large-scale elements designed specifically for outdoor theatre. As The Bread and Puppet Theatre is one of the oldest outdoor theatre companies in North America, the books provided some very inspirational material such as photographs, company history, and descriptions of how they created their shows. I used the books by Rice and Roose-Evans, as a reminder of the fundamentals of what dramatic elements make up a strong story or script, a healthy rehearsal room, and a motivated theatre maker and director. When I am about to embark on a creative process, it is useful for me to find written or visual material about the style of theatre I’m directing to refer to before I begin and as part of my research. I did not use any specific technique directly from these books in the writing or directing of The Gift Horse; I used the material rather as a resource.
Monday, October 3rd - First Design Meeting

The Set Designer of *The Gift Horse*, Phillip Tidd, and I met at Caravan for the first time today. I was nervous about meeting him, as the script still has far to go in its development and he is, outside of Erin and myself, the first to have ever read it. As it is still so very much in an exploratory phase, I was mainly concerned about what he thought about clarity of story, character journey, what he liked about the piece, and what his questions were.

We sat down at the picnic tables outside of the Cook Shack. It was a nice day outside, not too windy or chilly, and the leaves from the big tree in the yard were falling around us as we spoke. It was a beautiful setting to talk about designing a show.

We started talking about the story, the characters, and the script first. He asked me a couple of plot questions and about the world of the piece. I had already talked to him on the phone about the Japanese aesthetic I was looking for in the design, so he was prepared for that. We talked about the language of the play; how the Moon has a more heightened language than everyone else, and how it was fitting for her.

After the initial story talk, we got into the design. He loves the design idea that each home we come across gradually fades in color as Jun’s sadness in the piece progresses. Erin and I were unsure of this, if it would be something that could work, we thought it might be too obvious, but Phillip loved it and wants to use it in his design. That was the most exciting part of our conversation.

We talked about colors and the simplicity of the Japanese aesthetic that we are both very interested in as inspiration for the piece. We both left the meeting with general ideas, color, and a design plan in mind. As I am still very new at this, my nervousness started to fade as our meeting went on, and by the end I was far more relaxed then when we started.
We seem to communicate well so far. I have never worked with Phillip, so I was not sure if we would be able to read each other, respond off of one another’s ideas, and most importantly inspire each other. So far though, I find him to be a very intelligent, sensitive, and creative designer.

Until the next meeting! Can’t wait.

**Thursday, October 13th - First Meeting with Lighting Designer**

I met with Stephan Bircher, *The Gift Horse*’s lighting designer today. While I know him very well from past Caravan productions in which I have performed I have never worked with him as a director.

I told him about the script, the story, the aesthetic of the piece. His main concern and continual artistic challenge at Caravan in both the summer and winter productions, is that there be a place to hang the lights that in the best case scenario, is somehow worked into the set design.

Of course. How could I not have thought of that? As this show is outdoors, there is nothing to hang any lights off of. In the past, Stephan has used trees, and the occasional lighting pole to hang the lights. Stephan wants me to seriously consider this when I meet with Phillip about the set design. I can tell from this meeting, that this is going to be an ongoing challenge for the set designer, lighting designer, and myself when mounting productions for Caravan, that we all have to put our brains on. Where do we hang the lights? The sky?

**Tuesday, October 18th - Phone Conversation with Erin Macklem - Costume Designer**

I had my first discussion with Erin Macklem, the Costume Designer today. I have never worked with Erin before, but I know her very well from being at various theatre events with her and from working as an actor at The Belfry Theatre where she is the Artistic Associate. I have always admired Erin; she has always seemed like she has an
incredible work ethic and is smart, well read, and articulate woman. She sent me an email a while back expressing interest in designing for a Caravan show, and as I respect and get along with her so well, I immediately thought of her to design the costumes for this show. This is a fantastic opportunity to forge a long-term director/designer relationship with her.

We had a phone conversation, as she is in Victoria, and talked generally about the design of the piece; directions we would like to go, what the overall costume aesthetic is, and color palette. She was very excited about the idea of the costumes fading in color as the show went on, like they are getting more and more washed out as the happiness seeps out of the family. We talked about how we wanted to really use blue and silver as the overall two colors of the costume design. We very much want to stay away from the typical Christmas colors of red and green. I want this show to look like a blue ice sculpture. Erin was thrilled at this idea and is going to run with it.

We also talked about wanting to take the simplicity of Japanese design, the straight lines, the primary colors, the streamlined elegance that is so dominant in their art work and clothing, and use that as the basis of inspiration for the costumes. We both agreed that we do not want the actors to look like Japanese cartoon characters from an anime film. We want to borrow and be inspired from the cleanliness and simple structure of the aesthetic, while also adding our own flare and folktale aspect to what the actors are wearing; as much as we want the costumes to be inspired from the Japanese aesthetic, we want the piece to exist in its own world, to have its own design rules and beauty.

Erin discussed with me that, as a starting off place in the costume design, especially in regards to line and texture, she happened upon some beautiful images online of Japan’s *Ainu* people. The Ainu were a group of indigenous people of ancient Russia and Japan. Before our next phone conversation, Erin is going to send me some images of the Ainu, to see if I am keen on the look of the clothing as inspiration. I am excited to see the images.
Friday, October 21st – Second Design Meeting with Phillip Tidd

I met with Phillip at his house today. I was nervous for this meeting as I didn’t quite know what to expect, what ideas he may have, if I will like them, how to tell him if I do not, how to be encouraging and obtain what I am looking for in the design, and how to spark his imagination to improve it.

We went into his studio and I saw the maquette on his table. It was white, hadn’t been painted; it was a very plain, very simple Japanese inspired design.

I did not quite know what to make of it. I had gone into this meeting expecting what I had imagined in my brain to magically appear in front of me, for Phillip to be able to read my mind, except that I am not even sure what I had in my mind. Because I am writing the show, I imagine the set and characters as if through a glossy veil; like in an film where the Director of Photography smudges a layer of Vaseline on top of the lens to make the image appear softer. As I write this play, I only imagine faint outlines of the characters, the set, the costumes, the lights; I don’t know what is visually important yet or what is exactly needed in the space as I have been living in my writing brain with this piece for so long now, I am solely concentrating on the action, the story, who needs what from whom, the journey, the style of dialogue, all the writer stuff.

I did not like what I saw in the maquette. It was too stark, too white, too conventional, too plain, and unimaginative. It looked like a Vancouver condo; insipidly modern. I was trying with all my might to articulate this without sounding rude, but was so shocked, I found myself not sure of what to say. I could not recall words to use that may help Phillip understand what wasn’t working and then to clarify what I ultimately wanted. I kept telling myself that I should not expect a completely finished product, that Phillip is figuring out the design and piece too as he goes along. To be patient. This is only the beginning, the start of where he wants to go with it. So in our confusion and loss for words we both just sat and stared at the maquette, as if willing it to be ‘better’ than it was.
When I proposed to Phillip to use the design aesthetic of Japanese houses and buildings as an influence for the set design, I did not fully discuss what specific aspect of the Japanese feel I was interested in and looking for. This was my fault and I should have given him more of a specific direction to go with right off the mark. I did not tell him about any time period to place the piece, as I would like the story to happen in its own world, in any time, place, or era. I want it to be inspired by the Japanese winter aesthetic just as Norse, Russian, or Eastern European aesthetic have inspired many Caravan winter productions in story and design aesthetic. The Japanese have a healthy winter season; the northern part of the island especially receives a lot of snow, and therefore, they have a distinct ‘winter’ look that is unlike the winter aesthetic culture of the Europeans, Russians or Slavic people. Borrowing from this design palette intrigues me.

What we came to at the end of the meeting was that we felt as if the design was too stark. Phillip had incorporated these beautiful Shoji screens as part of the set. Originally I was excited by this idea as it seemed distinctly Japanese, had lots of lighting potential, and made it clear in look and feel, that the design was inspired by Japan. Shoji screens are not modern, they have been used in Japanese homes for centuries, but in this case they made the space look too clean, too crisp, too I kea-furniture like.

Phillip and I decided we needed to go less ‘condo’ more ‘cottage’ with the set design. The Hara family in The Gift Horse is poor and they become poorer as the story goes on. The set that Phillip designed, even though it may be appropriate to the homes of a ‘poor’ family in Japan, felt too clean and organized, ultimately too wealthy. I am glad we reached the conclusion, and came up with the words ‘cottage’ instead of ‘condo’ by the end of the meeting; the lingo made sense to us in trying to figure out what kind of world to give to this play and their characters.

When driving home after my meeting with Phillip I was depressed. I felt I did not give him enough guidance or clarity on what I wanted out of the set from the very beginning. I am not sure how to do this yet though, I have very little experience with designers. I
want to know what I want as a director and be able to articulate it. I hear theatre professionals saying, ‘oh that director is really good with visuals’, or ‘that director is really good with text’, or ‘that director is really good with new plays’, or ‘that director is really good with classics’, and so on and so on. As a director I have done many types of theatre, site specific plays, written and directed my own work, directed black box plays, directed classics, directed new work, musicals, the list goes on. All my work has been wildly different and all of it produced on a very small scale. As the Artistic Director of Caravan Farm Theatre, I now have an opportunity to really hone my work, to delve into developing a body of outdoor, site-specific theatre here, to be able to use a budget to make my productions more spectacular in design, and yet I have only just begun, and I am clumsy at it. I feel confident with what I want in my head, I know I have good taste, and I am learning how to work better with actors, but I do not have any real process yet. Or maybe I do and I just have not had enough experience to practice it. Either way, it makes me feel depressed.

I have not worked with many set designers. Most of my work has been self created and has had little or no set, as I could never afford one. Now that I have a budget to hire a designer, to use that person’s talents to make a story come to life, I am inexperienced in communicating with them. I also do not have much judgment on if they are being difficult or absolutely fantastic, as I have nothing to compare them to. This makes me second-guess my own ideas; I do not know if I am being too demanding or too accommodating or what. I am relying on gaining more experience in the future to help guide me.

For my next meeting with Phillip I am going to come more prepared. With notes and such. Maybe that will help me feel like I have accomplished something by the end.

**Saturday, October 22nd – Phone Conversation with Set Designer**
After thinking about the design meeting in the car yesterday all the way home, I felt unsettled. I wanted to be able to give Phillip more sparks of ideas to work from.
I keep coming back to the fact that the Hara family in the story is poor. I also keep coming back to the image of a house that comes out of the land using the natural environment of Caravan to the utmost. The Costume Designer, Erin Macklem, and I have been researching the Ainu people of Japan after she sent me some images for costume inspiration. They were an ancient indigenous people that inhabited Hokkaido, the Kuril Islands, and Sakhilin. Some were believed to have lived in Russia as well.

The Ainu culture, primarily because it is ancient, is very primitive. The pictures of them depict them in grass huts, wearing patterned Japanese robes, using wood burning stoves, and sitting on grass mats. There are similarities to Canadian First Nations culture, especially the Haida people of British Columbia.

The homes of the Ainu are made of grass, wood poles, bamboo, boards, and mud. The primitive and rustic aspect of these homes is the way the Hara home in *The Gift Horse* could be depicted instead of a traditional Japanese look. The houses are made of materials that are found right on the land, a perfect aesthetic to incorporate for Caravan Farm Theatre. The land is my biggest artistic resource and there is no way of ignoring it. In fact, I feel as if I am cheating the audience in this production by not using the land to its utmost. As four of the five scenes take place in the Hara home, it is very important that we arrive at a very pleasing look for it.

I like the idea that the Hara home, a domestic, inside space, can be placed outside, under big tall trees for example. I like the idea of taking an inside location and looking at it from the outside, literally, as if the audience is sitting outside the Hara’s window watching the show. The home could look like someone has taken a big knife and sliced it right down the middle allowing us to see a cross-section of the characters lives. That could be cool.

So when I thought more and more about using the land and giving the set a distinct ‘Caravan’ feel by incorporating the land as much as possible, using the Ainu homes as influence made a tremendous amount of sense. I phoned Phillip and in our
conversation, expanded on my desire to go more ‘cottage’ instead of ‘condo’. He concurred, said he had been thinking a lot about it too. I told him about the Ainu, he had heard of them before but had not looked at many pictures. I told him I would send him some that Erin had sent me and see if they inspire him. It was a brief conversation.

I am glad I touched base with him and I think we are now on the same page and headed in the right direction.

**Monday, October 31st – Third Meeting with Set Designer**

I went over to Phillip’s studio today. When I arrived, he and his wife were so excited to show me their new baby kitten. Her name is Halia and is part Siamese and Burmese. She is the cutest thing you have ever seen, she looks like a kitten that could be in a commercial. Their neighbor gave the kitten to them after finding it in her barn abandoned by its mother. Phillip and his wife’s old cat died a couple of months ago. He is unsure about getting another cat so soon, but I can tell he loves this little thing. She is perhaps one of the most adorable creatures I have ever seen.

I am realizing that a lot of the work we do in the theatre is about developing personal relationships and trust with the people you are working with. Or before working with them at all, there is a desire to get to know them first. I believe this may be because the work is always incredibly personal, whether you are the director, the designer, or the actor, you are putting your ideas out publicly. You are brave in your desire to share your ideas, your stories, your thoughts with others and you are wary of working with people you feel may have too much of an instant judgment of them. The ideas are new and ever evolving, and you want to work with people that can go on that journey with you. If you feel out of your element, or in my case, new to the whole process, you need support from the people involved in the production in order to break through that creative, private wall you have created for yourself. I do not think this means that you should not work with people who don’t challenge you or push you to do better, but you must feel supported along the way. Otherwise it just feels as if you are all fighting to get something that should ultimately be fun to create, up on its feet.
Phillip and I are beginning to form a relationship in this sense. Meeting his new kitten, sharing a giggle about her with him and his wife, is a part of our meeting that is just as important and the work we do in his studio.

I came prepared today with a couple of requirements that I need the set to have to support the action of the play. I asked myself, what is in the home of the Hara family, to give me some idea of business the actors can do within the scenes. I deduced that in the kitchen I needed a:

- Table
- Couple of Chairs
- Stove/Oven
- Possible Counter
- Coat Rack
- Working Door
- Another Exit Stage Left

My question was:

- How can having these things as part of the set help provide action for the story?

When we walked into Phillip's studio I saw the maquette out of the corner of my eye and it was painted. I was happy that this was so, as the last model I saw was stark white and I could not get past it visually.

Phillip had basically taken exactly what we had talked about, going more ‘cottage’ than ‘condo’ and ran with it. He rounded the edges of the walls, he put textures on them, he has designed low, Japanese inspired furniture, and used many different patterns of raw wood and grass to give the place a rural appeal. He took an image of a home of the Ainu people and has made it his own; it is not too rustic and almost looks like one of the cabins we have here on the farm. He has added an actual working door without me even having to ask for it. We added a stove to the back corner of the set. I think this will
help the mother character, Rina, with some domestic business; fill out her action a bit. I was very pleased and relieved with the design; he did exactly what I wanted him to do.

Except for one attribute - a very difficult one that I do not like and am not sure how to deal with it.

In our last design meeting, Phillip had made a sort of crossbar type structure that he wanted put at the front of the stage to hang lights from. Lighting shows at the Caravan is a continuous challenge, especially in winter. The challenge stems from the fact there is no place to hang the lights because all of the productions take place outdoors. You are relying on some sort of imposed structure.

In the past, Stephan has hung lights primarily from trees and the occasional lighting stand. Because the winter show is performed at various locations around the 80-acre farm, the artistic desire is not to have a big ugly lighting stand present at the scene sites that can aesthetically interfere with the beauty and magic of the natural surroundings. Batteries power the lights, which are car headlights, which means that the throw the lights can provide is very limited. Despite all these challenges, Stephan has done marvelous, ingenious designs, where an audience cannot even tell where the light source is coming from as he has hidden it so well in amongst the tree tops and the landscape.

This set though, presents a particular lighting challenge. Because the bulk of the action takes place in one location, the kitchen of the Hara home, the light has to seem as if it is coming from inside the home. If we hang lights from the trees, from the side of the playing space, as there are no trees in front of the stage to hang them from anyway, the actors will be only side-lit. This will appear bizarre to an audience, especially if the source has to come from way up high.

I do not like the crossbar structure. It is a barrier between the actors and the audience. It is right in the sight lines and closes up the space.
I talked of my dislike for it to Phillip, trying to ask him questions about its function rather than saying I hate it. He defended it in every way, saying it not only helps to be able to light the space from the front, but provides support for these huge timber poles he has designed to come from the back of the set that looks like a roof line for the Hara home.

I did not push it too much and said that we could keep it on the table as ‘open for discussion’ as the finals for the drawings are not due until November 16th. Phillip and I then decided that he could come to the farm tomorrow and we can nail down the location of each scene on the land. We also want to try these floating Japanese lanterns that are written into the script outside to see if they are a bother to light. I am excited to see if they work.

I drove home from our meeting pleased with what Phillip had come up with for the actual home of the Hara family, but displeased with the crossbar lighting structure at the front of the stage. I know this is going to be a bone of contention for us and one of us is going to have to bend on it. My stubbornness is not going to let it entirely be me. We may reach a compromise, but I am at least getting a little bit of what I want, otherwise why would I be doing this? Right?

**Tuesday, November 1**st **– Fourth Meeting with Set Designer**

Before Phillip arrived on the farm today, I walked where I thought the scenes could be, what route the sleighs would take. I wanted to make a firm decision before Phillip got here. I needed to talk about bigger design questions with him and I did not want to waste time deciding on where the scenes should go. Besides, ultimately it is my job to decide this, not his.

The biggest directorial question I had for myself was whether the show was going to go down into the ‘Back 40’ acres of the property to be performed. I had to make this decision today as it affects how the show is built as well as the timing; it takes longer getting there on sleighs. Because the Back 40 acres consists mostly of wide open fields with a perimeter of forest, the atmosphere is rigid, cold, harsh, with its bitter cross winds
and wide open plains of snow. The play needs to support this type of landscape in the
text and story. It has to be one that is epic itself; it must match the land it is performed
on in size, feel, and natural elements. If we stay up on the main plateau, the Front 40
acres of the property, it is easier on the horses and teamsters, and we have the ability
to tell a more intimate, personal story. We did *A Christmas Carol* in the Back 40 acres of
the property last year to much success. I was not sure if I wanted to use it again or give
the audience and teamsters a change up by not using it again this year.

So I started from the very beginning, I knew where I wanted the first scene of the play to
take place: in the back corner of the Stud Pasture that is nearest to the parking lot.
Starting the show in the Stud Pasture makes for a bit of a walk for the audience as it is
about 300 meters from the Cook Shack or ‘lobby’ area of the farm. When the snow
arrives, we will have to lay down a wood chip path for the audience to walk on as it is an
amusing little trek, but a far one nonetheless.

As I walked from the Cook Shack to the forest in the Stud Pasture, the more excited I
became about this site’s possibilities. One must walk through a grove of pine trees
before they reach any sort of clearing where, audience bleachers could be set up and a
scene could take place. I imagined how beautiful it would be if we put small twinkle
lights in the trees to visually guide the audience through the forest, and if we had a fire
pit just behind the set to warm your hands up at. These would be fantastic visuals as
you approached the very first scene.

I looked at two locations in the Stud Pasture forest where the first scene could be
placed. The most theatrically thrilling area is at the bottom of a small hill that has quite a
slope behind it. Very dramatic. The other area has two fantastically big trees that could
beautifully frame the set. There is no hill at this site though.

I concluded that there were two good reasons the set should be against the first hill site
of the Stud Pasture forest; I want the Moon character of the play to descend from above
and into the Hara family kitchen window. That is how she enters in the Japanese folk tale, and I thought it would be magical to see her float down from above into their lives.

The Moon is always high, so in her entrance and blocking she somehow has to remain high up. For her first entrance it has to seem like she is coming from the sky.

Before the hill site I weighed a bunch of options in my head about her entrance. Could we build a ramp of sorts that was elevated for her to enter on? Could she enter from the side? Maybe she doesn’t enter the kitchen and we build her a platform to float upon outside of the house? The best option by far still seemed that we could use the slope of the hill for her simply to walk down from and into the kitchen window. I think the actress would have fun with that too.

Once I decided on the hill location I started walking from the Stud Pasture and into the field where, in my mind, the rest of the scenes could take place. I still had it in my head the possibility of going down into the Back 40. I wanted to walk the route the sleighs would take from the first site to see if the sleigh ride would be thrilling enough. I walked across the fields, trying to imagine the sleigh routes the teamsters might take. I don’t know much about the sleigh choreography yet; I’ll have to ask a teamster what they think about the route. I walked through the field immediately to the ‘Manger Hill’; a small hill in the middle of the field that, at one time, had a manger built for a winter show two years ago called *The Story* which was a retelling of the Nativity story.

I came around the backside of the manger and realized that this would be a perfect second scene site for the play. Again it was built into a hill, which saves us having to jack the front of the stage up in order for the audience to see the scenes from the sleighs. It is also a nice spot as it is completely different from the site from the first home. It is barren, out in the open, set against the cold winter sky.
Jun’s journey in the piece goes from being a warm human being to a cold one, so I liked the idea that this backdrop was out in the middle of nowhere. Like he has gone into the ‘wild’ of his heart.

Once I was at the manger sight, and if we were to stay up on the Front 40 acres of the property, I knew we had to backtrack somehow. There is really no way to go forward on the property from the manger hill, which means, we have to retrace our steps. I started walking back along the field I walked through getting out to the manger. I came to a spot along the way, which seemed like a good fit for the third scene. It is out in the open but has a backdrop of trees, which I liked, and to get there one can take a road that borders the field so that we wouldn’t have to take the field route with the sleighs again. In approaching the scene, you can come at it from the back and side along this road. If we go this way, we can disorient the audience so they feel as if they’re being pulled from one place to the next, never knowing exactly where they are on the property.

All right, so I had my third scene location; I just had to find one more, knowing that we are coming back to the first scene location for the last scene. I began to walk forward in the field again, as we do not have anywhere to go behind us as we would start to get into the “downtown” area of Caravan and the buildings and lights of the buildings are not a very picturesque vision to see.

So I walked back out towards the mountains, with a particular sight I have always wanted to see a scene at Caravan before, and with the knowledge that I needed to find a location with a gigantic tree. We have no shortage of gigantic trees out here, but I needed one that was isolated, was growing out on its own from the rest of the forest.

As I rounded the bend of the field, just before the road curves down to go into the Back 40, there is this huge pine tree that juts out from an embankment. It is perfect, and there is tons of room for the sleighs to manipulate themselves in and around this location. There is even a high up place for the Moon to appear and disappear in the scene. The
ground has two natural levels here too, which means that there are a couple of playing locations.

All right. The fourth scene could take place here. The sleigh ride back to the first location for the last scene is a nice long ride from here, which is fantastic. I did it. I decided where the scene locations were going to be for my first winter show.

When Phillip arrived, I showed him around the locations. He liked all of them and applauded not going down into the Back 40.

**Monday, November 7th – Writing Day with Erin**

Erin and I had a slow start to the day due to not being able to find a warm place to work from the get go. I had to do some admin stuff this morning too. I definitely find that aspect of this job most difficult. All the admin stuff to keep track of as well as writing and directing a play; what was I thinking?! All I want to do is immerse myself in all the artistic business but there is always that one email I have to send today or that one schedule I forgot to send or that one person I have to contact about something. It is exhausting and if I’m not careful it can sneak up on me and take up a whole day. I really have to only allow myself a certain amount of admin time when I’ve got so much to think about artistically.

By the middle of the day though, we had a clear path that we wanted to follow, which was mainly to tweak Scene 3 and Scene 5 and have a rehearsal draft by the end of tomorrow, our last writing day. We worked on Scene 4, moved some things around, added some characters into both scenes that were not there before and decided to attack the final scene of the play. We thought it would be better to deal with the end of the play when we were bright eyed and bushy tailed tomorrow.

**Monday, November 7th – Meeting with Set Designer and Lighting Designer**

So after my writing day with Erin, I had a mini production meeting with Stephan and Philip at the end of the day. The goal of the meeting was to show Stephan, the lighting
designer, the model of the set Phillip had designed to go over the lighting capabilities and I had a couple of very specific lighting questions to ask him.

We had the meeting in the cook shack and Philip brought the set model in a white box. Before the meeting even began he said to me “I have a surprise for you, I think you’re going to be happy with what I’ve done”. He was referring to the cross bar lighting apparatus he had designed on the previous model, which he knew I did not like. I had decided before this meeting to basically just deal with it as I didn’t have much choice, but I was very happy to see Phillip was able to move the poles of the cross bar apparatus back on the set, providing less obstruction to the performers on stage.

I was thrilled with it. It is the perfect compromise on something that is very hard to control. I think we have done our best given our resources and budget. This will allow us to give some front light to the stage and the actors but not cut off too much of the play’s action with the awkward cross bar piece. The model that Phillip has built now suggests that the audience is peeking in the home, like rubbing a patch clear in an iced up window in order to see what is going on inside. It now has some charm and purpose to it, rather than just being designed for necessity.

My two main questions for Stephan were, based on having this cross bar piece at the front of the stage, would the whole playing area of the set be able to be lit? Often times in Caravan winter shows, when the lights in a scene are battery powered they can be very, very, dim which means that actors hug the front edge of the platform/set they are performing on as they know they are lit there. I call it ‘front of stage acting’; I’ve done it here myself before.

I really don’t want to have that happen in this production, that is the whole reason for designing this front cross bar piece providing us the ability to light the whole of the stage. Stephan reassured me that the stage would be lit for the actors to move around in. He also reassured me that the front ‘porchy’ part of the set, a little jut out that seems like an outside area of the house, could be properly lit too, even though it is in front of
the lighting crossbar piece. Stephan thinks we can use one of the shotguns to shine a light from the sleighs onto the set, or we can footlight the performers. The footlights may be a bit more challenging, we’re not sure if they will work; they are so dramatic it might not be the look we’re going for. We’re going to try it out and then see.

The second question I had for Stephan was about a couple of the ‘specialty’ lighting effects of the show that I want to happen. There are four of them:

1. *The Moonbeam Light* – A bright Moonbeam shines into the Hara family’s kitchen window, upon which the Moon enters.
2. *The Glowing Gift Horse* – How to make the Gift Horse glow bright white at the end when she enters
3. *The Christmas Tree Lights at The Festival of Snow* – I have a tree in mind now on the property for that scene. It sticks out of the side of a bank and feels like it is all on its lonesome. It’s perfect. And I want there to be lights from the very top all the way down the tree. It would be magical if it could happen but tricky to get set up. Phillip recommends we hire an arborist to come help us execute it. He has a friend to whom we may be able to trade a couple of comp tickets for work.
4. *The Japanese Lanterns at the End of the Play* – Caravan General Manager, Sean Newton, found some paper Japanese lanterns, that after being lit, float up into the sky and go on for ever and ever until they run out. I had this image of seeing them all float up into the air, but having them tethered to the ground somehow so they look almost like big floating stars. I think it could be magical if it works.

I was happy with how enthused both Stephan and Phillip were at all the ideas for the design for far. Phillip is thrilled we have finalized the set and Stephan seems to be keen on the general Lighting Design and all the specialty items too.

We all came out of the meeting pumped and refreshed. I want this to be a great, warm, beautiful, artful, and emotional show. I think it will be. Here’s hoping.
Tuesday, November 8th – Writing Day with Erin

Good. Great. Finished the Rehearsal Draft. Both feel really good about it all.

Monday and Tuesday, November 14th & 15th – Costume Workshop with Costume Designer at Caravan

The Gift Horse costume designer, Erin Macklem, came to the farm from Victoria for a few days of a costume workshop with me. She is unable to be here for the first five days of the production period, so she and I wanted to make sure to have the designs set so Alex, our head costume mistress, could get going on making patterns and building the costumes.

We wanted to accomplish three things:

- Set the color palette for each scene
- Decide upon the design of each character
- Go through each characters costume track and talk about any potential quick changes

We started with deciding upon the color palette. We are going from a dark blue, to a medium, blue, to a light blue as the scenes and journey of the characters go on. It will seem like the color is fading from their clothes, their lives, and that the characters are changing as time passes by. We want to keep Suki in pinks and reds though, as she should stand out and be special compared to everyone else. We also decided to keep Tadashi in a brighter green, as he is an outsider and does not belong in the Hara’s fading world.

Erin and I went through each minute detail of the basic costume of each character. Erin had brought many inspiration images for us to look at when shaping and deciding upon the structure and look of each one. The images were of Japanese people, high-end fashion magazines, or artful Japanese culture/aesthetic shots.
It was a very productive day and we learned a lot. We decided upon the look for each character. I am so happy with the design. I think it is going to look straight out of a Japanese storybook. Tomorrow Erin is going to go fabric and pattern shopping in Vernon and then bring the fabrics back for me to look at.

**Wednesday, November 24th – Production Week**

Our production week started yesterday. It is a good feeling having everyone here and working on the show.

I met with stage management today and went through the rehearsal schedule. I wrote a couple of songs for the show and I beat out my script. I love this week so far. I am able to have organizational meetings with the crew as well as steal away to my house to do my own directorial preparations for the show.

**Friday, November 25th – First Day of Rehearsals**

My ultimate goal for this day was to get a good night sleep the night before so I could respond with a clear mind and heart to all that was happening today. I want to be efficient, clear, exciting, and calm all at the same time for these wonderfully creative people who I have asked to come and stay on this farm and create art and be here together and have a good time doing it.

We started off with a Meet & Greet in the morning. The entire cast was there, stage management, heads of departments, designers, Caravan Board members, and staff. I gave a speech first, thanking everyone for joining us and talked about the inspiration for the show and what Erin Mathews, my co-writer, and I wanted to do with it.

People seemed to respond to my speech well. I tried to make it understandable, funny, organized, and meaningful. A little thanks goes a long way with people and getting them jazzed about an idea for a play goes even further. Sean brought donuts too, which was good as food is nice to have in a rehearsal room especially if people are just getting to know one another.
After the Meet & Greet we read the play. This was the first time I had heard this play read…ever. It was incredibly exciting and nerve racking all at the same time. For the most part, I was very happy with the way it sounded, the way the text lifted off the page. And there were times in the room where you could hear a pin drop; people were paying attention. That was good. My goal with this winter show was to try and give the audience a really strong story, something they could sink their teeth into and care about. It seemed like everyone was following the story well, and I was able to discern which parts I wanted to work on further.

I like this story. I feel as if I have been living it, planning it forever as it has been more than a year now. Next winter, I want to be more spontaneous about the show. This one is a little too calculated. I almost feel like I’ve been sitting on it too long. The text is a bit over-analytical and forceful in pushing a message home. Next time I write a show, I want to be looser with the creative approach and goals.

After the read we did a bit of table work with the actors. We talked about the characters and they asked me questions about them. We talked about the plot, the Japanese influence of the play, where it came from, and how it informs the dramatic action of the piece. Our conversation started off a bit slow, as we’re all getting used to how each one of us communicates, and how to respond to one another. We did have some enlightened conversation about the show just in time for the lunch bell to go; we went to lunch with full brains.

One of the actors was having a migraine this day and had to take the afternoon off. At first I felt bad for her but then started to get mad as I was worried that she may just be a high maintenance person and I immediately went into rescue mode and started thinking about what if she didn’t recover and who I could get to play the part if she didn’t get better.

I made her stay in her cabin all afternoon while the rest of the cast and I went out to each site and looked at where the scenes would be. We had a great time, they were
quite pleased with the locations, asked tons of questions about the horses and show logistics. We saw the horses in the field and they came up to us and said hello. This was nice; a good first day thing to do. Get the company members to fall in love with Caravan by walking around the property and meeting the animals. Nature and animals. Who doesn’t want to perform around that? They immediately fell in love with the horses and we had a short end to our day as we couldn’t do too much table work with an actor missing.

We broke early; I thanked the cast and stage management for their work today. They all seemed half exhilarated and half terrified by the end. Like they had never seen anything like this before but didn’t know quite what to make of it yet.

Tomorrow they’ll settle more.

**Saturday, November 26th – Second Day of Rehearsals**

My plan today was to roughly block scenes 1, 2, and 4. I wanted them to get on their feet as soon as possible. The play is only 40 minutes long but because of our two-week rehearsal period I wanted the actors to learn their blocking quickly.

We powered through the first three scenes. It was amazing to see. They were all fully committing to the story and going for it all with gusto. This was my day as a director but it was also my day as a writer. I am continually amazed when I create theatre; it begins with an idea in my head, that is then taken to the page, and then finishes on stage, a fully realized production. What started out as a small kernel of an idea, will now be viewed by thousands of people. This is extremely exhilarating and almost makes me want to vomit as I write. But I must remember, and continually remind myself, that I am an expert in my field, and so are all the talented designers, actors, and crew I hire.

You can’t think about it on such a grand scale. You just have to keep forging ahead, day by day, with the ultimate goal of giving the gift of theatre. If I stop to think about the fact that my little idea, the idea I had in my head and my head only, is now public, out there,
something that has been created for thousands of people to see, it petrifies me. There is an intensely private feeling of creating theatrical ideas and stories. These thoughts often come about during one’s most introspective moments; when we’re doing the dishes, or driving, or swimming lengths at the pool; solitary places where we do our most intense, creative thinking. These little snippets of an idea eventually become a massive, multi-leveled project that many people are working on, sharing your idea, building your idea, and then witnessing your idea before it is finally handed over to an audience. This journey then from the private to the public in theatre is fast, furious, and daunting. There is no way of easing oneself into exposing a piece of live theatre, such as you could a novel or a piece of visual art. One person could study a painting or read a book, and criticize it before it is released to the masses. Theatre does not work that way. Traditionally it is to be witnessed by many people, all at once, and most times, (besides experimental theatrical pieces that are intended, let’s say for one person to witness), the more audience members the better. In that case then, a theatre artist must gird themselves up, embrace the leap, rip off the band-aid, as, whether we like it or not, the only way of experiencing the rewards of creating live theatre is to expose your work to people, which in the end, no matter how we brave through it, is an intensely vulnerable place to be.

So as today progressed I was getting my directing groove on. I felt like I talked too much. I always feel like I talk too much. I have to watch myself with this. I also feel very comfortable in this environment, which means that I can be a little casual in the rehearsal room; I have to watch this too. Not that I want to be domineering or anything or create a scary rehearsal room, but I sometimes think I apologize for something I’ve said or some direction I’ve just given by joking around. It is my way of warming up to people, but I don’t want to come across too nervous. I find I especially do this with actors I’ve never worked with before. I may as well get used to this though. I will always be working with actors I don’t know.

By the end of the day we had roughly blocked the first three scenes of the play and learned some songs. I had everyone singing with me on my guitar in the centre of the
room, gathered around me like a campfire. I like this way of learning tunes. It makes everyone less nervous about singing. I had no idea what these actors’ voices were like, I knew they could sing but I didn’t know their range or anything. Turns out they are all strong singers, especially in a group. It was nice to have them singing songs from the show already on day two.

Very exciting. Tomorrow we roughly block the rest of the play and then do a run tomorrow afternoon. So fast. Yet so important.

**Tuesday, November 27th – Fourth Day of Rehearsals**

We started with a production meeting today at 9 am. After feeling completely wiped for my day off yesterday, I went into the production meeting groggy, not entirely clear headed and ready for this week. It went well though, the crew seem to know where they are headed going into this second week of production. Volunteers are organized to come and work on the Christmas tree this weekend, the set is being painted in the next couple of days, and installed by Saturday. The crew seems happy, busy, and perhaps over-worked a little, but in good spirits. It feels like we’re all headed towards the end product, being the show, which is good. People all want to get things done; they’re not anxious, but they’re not resting on their laurels either.

After the productive production meeting, and before we started rehearsals at 10, I went into the office and read my emails. I am still finding it difficult to manage the administrative as well as the artistic end of things and I didn’t even want to check my emails at all. I like delving into the artistic side and don’t ever want to leave. If only I had an assistant or grants that could write themselves.

I had this email in my inbox from a woman, a past Caravan audience member, who said she wanted to come to the show this winter, but after reading the description on line, she wasn’t sure about it. The email was very long; she included cutting and pasting the show description, highlighting words she thought were inappropriate. It was a wicked email saying that she wishes we weren’t doing this show, she wishes we were doing
The Gift of the Magi, and that she would appreciate a follow up email explaining more about the show, the plot and such.

I was so mad. I couldn’t let it go. I went into rehearsals full of self doubt, second guessing everything to do with the script, wondering if her hurtful words saying that people would be offended by our little Christmas show, are true. The actors would be doing a scene and all I could think about was if the whole premise of the show was a bad idea, how could I fix it all, is there time to try and make it better, really letting this woman affect me.

After lunch I did manage to get over it a bit. I went into rehearsals in the afternoon which much less doubt. Finally. It only took about four hours of quietly seething.

The actors are doing great. They are pushing through and coming into the second phase of rehearsals; making everything deeper, funnier, better. They seem to be getting along nicely and having fun.

I find this stage of rehearsals much harder than the first week. The first week is about getting things on their feet for the first time, you are just amazed that it actually looks like it’s going to work. I continually find it fascinating that words on a page can suddenly become a full, beautiful, full-blown story just simply by putting people on their feet and having them say the lines.

The second week of rehearsals is trickier. You have already made some decisions that you don’t have time to go back on. Actors are getting off book so you don’t want to be making many drastic changes to the script. You are trying to bring the piece up to the next level, but at first you may not know how to make that happen. The actors rehearse a scene and you know what needs working on and improving instinctually, but you have to figure out the exact way to articulate it to them. Blocking comes more naturally, you plan out the action and make some pretty stage pictures, but it is taking the acting to the next level, honoring the story by telling it in the most efficient and moving way possible,
that is the greatest challenge. I am lucky that I wrote the script, that I know what the intention behind each line is. It is easier to cut the text too. It doesn’t hurt my feelings to cut my own work. It just makes it easier all around.

By the afternoon my feelings of doubt about the script, the piece, had completely subsided. We worked very hard today and I have earned my rest tonight. We ran Scene 3 over and over again, because we had the time and could afford to do so. Those actors found new depths in the scene every time we ran it. They started to become specific with their choices, slowly building the intensity of the scene rather than blasting out the heated emotion on one level. Instead of yelling, they found subtlety with the voice, instead of portraying pure hate, they found deeper, varied emotions such as contempt, resentment, and fear. Tim Machin, the actor playing the father, Jun, particularly found more levels to his performance in the scene. When Jun finds out his daughter is going to the Festival of Snow with her date, Tadashi, the text dictates that the character goes through a variety of emotions, all within six to eight lines; from shock, to denial, to insistence, to outrage. Tim was beginning to discover this journey by the day’s end. How exciting. I love watching actors deepen their work in this way. You can see in their faces, once they have twigged onto these emotional levels in a scene, they are having more fun, even if the content they’re dealing with is dark. They finish the scene with a smile on their face, they pace around the room a bit after, like they’ve just run a marathon, they look at me as if to say ‘did you just see that?! Did you just see what I did’. And I am as pleased as a proud parent.

Tomorrow we are finishing working the final two scenes of the play and then running it in the afternoon for the set designer and the lighting designer. It will be nice to have a tiny bit of an audience even though we have only been rehearsing for a couple of days.

I also made some cuts to the script tonight. There were just so many plot points in the first scene of the play; it was starting to get too confusing to an audience. I feel good about the cuts, and I changed some intentions in the last scene. The family is poor that is why they are not able to adopt a child. Erin and I had neglected to work that
understanding in the beginning. And then in the end when they are approved for adoption we had not yet put in why they had been approved. The last time we had seen them they were as poor as they were at the beginning of the show. Why are they suddenly approved for adoption after all these years of being poor? I think I have found an elegant solution. I am going to insert in the text that Jun has been saving money secretly in order to be able to adopt a child. He is keeping this from his wife Rina as he wants to surprise her with the news right before Suki must be taken away from them. This plot point will highlight that Jun is taking responsibility for his own redemption; trying to improve his life and his family’s life with his kind actions. I love this plot adjustment. It makes perfect sense for the story and the character and is what the audience needs at the end of the story.


**Wednesday, November 30th – Fifth Day of Rehearsals**

Today definitely started off better than yesterday. I was more confident going into the rehearsal room. I had a schedule all worked out in my head as to what I wanted to accomplish and we stuck to it.

I still think I’m talking too much when I give an actor a note. I’m really trying to not over explain, to choose my words wisely, and make sure I don’t give the actors too much to think about in one note. My instinct is to rush them, to have them jump into stuff quickly, as that is how fast my brain is working. I find myself getting impatient when they aren’t moving as fast as I would like them to be. I don’t think I’m showing it. I am just trying to breathe and be clear as to what I want them to do.

I am nervous about this script. I hope it is not too dark, too heavy for the Christmas family audience. I’m going to look at it tonight and make sure that there isn’t anything too violent, too extraneously over dramatic in the writing. I want it to be meaningful but not alienating. I think there are a couple of tweaks I can do in the acting to make sure this happens too. Scene 3 and 4 are the biggest ones to look at. They have the most
amount of yelling, of violent behavior. I need to temper it. There should be comical moments, even in the most dramatic parts. Otherwise it becomes too heavy.

Tomorrow we move outside onto the platforms to try the scenes. This is a big step for the actors. They have to take all the intricate and lovely work we have been doing in the rehearsal hall and make sure it all translates outside. They have to take everything up and out. They all seem to have the instinct for it though. I can see them thinking bigger and bigger each time we run the scenes and the more detailed they are the more we go with them.

There is only one actor, Rachael Johnston playing Rina, that I am worried about not being big enough and it’s funny, as she is the one I was thinking would be the strongest in the cast when I brought her here for the contract. She is a strong performer, but she may be stronger in smaller spaces. I think she may be trained enough to make it happen outside, but we’ll see tomorrow.

I gave the actors a whole bunch of cuts and re-arranging of text today. When we read the scenes with the new cuts it all sounded much better. When Erin and I went through the text before rehearsals started we thought we were being so clever in not having anything extra. But going through it again last night, I was amazed how much text I could still cut and have the story continue to make sense. In fact, make more sense. I’m going to see if there is even more I can streamline tonight.

I don’t think I’ve developed a real directing process yet. Or maybe I have just by default but I don’t know it. I am finding that I approach directing in a similar way to how I approach acting, which may not be a bad thing, especially if it is the best way I know how to create art. When I act, I need to know where I am going first, where I am moving, what I am doing in the scene. My body is what is memorizing the play, reacting to the impulses, allowing me to get through this emotional journey. Not my mind. I cannot make too may intellectual choices at first as an actor. I just end up standing in one spot and second-guessing myself.
I work similarly in my directing I am finding out. I need to do the blocking first. Figure out what the patterns are, what the actors are doing in the scene, where they are going. Then I can see it all visually and respond to the timings, the rhythm, the mood, and the feel of the piece. Like a dance. I need the steps before I can add any finesse.

This may be my approach always or it may just be because I am a young director. Maybe I will get better at making those earlier decisions on a play that will save me some time later. But for now, especially in an outdoor show, I can only respond to what is happening on stage, and what is needed, if the skeletal structure is laid out in front of me. Then, and only then, can I respond to it.

**Thursday, December 1st – 6th Day of Rehearsals**

I was thinking about this play last night before I went to bed, and what was bothering me about it after our run yesterday afternoon. What I realized was that we are not treating the show like a fairy tale right now. A piece of theatre that takes place in a magical land, with rules of its own, filled with great characters, funny moments, and beautiful images.

We went out on site this morning. The first time the actors have worked outside. I wanted them to start to feel what it was like performing in the snow, with the audience so far away from them. I wanted them to get used to acting outside, ad the performance energy required for it.

I wanted to get through scenes 1, 2, and 3 in the morning then hit Scene 4 in the afternoon. We started on scenes 1 and I immediately started re-arranging some blocking. Not too much of it, but it became obvious where it needed to be adjusted so that more of the side audiences can see the performers.

All the actors did very well in the outdoor space. They immediately brought their performance levels up and I was able to hear and see them clearly. The youngest actor of the play, the student I am using from Studio 58, was especially good at it. Her name is Agnes, and I know she has some dance training so she obviously has a great sense
of space. She knew how to make her performance bigger instantly. She reminds me of myself as a young actor, and I was thrilled to see her go bigger on her own without me having to say anything.

I did give them all the fairy tale speech; the emotions are pure in this piece, the actions are pure, the intentions are pure. There is no subtext. The characters say what they think and feel all of the time. The actors started to get it today. In the rehearsal room we are able to get into those deeper, subtler emotions, but out in the woods we are telling a fairy tale. We can’t help it. It wouldn’t work otherwise. In my efforts to make more of a ‘story’ with this show, I have cut anything that doesn’t aid us in fairy tale land too. I have stripped away lines that seem to be too fraught, too much tension.

Once the fairy tale speech happened the show became magical again. The ‘fairy tale’ acting style that they started to embrace, was not to play any subtext, not to take any emotion and play it down, introverted, into the floor. Instead, the characters talk about how they feel, or it is immediately read on their face, there is nothing hidden. Their emotion is to be played up and out; they literally must lift their heads and eyes up into the sky. I spoke to them about thinking like they were cartoons. If a cartoon character is feeling scared, for example, the artist draws their eyes wide, large, big pupils, little sweat droplets forming on their faces. Obviously a human actor cannot contort their face like a cartoon character, but that is how big, and honest the emotion is. The Gift Horse is a fairy tale, pure, raw, dramatic, and intensely focused with the use of the characters feelings and emotions. When Cinderella is told by her evil stepmother that she cannot go to the ball she is overcome with emotion. She throws herself to the ground burying her face in tears. This is real. This is intense. This is what the characters in The Gift Horse are faced with as well.

We’ve reached another plateau today. One that I’ve made happen on my own. I am so happy to be working with these people, these designers, today. We made another step forward in making what has been in my head for more than a year. It is so exciting.
I really like the costumes too, so far. I haven’t seen all of them yet, but the fabrics chosen and the whole look of the piece is beautiful. Yay!

Friday, December 2nd – 7th Day of Rehearsals
This morning we worked on the scenes again outside, had lunch, and then did a run in the afternoon.

When we got outside to the set, the Technical Director had installed the poles onto the front of the stage each stage - the dreaded poles over which I fought with the set designer from the very beginning. I was so thrilled at the end of our rehearsal day yesterday when we were outside, I could hear and see everything and the actors were doing all their cuts and blocking. Then last night I remembered that the poles had to be installed tomorrow and I almost cried. It’s not that I don’t like them entirely; it’s just that, no matter how hard I try to accept them, I still feel they disrupt the action of the play.

So we delved into Scene 5 and, because of the poles, all the blocking we did in the rehearsal room went out the window. Not only do we have to negotiate blocking in a thrust stage environment outside, we have to work around these poles as well. We got off to a slow start to the day, as I was completely frustrated about it all, but did manage to keep my cool in front of the cast. This is something I’m learning about being a director more and more; how to keep your cool when everything is, or seems to be, falling apart.

As we picked our way through the scenes, we redid some blocking, and miraculously, the poles didn’t seem to be as gigantic as they were before. I did call a little production meeting at lunch though, as I wanted to make sure that if these were going to be the poles, and they were going to be this thick, the lighting designer knew he was going to be able to use them to hang lights on, as that is their only function, and if he couldn’t, I wanted them struck. I had heard Stephan and Phillip talking one day, and Stephan said that he didn’t want to hang too many lights on the poles at the front of the stage as it would ruin the aesthetic that Phillip had intended. But that was the whole reason we were putting the poles up there in the first place! To hang the lights on!
At the production meeting, Stephan reassured me that he needed to hang lights on the poles in order to light the entire set. I relaxed and I think Phillip did too. I think he thought that I was going to cut the poles altogether. We all made the decision to keep the poles as wide as they were.

**Saturday, December 3rd – 8th Day of Rehearsals**

We started the morning off going out to rehearse Scene 5 with Whimsy, the horse. This was Whimsy’s first day of rehearsal. I wanted Kim, her handler, to show her the pattern and bring her into the stage area many, many times so she would get used to it. Horses need repetition. They have to go over and over the exact same movements to make sure that they know what is going on at all times. That way, if they get spooked, they are able to go back to their pattern and action of what they know.

I gave Kim his cue to bring Whimsy in and then we ran the scene about three or four times to get her used to it. She did wonderfully. I was expecting her to be a little jumpy in rehearsal but she wasn’t at all; she handled herself like a pro every single time we ran the scene. Kim is really good with her too. He stands still and is patient, projecting a calm energy as the one in charge. I’m going to get him to take her out almost every day until we open and just repeat her pattern. From now on she’ll be used in all the runs we do too.

It is pure magic when Whimsy comes onstage. She is so white and small and pretty; every little girl’s dream pony. The costume mistresses and designer are making her a ‘sparkle coat’. It is a horse blanket that is made out of very sparkly material so she shines from head to toe. We wanted her to look special, like a glowing Christmas gift, so she needed some shine. I don’t want to take away from the majesty of her own body too, so something just draped lightly on her back, will be fine.

We took a break and then before lunch, ran Scene 4. I wanted to do some cuts and look at some of the intentions in the play that I wasn’t happy with. When we last ran this scene, I felt like the Moon was too angry at Jun. I wanted to ask Sarah to temper it and
give the scene some more levels. I also had to work out some blocking challenges with Tim and Agnes. They have to play to such a large area and are getting lost out there in the wilds. I wanted to tighten up their blocking and see if I could give them a more accurate map of where exactly they are going in the scene. This is difficult given that the playing area of this scene will be largely dictated by where the sleighs park.

We powered through it and I tried to be as clear and precise with them as possible. By the end of the rehearsal they were confident in the changes and solidified blocking in Scene 4.

I’m finding that Tim, the actor playing Jun, is unlike any other actor I have worked with. Directing him makes me truly understand the power of my words. When I tell him something, give him a direction or note he takes me very literally. If I describe a piece of blocking to him, do some a sort of small demonstration for him, he repeats exactly what I have done physically. It’s bizarre. I’ve never had another actor do that before. They usually listen to what I’m saying, ask me about it or expand on it themselves, and then make it work for them. They are inspired by the piece of direction, rather than exactly copying what I have done or said. I have found though, during this short rehearsal process with him, his work flourishes when he knows exactly where to go, and exactly how to play something. He is an actor who needs a definite map, before he can even begin to comprehend the scene.

After lunch we went out to the Scene 2 site. The actors had never worked there before and what a lesson they were given as we started to work the scene. I think it finally hit them when we got out there just how large their performance has to be; especially Rachael, the actor playing Rina, the mother. You can hear her fine enough, and she is undoubtedly a gifted actor, but she can be small, and emotional in her choices instead of taking them up and out.

We ran the scene and I told them they all have to increase their volume and gestures by 50%. They looked at me as if I was crazy. I told them to trust me, to try it out, and feel
what it’s like to act that large. They went for it, we ran the scene again, and it was much better and much clearer. The actors were bringing the story to the audience instead of the audience working too hard to hear the story.

It was a good day. The play started to come alive. It was true Caravan magic. I was very pleased at the end of the day. We’re doing a run tomorrow afternoon. I’m excited to see it all coming together.

**Tuesday, December 7th – 10th Day of Rehearsals**

We started the day off with a production meeting that was intense; lots to talk about in the upcoming tech week, what to expect, and what the shape of the schedule might be.

Today in general was a frustrating day, so I'm writing this entry after having a glass of whiskey. Down the hatch.

Rehearsals are going well. The actors know what they are doing. Besides a few tweaks here and there we are ready to go into tech week and tell this story. They had a good day off yesterday and they seemed refreshed and excited about performing the show today.

We ran through some scenes this morning, did some tidying, and then in the afternoon we took a wagon out with a teamster and team of horses and went to each scene with the actors.

Because there is no snow we have to use wagons right now and they are significantly higher. Which means that people will be straining to see scenes 1, 2, and 3, which is a real shame. We could have made the platforms higher but that means that we have to add railings to the scenes and that is just brutal. Then it completely closes off the action of the scenes and it looks like the actors are performing on a cruise boat.
I’ll just have to pray for snow. It truly would be a ‘Christmas miracle’ as one of the characters says in the play. The sight lines of the sleighs are much better as the sleighs are lower, much closer to the ground.

However, working with the wagon today will help prepare me for the work tomorrow and the next day, when all of the teamsters, teams, and wagons arrive. It gives me a greater sense of the room they need to be able to come into each scene and make wide turns. It is amazing how much more room they need in comparison to the sleighs. The wagons are huge.

We ended the day with a music rehearsal with the two musicians, Kim and Tom. The two musicians are playing the music beautifully. It has a Japanese sound to it. They will be costumed so they’ll fit right into the world of the play. I am excited to see it all come together. I’m excited to give the play away, to the actors, the crew, the teamsters, the audience. Give it away so it’s not mine anymore. I can feel it approaching, and it is going to be magical.

My main concern is that the audience can hear, see, and follow the story. I am doing a theatrical experiment here. I am trying to incorporate more story versus spectacle, a moving little tale that has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
Here’s hoping it will all work out.

**Wednesday, December 8th – 11th Day of Rehearsals**

I had a little meeting today with Heather, our production manager, and Phillip. I want to make and hang a star on top of our gigantic Christmas tree. Right now it doesn’t look like a Christmas tree. The decorations are on lines of string and it looks like a lit up tent of sorts. I think if we put a star on the top we will understand it more clearly. It is going to be an effort, as we have to call the arborist back in, but I believe it will be worth it in the end.
Thursday, December 19th – 12th Day of Rehearsals

Today was our first day of tech. It was a very big day for me and for the entire winter show company of the farm.

We had a production meeting at 9 am. We talked about all that remains to be done, including getting the star up on the top of the tree. Heather has done an amazing job getting everything done out here. She is an excellent addition to this company and I wish she lived nearby so we could use her all year round.

I am delighted with how this production and rehearsal process has been handled by all of the artists and crew I have hired. They have been so specific in their work, making informed choices that help to tell the story, and are very respectful of one another.

I am extremely pleased with Kim White, our Technical Director, and my husband. At first I was hesitant about hiring him as I was worried about what everyone might think about me doing my first show here on the farm and then hiring my husband to fill a key position. But it goes to show that you should never make any decisions based on what other people think. Who cares what they think? All that is important is to trust your desires, feelings, and instincts. I knew he would be a good T.D. He doesn’t have a lot of experience doing it, but he knows the farm so well, and he is calm and patient, and sometimes you have to give people responsibility in order for them to learn. There is a first time for everyone; a person has to be given a chance to prove that they can do it.

The teamsters and their horses started arriving on the farm by 11 am. We then had a Meet & Greet with the teamsters, shotguns, and actors in the Cookshack. I went through all the Caravan regulations with them, made sure that they knew the low-down on how to live harmoniously out here. After the Meet & Greet, I sat down with the teamsters and went through the sleigh choreography with them. I had maps prepared and talked through all the patterns. They responded to me quite well, they all have a lot of experience doing the show so that expertise really helps. They are also very
knowledgeable horse people, they train horses, farm horses, drive horses for a living. They do this every day.

We had lunch and then the teamsters had a half hour to get hitched up and meet me out in the field where the show begins.

At 2:30 we began teaching them their route. There was a lot to go through, and I am pleased with the way it went. We basically had two tries coming into each scene. By the second time each go around they had hit their marks better and better. They seemed to understand what they were doing.

We were using the sleigh route so they could learn it even though we were on wagons. It was incredibly bumpy, but I wanted to imprint it into their minds so that if and when it snows more, they will be prepared for it.

After we were finished, we had dinner, took pictures of everyone for our Bio Board and then released the teamsters and shotguns. We will have two more passes at the route before we get an audience; tomorrow afternoon at 4 pm with the actors, lights, and costumes and then the Dress Rehearsal tomorrow night at 7 pm.

After dinner, we did a small Cue to Cue. All the designers and myself went from one location to the next and did the cues. The actors were in costume too so we got to see the whole picture. They show looks great. The sets look like little jewels out there in the wilderness and the costumes heighten the piece into a truly magical and fantastical fairy tale. The music sounds beautiful. My concerns about sight lines are still present, but like Kim said when I told him about my sightline woes, ‘well we’ve been doing it the same for 30 years and the people keep buying tickets’. I thought that was a good observation. I was exhausted by the end of the day but very pleased with the way it went. Now that it is over I can take a bit of a breath, relieved that we at least got that much under our belts.
Tomorrow we do two runs, then Saturday we Preview. It will be a hard push till Sunday.

Friday, December 9th – 13th Day of Rehearsals

We started just before lunch this morning with a meeting about Front of House. It is amazing in this job how I have to be the instigator and organizer of almost everything. The only job that I don’t have much of my eye on is anything to do with the farm such as fencing, horses, hay bale orders, etc.

At the Front of House meeting we talked about what the Front of House speech is which, out here, is a very important aspect of the show. The front of house person is the first person they see before the show: the first person who represents Caravan. The girl that I hired did a practice run at it, and right now she’s coming across a little pithy, or sarcastic. I have to talk to her about it tomorrow.

We then had lunch and I did another route run with the teamsters and teams of horses. It went much smoother this time. The teamsters were hitting their marks and things flowed much better. I wish it would snow. It would make our lives so much easier. The wagons are laborious, they are really bumpy, and they eat up precious play-time.

We then did a tech run. It went pretty smooth all things considered. I was timing the show and it is running too long right now and that’s not even with a full house. Which means that it is going to take way longer when we have to load 145 people onto the wagons.

We had dinner after the tech run and then did a Dress Rehearsal at 7 pm. It was all right. I was trying to imagine the show from an audience’s perspective, thinking about story, visuals, continuity, etc. I think the arc of the piece comes off pretty well but there are a couple of things that stick out, and a couple of things I’d like to cut in Scene 2. There is a section near the beginning of the scene where Suki is asking her mother if her father doesn’t like her. In looking at the script again, I want to cut this whole little section. It will make the scene shorter and right now it feels a bit too ‘on the nose’, too
obvious, too corny. The audience will understand Suki’s confusion about her father’s feelings for her when we get to the action of the piece as Jun enters the scene and doesn’t want anything to do with her. Suki begins to tell him all about what she and her Mother did that day, and about the Festival of Snow. He responds with mild enthusiasm and feigned interest.

I’ll do the cuts with the actors before we start rehearsals tomorrow. And rehearse the scene a couple of times with the cuts so they can get used to them.

I am pleased with how everything is going, but terrified. Tomorrow we present this play to a paying audience. I hope they understand and enjoy all of it. Next year I just want to do a comedy. I can tell if they like it better when they laugh a lot.

**Saturday, December 10th – First Preview Day**

We took the morning off, had lunch at 1 pm, and then started rehearsals right after lunch. I had a short meeting with the Front of House Manager before lunch going through things that needed to be fixed in her Front of House speech. She is an interesting creature; she is outgoing, boisterous, loud, very self-assured, but when she does her speech she is small and unsure. We went through everything that needs to be said again and I hoped she would get it right.

After lunch I had a short meeting with the props designer about the baby prop in the show. It is beautiful; one of the most beautiful props I have ever seen. It is supposed to be a pink cherry blossom that holds a baby in it. When I wrote this into the play I had no idea what I wanted it to look like. I just knew that I wanted the baby to be born out of a cherry blossom.

When I first saw the prop on stage it was brilliant. The props designer made it out of pink raw silk, and the stem out of some sort of stiff green material. When the moon hands the blossom to Rina in the show and there is a baby inside. It is so beautiful. True magic.
At the meeting we just had to go over how the baby was going to be seen by the audience. The actress who takes the blossom into her arms has to tilt it so the audience can see but the prop also had to be altered so that she had to ‘unwrap’ the petals to find it inside. The props designer fixed it so that there were three petals for the actor to unwrap to reveal the baby. It will be beautiful.

I did some cuts to Scene 2 with the actors. This will help to shorten the scene and the play. I think it will make more sense too.

We did a 4, 6, and 8 pm Preview of *The Gift Horse*. All of them went very well, and the whole thing keeps getting smoother and smoother with each show. The audiences are responding just like I hoped they would. They understand the story and the journey, they seem to sympathize with the characters and they have a few laughs. I can tell they understand it by their verbal response. In Scene 3 for example, they get a kick out of the character of Tadashi, Suki’s date for the evening. He is a loveable character, and they laugh at his awkwardness and innocence. Suki and Tadashi’s date preparation is a nice, warm introduction to the scene. As soon as Jun enters though, the audience goes quiet, they listen intently, and you can hear a pin drop in the winter snow as they know there is going to be trouble. Through this collective, verbal reaction, I can gauge that the audience understands the function and struggles of each character in the story. They also understand the family dynamic in this scene, and the whole play. As Caravan audiences are primarily made up of families, they are aware that there is a family dynamic that is trying to be resolved on stage. It is a reflection of them.

The hardest part right now is getting them out to start that first scene on time. It is a long walk out and we’re still figuring out the mechanics as to how to speed it up.

The teamsters and horses did very well. The actors did an amazing job today, I am so proud of them. I gave them some notes tonight in the rehearsal hall, but they were just tiny details. It is time for me to relinquish my control of the piece; it is theirs now. They need to continue to build it into the production they will enjoy performing night after night.
**Tuesday, December 12th – Opening Night**

The show has been running well. They company has six previews under its belt, so I was not worried about opening night. I couldn’t watch the opening performance, as I had to get to the cook shack and get food set up for the party afterwards.

After the show, the audience piled into the cook shack and ate food and danced and stayed for a long time, which I thought, was a good sign. If people want to hang out after a show it generally means they enjoyed it.

My writing partner, Erin Mathews, and her husband were there for opening. I was most excited to see her and to hear what she had thought of the show. She was very happy with it. She loved the set and the costumes and the cast. She thought they were all very strong. She noticed that I had cut a lot from the script, of course, and she asked me why I had cut so much. I told her that we never knew what the script was going to sound like or feel like until we got it up on it’s feet and spoken out loud. There were some things that just did not need to be there to tell the story.

I was so proud of how the evening went. I was so proud of myself. It does not matter in the end what people think of it; there will be some that love it and some that don’t. What matters is that I did it. I pulled it off. Like I mentioned earlier, from the seed of an idea, to a live, full, beautiful story. I am looking forward to watching how the show develops over the run.

Until next time….
CHAPTER THREE

Reflection

My original thesis production was to be Dead Man’s Cell Phone by Sarah Ruhl. When it came down the pipeline that this play had been selected as one of the thesis productions for the university’s 2010-11 season I was thrilled. Dead Man’s Cell Phone is wonderfully unique, stylish, and contemporary, and I could not wait to get started on it.

Soon after receiving this news, a professional opportunity came up for me I could not ignore. In the spring of 2010 I applied for the Artistic Director position at Caravan Farm Theatre just outside of Armstrong, BC. I was a long time performer and associate at Caravan, was very much a part of its culture and art form over the last ten years, and it was my ultimate dream to, one day, run the company. After a cross Canada search and three-stage interview process by the Board of Directors, I was offered the job. I was beyond elated, completely crazy with joy, but remained dedicated to my desire to complete the M.F.A program. My eye was on the prize of that degree and I could not, and would not, let it out of my sight.

After many conversations with Stephen Heatley and my thesis advisor, Tom Scholte, it was decided that I could use the first show I directed for Caravan as my thesis production. With their support, I could accept the Artistic Director position and finish my degree, and for that I am eternally grateful.

This production was my directorial debut at Caravan and I was well supported by the design team, performers, and administrative staff in making it a beautiful and successful winter show for Caravan.
The story of *The Gift Horse* was based on an ancient Japanese folk tale, and the designers brought a Japanese inspired simplistic beauty to the set, costumes, lights, and props. They worked hard to produce an ambitious design in an incredibly short amount of time. The cast of *The Gift Horse* was a generous, multi-talented group of individuals from Vancouver, Toronto, and Edmonton that included Sarah May Redmond, Tim Machin, Rachael Johnston, Studio 58 student, Agnes Tong, and Adam Underwood. Kim White and Tom Jones added depth and focus to the dramatic action of the piece by playing live music on guitar and baritone ukulele. Whimsy, our Gift Horse, a white Welsh pony-thoroughbred cross, provided a breathtaking coda to the show.

I had decided to write *The Gift Horse* with my long time writing partner, Erin Mathews, as I was compelled by its story, and in thinking of options to tackle our deficit, I knew I could save the company a bit of money in commissioning and royalty costs by using myself as a writer. The primary reason I wanted to put the pen to the paper though, was that I wanted to take an artistic risk in the content and themes explored in the text.

Caravan winter shows are a seasonal highlight for its audience members; they bundle up over the holidays with friends and families and take the trek out to the farm to enjoy the show. The productions are so incredibly unique in their experience and execution, with the audience being pulled from scene to scene over our 80-acre property by horse-drawn sleigh, they often sell out before they have even opened.

The performance style required of the actors in a winter show is loud and large, leaving little room for subtlety. Because the audience is outside, in the cold, and sitting sideways on the sleighs, it is often challenging to hear and see the performers. These elements can be distracting when trying to pick up plot points and emotional journey in the show.

With this in mind then, Erin Mathews and myself were determined to write a winter show in which the audience would truly feel for the characters, despite the potential distraction.
For the most part I believe we succeeded. Looking back, I believe we were a little regimented in our approach to how the story was told; we created three of the same houses to show the passage of time for the audience. In retrospect, we could have come up with a more imaginative way for the audience to follow the story; the scenes could have all been in different places instead of at the same house. I believe the audience grew tired of the repetition.

Directorially, I wish I had pushed the set designer and costume designer in a stronger direction to visually tell the story in the design of the color fading out of this family’s life. The color difference in this version of *The Gift Horse* from scene to scene was not drastic enough to read to an audience. It seemed as if we were moving through time well enough, but it did not capture the severity of the sadness as I had hoped it would.

Erin and I spent hours and hours working to construct a compelling and complete character journey of *The Gift Horse*, and in the end, I do believe we succeeded in this regard. The audiences appreciated the gravity in theme and content of the production. *The Gift Horse* sold out well before Christmas and broke Caravan winter show box office records, with over 7000 attending.
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Appendix B: Map of Scene Locations

The Gift - Horse -

Scene Locations
Scene 1: Load

Scene 2: Ellen, Lindsay, Steve, Gillian, Joyce

Scene 3: Tree

Out of Scene One

*Single file
hugging fence
line until out of
Timber Barn field
Into Scene 2

* From Single File into 2 columns

Out of Scene 2

* Single File onto Road

Road to Back 40

* Outside Circle
  Moving Counter Clockwise

* Inside Circle
  Moving Clockwise
Into Scene 3

Road to Yard

Out of Scene 3

From Scene 2

Two Columns to Christmas Tree

5 4 8

7 3 2 6
Into Scene 4

* From Two Columns into Alternate Park

Out of Scene 4

* Single File to Scene 5 (Scene 1 Location)
Scene 5 Unload

Agnes 6 Mahira
Tim 2 Gillian
Steve 3 Vad
Emma 7 Lindsay
Lysette 4 Joyce
Sandie 5 Ellen

Tree
Appendix D: Production Photos – By Tim Matheson

Scene 1 – Rachael Johnston (Rina), Tim Machin (Jun)
Scene 1 – Rachael Johnston (Rina), Tim Machin (Jun)
Scene 1 – Sarah May Redmond (Moon)
Scene 1 – Rachael Johnston (Rina)
Scene 2 – Agnes Tong (Suki)
Scene 2 – Rachael Johnston (Rina), Tim Machin (Jun), Agnes Tong (Suki)
Scene 2 – Agnes Tong (Suki), Rachael Johnston (Rina)
Scene 2 – Tom Jones (Guitar), Kim White (Tenor Ukulele)
Scene 3 – Adam Underwood (Tadashi), Sarah May Redmond (Moon), Agnes Tong (Suki)
Scene 3 – Adam Underwood (Tadashi), Agnes Tong (Suki), Rachael Johnston (Rina), Tim Machin (Jun)
Scene 4 – Sarah May Redmond (Moon)
Scene 4 – Agnes Tong (Suki), Tim Machin (Jun)
Scene 4 – Agnes Tong (Suki)
Scene 4 – Sarah May Redmond (Moon), Tim Machin (Jun)
Wagons Lined Up – Scene 5
Scene 5 – Adam Underwood (Tadashi), Agnes Tong (Suki)
Scene 5 – Sarah May Redmond (Moon)
Scene 5 – Rachael Johnston (Rina), Tim Machin (Jun), Adam Underwood (Harvey Willoughby), Agnes Tong (Suki), Sarah May Redmond (Moon)
Scene 5 – Rachael Johnston (Rina), Tim Machin (Jun), Agnes Tong (Suki), Sarah May Redmond (Moon)
Scene 5 – Whimsy (Gift Horse), Kim White (Musician and Horse Handler)
Scene 5 – Whimsy (Gift Horse), Kim White (Horse Handler)
Wagon Traveling
Wagon Traveling – Ellen Hockley (Teamster)
Scene 4 – Sarah May Redmond (Moon)
Scene 4 – Sarah May Redmond (Moon), Wagon Traveling to scene
Wagon Traveling
Caravan Audience
Caravan Audience
Wagons leaving Scene 5
Scene 5 – Saray May Redmond (Moon), Whimsy (Gift Horse), Kim White (Horse Handler), Tim Machin (Jun), Rachael Johnston (Rina), Agnes Tong (Suki)
Appendix E: *The Gift Horse* Script

**The Gift Horse**

A Winter Sleigh-Ride show for the Caravan Farm Theatre written by Erin Mathews and Courtenay Dobbie

**Characters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>Woman #1 (30’s, 40’s, 50’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother - <em>Rina</em></td>
<td>Woman #2 (30’s, 40’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father - <em>Jun</em></td>
<td>Man #1 (30’s, 40’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker - <em>Harvey</em></td>
<td>Man #2 (20’s, 30’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl - <em>Suki</em></td>
<td>Woman #3 (20’s, 30’s who can play young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy - <em>Tadashi</em></td>
<td>Man #2 (20’s, 30’s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prologue:

The Cast enters and sings

This night the cheerless winter moon
Does all our minds enthrall
But others also have their griefs,
For winter on us all,
Has cast her gloomy pall

Scene 1 – The Hara Family’s Kitchen

The kitchen is modest with few furnishings. A single lantern lights the space. Rina is anxiously pacing, awaiting her husband, Jun’s, return.

Jun enters.

Rina     How much did you get?
Jun      Not enough.
Rina     What does that mean?
Jun      It mean’s not enough.
Rina     Well how much then?
Jun      Five hundred.
Rina     What?! Jun!
Jun      Thompson’s on hard times too.
Rina     I know but... I know he is. Jun...how are we going to pay our bills?
Jun      I’ll think of something.

beat

Jun      My mother’s ring. We could probably get a lot for it.
Rina     No, no not that.
Jun      We could take out another mortgage.
Rina     I don’t want to lose this house.
Jun    We'll sell the backfield then.
Rina   Our land?
Jun    It'll bring in a good amount.
Rina   If only you got more for that horse! What did you do? Just stand there while Thompson gave you a third of what he was worth.
Jun    Rina...
Rina   That was our last horse-
Jun    Rina-
Rina   That was our last hope-
Jun    We'll survive. We always do.
Rina   We're horse farmers without any horses!
Jun    Rina, calm down.
Rina   We can barely feed ourselves, how could we have ever thought we could take care of a baby?
Jun    We're still on that adoption list.
Rina   But we haven't heard anything yet.
Jun    We are good people. There is a baby out there in the world we can give all our love to.
Rina   I'm not getting my hopes up. We've been on that list for too long.
Jun    So what? We'll keep waiting, as long as it takes.
Rina   Waiting for what. A Christmas miracle?

There is a knock on the door. Harvey Willoughby, a social worker, is outside. Harvey’ disheveled, carrying too many papers and notebooks that he’s bringing home to work on over the holidays.

Harvey (knock, knock) Hello!? Anyone home? Sorry to bother you on Christmas Eve. (knock, knock) Hello?!

Jun opens the door
Jun  Yes?
Harvey  Sorry for visiting so late, pheww, I’m always working overtime. Oh, it’s hot in here, do you find it hot in here?
Rina    Can we help you?
Harvey  So sorry. Harvey Willoughby. I’m from the adoption agency. Normally I wouldn’t come by on a holiday, but I’ve got great news for you, *looking at his papers*, thought you might want to hear it on Christmas Eve so it wouldn’t be *sings*, “A Blue Christmas without you” – it’s hot in here, heh, heh. Where was I? So the good news! You’ve been approved for adoption! Congratulations!
Rina    O my-
Harvey  *(looking through his papers)* Just got a couple of things for you to sign -
Rina    Jun, o my god-
Jun     Thank you.
Harvey  Where is that doggone form!-
Rina + Jun  Jun/Rina, O my god, *(laughing, hugging each other with the news)*
Harvey  Just sign here, and we can start making arrangements to go pick up your baby daughter in the next couple of weeks.
Rina    A girl! Jun, a baby girl!
Harvey  Yup a beautiful baby girl. And she’s gonna be all yours very soon Mrs. Smith. This is truly the best part of my job.
Rina    Sorry, what?
Harvey  Just sign there Mrs. Smith. Right next to the X.
Rina    I’m not Mrs. Smith
Harvey  You’re not Dorothy Smith?
Rina    Oh no-
Jun     We’re the Hara’s. Jun and Rina Hara.
Harvey    Oh dear. Hara, Hara, *(looks through his notes, finds their paperwork)*. Yes, here you are, right here, o.k, application has been pending for a while, looks like a decision has been made...oh dear. Oh no, wasn't expecting that. I'm so sorry. Your application's been denied. It's your finances...they're not... I'm so sorry. I am such an idiot. I am so-

Jun     Please –

Harvey    I must have got the addresses mixed up. This has never, ever, happened to me before, I am so sorry-

Jun     Please, just go.

Harvey    Yes. I’m sorry. I hope-, Merry- Merry Christmas.


*If in this troubled world of ours*
*I still must linger on*
*My only friend shall be the moon*
*Which on my sadness shone*
*When all my hope was gone*

*A bright moonbeam shines into their kitchen window. The Moon appears, with a large, pink cherry blossom in her arms*

Moon    Whew. You two are the saddest people, in the saddest kitchen, on the saddest Christmas Eve I have ever seen.

Jun     Who are you?

Moon    I’m the moon. You ever seen the sun at night?

Moon    No. Don’t worry. It’s my way of warming up to people. I’m not a very warm planet in general. Actually I’m not a planet at all, I’m the Moon. I’m here to give you this. *(she holds out the flower)*.

Jun     What is it?

Moon    Open it and find out.

*(Rina opens the flower. There is a baby inside)*

Rina    A baby. A girl.

Moon    Go ahead...don’t be shy, she’s for you.
(Rina walks to the cherry blossom, and carefully picks up the child)

Rina    She’s...she’s mine?
Moon    Yes.

(Rina brings the baby to Jun, they look at her adoringly)

Moon    You must take good care of her, love her, teach her all of life’s lessons, and all of life’s joys.
Moon    This child is from the other side of the night’s sky. Yes, she cries, she eats, she poops just like any other baby. But she is a rare blossom, and if you allow her to grow with love, she will bring you happiness.
Rina    Thank you...
Moon    But...she is not yours forever. On Christmas Eve, on her 18th birthday, I will come back for her. She must leave with me, never to return to you again.

beat

Rina    Only 18 years. Why?
Moon    This is my gift to you, no questions asked.
Jun    Is there nothing we can do to keep her?
Moon    You can choose to love her fully under these conditions or never know her at all.
Rina    Alright, yes, we will keep her.
Jun    No.

beat

Jun    I’m sorry. (to Rina) It’ll be too difficult Rina. (to the Moon) Thank you...but we cannot accept such a gift we have to give back.
Moon    Well aren’t you just the wise and all knowing one. Alright. Forget it then.

(The Moon goes to leave)

Rina    No wait! (to Jun) Jun! Think about what you’re saying.
Jun    You’ll have to give her back Rina.
Rina Please, don’t take her away from me.

Jun *(Jun says nothing)*

Rina *(to the Moon)* My husband was just overwhelmed. We accept your gift. Thank you.

Moon You’re welcome. The child is yours.

*(the Moon starts to depart, then turns back)*

Moon Heed this advice: do not let this child’s impending departure cast a shadow over your love. Embrace every moment and use the years wisely.

The Moon disappears

Rina *(to baby)* Jun isn’t she is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?

Jun Yes. She is beautiful. Too beautiful to give back.

Rina I know. I don’t ever want to let her go.

Jun Neither do I.

Jun turns and walks out of the house.

Rina Jun? Jun?

*(she sings to the baby)*

*We are, you and me,*  
*Like two pine needles,*  
*Which will dry and fall,*  
*But never separate*

The sleighs move to Scene 2

Scene 2

The cast sings:

*When on the mountain’s edge I see*  
*The winter Moon has cast*  
*Her cloak that sparkles on the snow*  
*I know the day is past*  
*The night approaches fast*
Hara family home. Christmas Eve, 10 years later. The house has become grey, like the color has begun to seep out the family’s lives. Their costumes reflect the same. Rina and Suki make a Christmas ornament, bright and shiny, at the kitchen table for Suki’s birthday.

Suki
Mom, come and look! I fixed it!

(Rina enters)

Rina
Oh, beautiful.

Suki
It does look like a horse! You said it looked like a monkey!

Rina
You’re my little monkey, Suki.

Suki
I am not!! I’m your pretty little pony.

Rina
My fat little Filly.

Suki
Mom!

Rina
Well, he’s a funny fat little horse. (Rina nuzzles the ornament and makes horse sounds) I’m Suki’s hungry chubby horse! I love to eat Christmas presents...I might eat you up too Suki!! Then I’ll have the biggest, smelliest farts!

Suki
Mom!! (laughing) Let’s name him Chubby Christmas! And he’s 10 years old, just like me!

Rina
I think Chubby is ready for his grand debut as long as he doesn’t tip over the tree.

Suki
The Festival of Snow has the biggest tree in the world - it can’t tip! Can we hang him there tonight? I want him to be on his branch when the sun comes up on Christmas morning.

Rina
We’ll talk to your dad about it.

Suki
No, he won’t want to go.

Rina
Oh, I don’t know about that. Your dad has a great love of horses. This farm used to be home to quite a few of them you know.

Suki
Real ones? How many?

Rina
Oh about a million billion.

Suki
Isn’t that a kazillion?
Rina    A gagillion!! *(Rina hugs her and they laugh)*

*(Jun enters)*

Rina   Hello Jun.

Jun    Hi.

Rina   How was it today?

Jun    Same as every day.

Suki   Dad, you stink like horse farts.

Jun    That’s impolite Suki.

Suki   Oh.

Rina   She’s just trying to be funny.

Jun    I don’t feel like joking around.

Rina   Jun-

Jun    Sorry. I’ve just been mucking out Thompson’s stalls all day long.

Rina   At least you made double time for coming in on the holiday.

Jun    No I didn’t. Turns out Thompson doesn’t pay double time on Christmas Eve.

Rina   Oh Jun…

Jun    So I’ll be working tomorrow.

Rina   On Christmas Day?

Jun    We need the money Rina.

Rina   But it’s the one day we can all be together.

Jun    What choice do I have-

Suki   Dad, can I ask you something?

Jun    Yes.
Suki: The kids at school were talking about The Festival of Snow, have you heard of it?

Jun: Hmm-hmm.

Suki: They have it every year and they have the biggest Christmas tree in the whole world! I know cause I saw a picture of it and it WAS really big, like a gagillion feet tall!!

Jun: Gagillion is a made up word Suki.

Suki: Okay, it’s about 50 feet tall, and filled with Christmas decorations.

Jun: (Jun gets up) That’s nice Suki. I’m heading to bed.

Suki: No! Dad! I want to keep telling you. Ok, so the giant tree right? Well the kids say that anyone can make a Christmas ornament and hang it on the tree with everybody else’s ornament. So me and mom made Chubby Christmas and we want to go and put him on a branch tonight before the Christmas sun comes up! Can we please, dad?

Jun: No.

Rina: Jun...

Jun: It’s late Rina.

Rina: But Jun-

Jun: I’m too tired.

Suki: You’re always tired dad.

Jun: I don’t like Christmas Eve.

Suki: Why?

Jun: You’re too young to understand.

Suki: But-

Jun: I’m going to wash up for bed.

(he exits)

beat

Suki: Dad hates me.
Rina: Oh no, sweetheart, he doesn’t hate you. I don’t want to hear you say that again ok?

Suki: But what about Chubby Christmas? He’s never going to get to live in his humongous tree and see the world from a branch.

Rina: Oh, I think old Chubby is going to be just fine. The view from our window is nothing to sneeze at. *(She hangs the ornament up)* See, he’s going to spend Christmas in our family home.

Suki: Is he going to be happy?

Rina: Look at him. He’s the happiest farty pants I’ve ever seen.

*Sigh*

Rina: Tell you what, little pony. Go and run to your room. I have put a special package for you on the bed.

Suki: A present?

Rina: The softest pajama’s that you have ever felt. Put them on and climb into bed and when you wake up it will be Christmas!! Happy 10th birthday, my darling.

Suki: I love you mom.

Rina: You are getting so big.

Suki: I know. It’s great.

Rina: Yes...You are my special gift.

*(Suki exits)*

*(Jun enters)*

Rina: For god’s sake Jun. It’s Christmas Eve! What is wrong with you?

Jun: Nothing.

Rina: *(sighs)* Thompson’s got that old mare.

Jun: *(Jun says nothing)*

Rina: He’s giving it away for free.
Jun (Jun says nothing)

Rina It wouldn’t take much to feed her.

Jun An old nag? You think that’s going to solve everything?

Rina It might make you happy.

Jun Our problems are way bigger than that.

Rina Well they might not be as big as you think.

Jun I don’t want a horse.

Rina Jun-

Jun I just want to come home and rest and think and not have to have any talk of horses or Christmas trees or birthdays or anything-

Rina Alright-

Jun And I don’t want to talk about Suki!

beat

Rina Alright.

(Rina exits)

(Jun take the ornament down from the window. Looks at it and smashes it on the floor.)

The Sleighs move to Scene 3

Scene 3

The Moon, Suki, and Tadashi sing

Overcome with pity for this world
   My tears obscure my sight
I wonder can it be the moon
   who’s melancholy light
Has saddened me tonight?

The Hara family home 7 years later. Suki is 17 years old. It is the same home, but looks even sadder, colder, totally devoid of color.

Suki is wearing a beautiful blood red winter dress and opens the door.
Tadashi    Wow. You look great...I mean...really, really great.
Suki      Thanks. You're early.
Tadashi   My dad always says 'better early than late'.
Suki      My mom's not home with the cake yet.
Tadashi   That's okay. Hey, nice table.

(They sit down at the table)

   beat

Tadashi   I'm really looking forward to our evening together Suki.
Suki      Me too.
Tadashi   You look really...really great. Is that a new dress?
Suki      Not new, new. My mom made it.
Tadashi   Well you look really...really great. (beat) I can't believe you've never been to the Festival of Snow before. I mean, what, do you live in a cave? (laughs at his own joke)
Suki      Well when you're little, it's kind of a family thing and my dad never wanted to go.
Tadashi   My dad loves the Festival of Snow. Free drinks.

(Rina enters with the Christmas Cake and a bouquet of cherry blossoms)

Rina      Hello Tadashi!
Tadashi   Merry Christmas Mrs. Hara. That cake sure looks really great.
Rina      Yes, I'm glad you are here to celebrate with us.
Tadashi   My Dad usually brings the Christmas Cake home, not my mom.
Suki      My Dad's not around very much.
Tadashi   My dad would never miss a cake opportunity. Especially if it's free.
Rina      Different families have different traditions Tadashi. Like, at our house, before we cut the cake, Suki and I sing our Christmas song.
Suki    Mom, don’t be so embarrassing
Tadashi  What’s the Christmas song?
Rina     It’s a song Suki and I sing every year at Christmas. We made it up ourselves.
Suki     Mom...
Tadashi  What’s the hold up, ladies!

_They sing the Christmas song._

_We are, you and me,
Like two pine needles,
Which will dry and fall,
But never separate_

Just then, Jun comes in the kitchen and walks right past Suki, Tadashi, and Rina into the other room of the house.

Rina    You two better get going...you can have some Christmas Cake when you get back.
Tadashi  Was that your dad?
Suki     Yes. We should go.
Rina     Have a great time, don’t be home too late – Oh, here let me look at the two of you,
Suki     Mom-
Rina     Suki...you look so beautiful.
Tadashi  You really do Suki...you look beautiful.

_Jun comes in from the other room. He sees Suki and Tadashi standing there._

Rina     Jun, look at her. She’s all grown up.

_beat._

Jun     Where are you going?
Suki     The Festival of Snow.
Jun     Who is this?
Suki A friend from school.

Jun Where did you get that dress?

Tadashi We’re going on a date.

beat.

Tadashi Allow me to introduce myself Sir. My name is Tadashi. Suki told me you guys have never been to the Festival of Snow (laughing) Seems like every family in town goes. It’s a real good time. There’s a skating party and a giant Christmas Tree-

Jun Suki is not going to Festival of Snow.

Rina Jun-

Suki Dad-

Jun We can’t afford it anyway.

Tadashi Don’t worry Mr. Hara, I’m paying! And I’ll have Suki home before 11. I have a watch with an alarm on it. Tomorrow’s a big day for my family. My dad would kill me if I got home too late. It’s like this. My aunt and uncle come up from the South- they always bring Cherry Blossoms- really brightens up a room-

Jun Suki is not going anywhere.

Rina Jun-

Jun You are not going to that Festival Suki.

Rina Jun-

Jun Go take that dress off. Tadashi, you can leave.

Suki No Tadashi. Stay where you are.

Rina Suki-

Jun Suki-

Tadashi Whoa...

Jun Christmas Eve is for spending time with your family.

Suki You never spend time with this family.

Rina Suki-
Jun        Suki!
Tadashi    Whoa...
Suki       It’s true. When is the last time you did anything with us.
Jun        Suki-
Rina       Suki-
Tadashi    Whoa...
Suki       You don’t even eat dinner with us anymore.
Jun        I’m working. There wouldn’t be dinner otherwise.
Suki       It’s like I don’t even have a Dad.
Jun        Do not talk to me like that-
Suki       I am going to the Festival of Snow whether you like it or not-
Jun        You will listen to what I say!
Suki       Listen to what you say?! You never talk to me! It’s like you don’t even want me around! You’ve never cared where I was going before why are you trying to stop me now-
Jun        How dare you say that – I have always cared-
Suki       You hate me and I hate you too!

(Suki turns to leave)

Jun        You are not leaving this house Suki! You will never leave this house!

(She runs out the door)

Jun        (running after her) Suki! Suki! Come back here!
Rina       Jun! Jun!

(Jun runs out the door after Suki. Rina sits at the kitchen table)
Tadashi    Okay...well...I guess I should be heading home.

_The Sleighs Depart for Scene 4_
Scene 4

*The Big Christmas Tree at the Festival of Snow. The tree is massive and filled with thousands of Japanese Christmas ornaments. Jun enters alone running frantically looking for Suki.*

*The Moon is there waiting for him.*

Jun        Suki!! Suki!! Where are you?! Suki!!!
Moon       Foolish man!
Jun        No, not you!
Moon       You do not make the rules, I do.
Jun        No – Just leave me be. Suki?! Where are you?!

*(He goes to leave)*

Moon       *(stopping him)* She has been right in front of you for 17 years!
Jun        You’ve caused me enough grief already.
Moon       Did you listen to me and use your time wisely?
Jun        Yes-
Moon       No! You have hardened your heart out of fear - you have brought misery to those closest to you – you’ve turned a blind eye to their love, time and time again.
Jun        No!
Moon       Yes! *(she forces him to his knees)*
Jun        I didn’t mean to- I’m afraid-
Moon       You have been a coward. A brave man is not afraid of love.

*beat*

Jun        I just can’t give her back. Please. Please, I’m begging you.
Moon       You knew this was coming. She is one of my children, she cannot be with you forever. There are never easy solutions, never easy ways of obtaining your heart’s desire-
Jun: But it’s not fair.

Moon: I never said it was fair. Nothing is fair Jun. It is up to you to be able to persevere in all the unfairness.

Jun: I can’t.

Moon: You can’t?! Then she will come home with me tonight.

Jun: No-

Moon: Yes! You have done nothing that I told you.

Jun: No- I will change my ways. I will do anything to have one more year with her. Please don’t take her tonight.

Moon: Then prove to me you are worthy father.

_Suki enters running, out of breath._

Moon: Right now would be a good time.

_She sees her Father._

Jun: Suki!

Suki: Get away from me!

_She goes to run._

Jun: Suki- please. Just stop. Suki!

_Suki stops._

Jun: Please.

Jun: I’m sorry.

Suki: (Suki turns to him but says nothing)

beat

Jun: Suki- You are very special.

beat

Jun: There is no one else in this world like you.
Suki     Huh. Right. Don't I know it. Sometimes I feel like I'm from the
moon or something.

Jun     You are.

Suki     Dad.

Jun     You were brought here as a gift for your mother and I when you
were just a baby.

Suki     What.

Jun     We couldn't have a child of our own...and then the Moon came,
and brought you to us.... You were the most beautiful thing we
had ever seen. But the Moon said, you could only be with us for
18 years, and after that you had to go back with her.

Suki     What?! What kind of a thing is that to say to me?

Jun     I know, Suki, I know how this must sound...

Suki     The moon?

Jun     Yes.

Suki     The moon in the sky?

Jun     Yes.

Suki     I belong to the Moon?

Jun     Yes Suki.

Suki     This is impossible.

Jun     I realize this is a lot to take in.

Suki     I don't believe you. You're making this up!

Jun     I wish I was.

*beat*

Suki     Do I have to leave?

Jun     Yes.

Suki     What if I don't want to go?
Jun          We don’t have a choice.

(Suki doesn’t respond)

Jun          Suki…I always knew you had to go…and I didn’t know what to do
about it…and I couldn’t show you…how much I-

Suki          Dad-

Jun          No, let me finish. I was scared to show you, but now…I promise
to do better.

Suki          Dad, it’s alright.

Jun          I’ll be there for you.

Suki          Alright- It’s okay.

beat

Moon          (to Jun) Not bad. I never thought you had it in you.

Jun          (says nothing)

Moon          Hello Suki.

Suki          Hello.

Moon          Do you know who I am?

Suki          I think so.

Moon          Are you frightened?

Suki          Yes.

Moon          (smiles) Don’t be. You have many exciting adventures ahead of
you.

Suki          I do?

Moon          There are wonders waiting for you that you could never imagine.

Suki          But I don’t want to leave my parents.

Moon          Don’t worry. You will have one year to prepare yourself.
Jun                    She will?
Moon                   Yes. But, I'm warning you... use the time, very, very, wisely. We'll see you next Christmas Suki.

*The Moon exits*

Jun                    I love you.
Suki                   I love you too.

*Suki and Jun depart. As they leave, pale pink Cherry Blossom petals fall from the sky.*

**Sleighs Move to Scene 5**

**Scene 5**

*Hara family home. Christmas Eve. Suki's last night on earth. The house, furniture, decorations, are now bright with color. Rina, Suki, and Tadashi wait anxiously for the moon to arrive.*

Rina                   Can you see anything?
Suki                   No...nothing.
Rina                   What time is it?
Tadashi                Well my alarm went off 47 minutes ago so she's late.
Rina                   Maybe she won't come.
Suki                   Maybe.

*beat*

Rina                   Maybe she forgot.
Suki                   Maybe.

*beat*

Tadashi                Maybe she's busy collecting other Moonchildren...

*beat (they laugh)*

Tadashi                Ah Suki, I really gotta go. My dad's gonna be worried.
Suki                   Okay. I'll walk you out.
Tadashi  I’m gonna miss you.
Suki    I’m gonna miss you too.
Tadashi  Can you write me letters from the Moon? Do you think they have paper and pens there?
Suki    They might…but I’m pretty sure they don’ have the same postal service.
Tadashi  Ok. Well…I guess this is goodbye then. Thanks for being so…great.

(He leans into her and gives her an innocent kiss)

Tadashi  Yes! I always wanted to do that. Bye Suki.
Suki    Bye Tadashi.

(Tadashi leaves)

Rina    What will I do without you?
Suki    Mom, you’ll be fine.

Jun enters.

Jun     I don’t see anything out there.
Rina    Really?
Jun     No, nothing.
Rina    Jun, there has to be something we can do. I hate this waiting!

Suddenly a bright moonbeam shines into their kitchen window. Music plays.

The Moon appears.

Moon    Good evening.
Jun     Good evening.
Moon    It is time now.

(Rina, Jun, and Suki don’t move)
Moon

Be happy for her. She has many roads to travel, many places to see and whole worlds to discover.

Rina gives Suki a gift: a hand knit sweater and a small satchel.

Rina

Here. I don’t know what it will be like...where you are going, but I want you to be warm nonetheless.

Suki

It’s beautiful. What are these? (indicating satchel)

Rina

Cherry blossom seeds. You can grow a tree in your new home. I mean, if the climate permits.

Suki

Mom...thanks.

Suki turns to her father.

Jun

Here.

(Jun gives her the newly fixed Chubby Christmas ornament)

Suki

Chubby Christmas! You fixed him!

Jun

Yes. Happy Birthday sweetheart.

(Suki and Jun hug)

Moon

Come now Suki. It is time.

(There is a sudden knock at the door. Harvey Willoughby enters)

Harvey

Hallooo! Mr. and Mrs. Hara? Can I come in? Oh, hi- sorry to bother you on Christmas Eve again! Remember me?

Jun

Mr. Willoughby.

Harvey

Little greyer around the temples and not much on top anymore, but what the hey! We’re all getting older eh? Hello, Rina-

Rina

Hello again.

Jun

Oh, this is... Suki.

Harvey

Nice to meet you Suki. (He sees the Moon) What the- is that the- is she the- Naaaa. (gives his head a shake) Working too much overtime. Mr. and Mrs. Hara, my mistake that horrible night 18 years ago has been plaguing me and plaguing me, god I was such
a nimrod, so when I received your new application, I was
determined to make it right. I fast tracked it to my manager
and...whoa, is it boiling in here or is it just me? I. am. Sweat. Ing.
I have got to lay off the double espresso’s-

Rina

(to Jun) Application?

Jun

I re-applied.

Rina

Jun...You want another child?

Jun

More than anything.

Harvey

Oh, isn’t that sweet! And...ba da dad a! I am happy to announce
that you have been approved for adoption. Finally!

Rina

But how?

Jun

Well, since Thompson started paying me more, I’ve been saving a
little bit at a time.

Harvey

There are many children in need of homes Mr. and Mrs. Hara. Do
you perhaps want to take another one?

Rina

Jun, imagine the house filled with children!

Jun

Rina...Mr. Willoughby...I wish we could. We just can’t afford it
quite yet.

Harvey

One child for the Hara’s then!

Rina

One sweet, beautiful child.

Harvey

Ah this is the best part of my job! Merry Christmas to me! Ok
now- sorry to rush you but if you just sign right here, I will be on
my way. My wife is going to be pretty peeved if her honey ham
gets cold cause I was working late again. Phew! Plus, it’s like an
oven in here! Just sign right next to the X.

(Jun and Rina sign the papers)

Harvey

Okay. You are good to go! Goodnight Mr and Mrs Hara, and very
nice to meet you Miss Suki, and (shakes his head) oh, I gotta lay
off the caffeine. Goodbye and Merry Christmas!! Merry
Christmas!!

(Harvey leaves)
Suki  Another child!

Jun  Yes.

Rina  Yes.

Jun  But it will never replace you.

(They all hug again)

Moon  Oh, come on! Yeeesh. It’s all just too much! I may be the Moon but I am not entirely cold hearted.

Suki...my child, you have faced your destiny with bravery and strength of heart, and for that, here is the first of many gifts I shall give my daughter...

Each year, on Christmas Eve, as I light up the winter sky, you shall return to visit your family. And when you have a husband and children of your own, they shall return with you too.

Suki  Thank you!!

Moon  Mr. and Mrs. Hara...my final gift to you.

(A beautiful horse appears. She glows bright in the winter night.)

Jun  What is she?

Moon  A Gift Horse. She is the only one of her kind and will live as long as you. Provide her a mate and her foals will be most rare and valuable.

Rina  Jun, we could adopt more children.

Jun  Yes! She’s beautiful.

Moon  Use this gift very, very, wisely...

Jun  (to the Moon) Thank you. For everything.

Moon  Now my dear, many wonders await you!

The Moon and Suki disappear up the Moonbeam as music plays.

(Jun and Rina sing)
The moon that shone the whole night through
    cast her light to set me free
And now I am filled with hope and joy
    For she did give to me-
    a future bright to see

THE END