

“COVID-EVERLASTING:
DIRECTING A UNIVERSITY PRODUCTION OF *TUCK EVERLASTING: THE MUSICAL*
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC”

by

Stephen G. Tabor

B.F.A., Western Kentucky University, 2011

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts Degree

Department of Theater
in the Graduate School
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THESIS APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Professor Olusegun Ojewuyi, Chair

Associate Professor Wendi Zea

Assistant Professor Andrew Abrams

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Stephen G. Tabor, for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theater, presented on April 6, 2021, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: “COVID-Everlasting: Directing a University Production of *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical* during the COVID-19 Pandemic”

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Professor Olusegun Ojewuyi

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 decimated the theatre industry. Nevertheless, the Department of Theater at Southern Illinois University Carbondale elected to produce live performances of *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical* to satisfy the thesis requirements of its graduate students and continue the education of its undergraduate students. This document chronicles the production amidst the pandemic from its inception through its closure from the director’s perspective by detailing the pre-production, production, and post-production phases. Pre-production examines the play analysis, directorial interpretation, design process, and casting. Production recounts the processes of executing rehearsals and developing production elements, including complications from COVID-19. Finally, post-production considers the final product through performance and self-reflection, addressing areas of success and opportunities for growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What a whirlwind of events! I'd like to express my gratitude first and foremost to the Department of Theater at SIUC as a whole. Without the unwavering support of the faculty and students, this production would have never culminated.

My deepest thanks to my committee members: to Professor Ojewuyi for our director meetings and inspirational lectures about pursuing art; to Wendi Zea for frequent support in the forms of coffee and counsel; to Andrew Abrams for his dry wit and passion for musical theatre.

I also thank Dr. Anne Fletcher for her thesis supervision and constant encouragement to keep writing. I thank the late Tom Kidd for his mentorship and emphatic insistence to let the text of a play drive everything I do. And, I thank my choreographer and colleague, Rion Towery, for his infectious spirit of collaboration throughout the production and availing affirmation while writing the paper.

Finally, I recognize those outside of the SIUC family who have supported me along my directing and graduate school journey. I thank Tracey Moore for reigniting my love for musical theatre and for daring me to use it to make a difference as an artist scholar. To Lusie Cuskey, who inspired me to pursue and excel in academia, and to Wes Drummond, whose rivalry and friendship challenge me daily to be a better artist; I thank you both. Mom and Dad, thank you for believing in my higher education endeavors, for understanding my need to advance my artistry, for answering my frantic phone calls, for consoling me during my hardships, for edifying me every step of the way, and, for introducing me to Everlasting and showing me His love.

DEDICATION

In memory of my mentor, J. Thomas Kidd, who rode the wheel plenty and whose legacy is everlasting.

PREFACE

There is an immense afterglow upon realizing that you are not only going to direct a mainstage production for the department, but a fully-realized, full-scale musical production intended to receive ninety-five percent of the departmental budget. The afterglow quickly gives way to gut-wrenching anxiety. There are expectations for this production – exceedingly high, elephantine expectations. So, you eat the elephant one bite at a time.

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INTRODUCTION

DOES THE VIRUS FADE...OR IS IT EVERLASTING?

NAVIGATING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

I received the e-mail on the train ride home from a conference in Chicago in mid-March of 2020. The coronavirus called COVID-19¹ was sweeping the nation, and in an effort to contain the spread of the disease, Chancellor John M. Dunn had decreed that Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) would follow the suit of other Illinois public institutions and take a variety of precautionary measures.¹ Spring break was to be extended to allow faculty time to transition their classes to an online structure; students were to remain at home and continue their lessons remotely; and on- and off-campus events were suspended until further notice and would likely be cancelled. This brought an immediate threat to my current heightened language project and a potential threat to my fall thesis project, *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*.

The theatre industry at large was thoroughly shaken by the onset of the pandemic. By April 2020, the Broadway League² had shuttered forty-one Broadway houses, and those theaters continue to remain closed, with little hope of re-opening in sight.² It was unsafe for performing artists and theatre practitioners to execute their crafts, much less gather an audience to spectate their works. The future of theatre was uncertain, if not bleak. In our own slice of Midwestern theatre, we planned for *Tuck Everlasting* as if life would return to normal in the fall, but there was the ever-looming shadow we could not ignore: would this outbreak plateau or would we find ourselves in a new age without theatre?

¹ *COVID-19* is the abbreviation of coronavirus disease 2019, derived from “co” of *corona*, “vi” of *virus*, “d” of *disease*, and “19” of *2019* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

² The Broadway League is a trade association representing producers and theater owners.

As an academic unit attached to the university, the first priority of the Department of Theater is, “dedication to the development of excellence in the education and training of its students.”³ It is necessary for the undergraduates, and particularly for me as a directing graduate student, to have hands-on and practical stage experience to prepare us for careers in the theatre industry. Nevertheless, the safety of the students was of the utmost concern, and so Department Chair Olusegun Ojewuyi contacted me during the summer break to ask if I could realistically direct this production in a socially distanced manner. At first, I laughed because I envisioned the actors on stage holding six-foot ropes between them to measure out the appropriate distance. But then, I asked myself, “Why not?”. I realized that the true pitfall of staging a socially distanced play is that spectators rely on physical contact between two people to infer intimacy, and six feet of space was sure to communicate isolation. However, if those two people were to hold an object that connected them, it would bridge the space, and the audience would then perceive a more direct relationship between the performers. The idea of these “connectors” began to permeate my initial concept for *Tuck*, and although we would face many other challenges brought on by COVID-19, the convention of connectors sparked a flame of hope that would propel me through those trials.

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic bore a striking resemblance to Severus Snape’s description of the Dark Arts in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*: “You are fighting that which is unfixed, mutating, and indestructible.”⁴ So many variables were unknown, and so many questions had no answers. The constant influx of new information bred new guidelines and restrictions and mandates and precautions. New problems to solve and new conditions to adapt to yielded an unprecedented strain on the production team. And, of course, no amount of pre-

production planning could have prepared us for the emotional toll the mere act of surviving a pandemic would take on the design team, the cast, and the Department as a whole.

But this thesis is not about COVID-19, nor is it an instruction manual for how to produce theatre during a pandemic. It is an account of how we, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, persisted as artists during a global crisis, and that journey is speckled with details of how the virus impacted various aspects of the production. As of this writing, the virus has still not faded, but our perseverance is everlasting.

¹ Dunn, John M. *SIU Alert: 3.11.20 Announcement*. 11 Mar. 2020.

² Paulson, Michael. "Broadway Will Remain Closed at Least Until June, and Probably Longer." *The New York Times*, 8 Apr. 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/theater/broadway-shows-canceled-june-coronavirus.html>.

³ Southern Illinois University. "Mission Statement." *SIU Department of Theater*, 2021, <https://cola.siu.edu/theater/mission.php>.

⁴ Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. (New York: Scholastic, 2006) 177.

PRE-PRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

LIVING LIKE THIS FOREVER:

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF *TUCK EVERLASTING*

The Story of *Tuck Everlasting*

Tuck Everlasting: The Musical, based on the children’s book of the same name by Natalie Babbitt, is about a young girl who meets a family of immortals. I had not read this novel until I learned I would be directing this show. Given its popularity, including two film adaptations, I was surprised that this tale had eluded me for so long. In fact, my first exposure to this franchise at all was when a student sang “Time” for a class in the Fall of 2019. After learning this would be my thesis, I purchased the book, and I found myself captivated by Babbitt’s craftsmanship with words as she created stunning imagery. While I did find the plot engaging, I did not find it compelling from Winnie’s perspective, as she was so entranced with Jesse, whom I did not find terribly interesting, but I appreciated the variety of character perspectives that became tied together in a single plot.

For the musical, however, I first listened to the cast recording and was immediately swept up in the Irish-flavored folk music of Chris Miller’s overture. Miller and Tysen’s subsequent numbers caught my attention to varying degrees, but I strongly bonded with the opening number, “Live Like This,” for its portrayal of multiple character perspectives, which echoed my fondness for the book. Everyone has a story to tell (literally, as there are songs called “The Story of the Tucks,” “The Story of the Man in the Yellow Suit,” and “The Story of Winnie Foster”), and those stories give substance and dimension to the characters in a way that seems to truthfully reflect people.

To summarize the plot, eleven-year-old Winnie Foster longs for an escape from her overprotective mother in the fictional town of Treegap, New Hampshire. On a bold whim, she adventures into her backyard woods where she encounters seventeen-year-old Jesse Tuck drinking from a spring of water. The two take an immediate liking to one another, but when Jesse's brother (Miles) and mother (Mae) arrive, the Tucks realize they have a problem on their hands: Winnie has learned about the spring, the secret of the family's immortality. Uncertain of what to do, they steal Winnie away to the Tucks' cottage to seek the advice of their patriarch, Angus. They resolve to keep Winnie overnight, but Jesse entices her to sneak out to the Fair that is passing through town. Although they enjoy an evening of revelry, they are unnerved by a Man in a Yellow Suit (henceforth referred to as MIYS) who surmises that Jesse is eternally seventeen.

Jesse evades MIYS and makes a tempting proposition to Winnie to drink from the spring when she's seventeen, so that they can be ageless together forever. Meanwhile, MIYS blackmails the Foster family into signing over the deed to Treegap Wood, which includes the spring, in exchange for information about Winnie's whereabouts. Angus explains to Winnie the consequences of the spring water and how it counters the natural order of life's cycle. Jesse, frustrated at the prospect of losing Winnie, returns to the spring to fetch her a vial of it, where he meets MIYS. The rest of the Tuck family and Winnie arrive and are confronted by MIYS, who reveals he has been looking for them ever since he was a boy and heard rumors of an immortal family. He threatens to harm Winnie unless they yield the spring to him, prompting Mae to strike and kill him with a rifle. The Tucks flee Treegap and Winnie returns to her family faced with the difficult decision of whether to drink the vial of water or choose to live a mortal life. The play ends many decades later with the Tucks visiting Winnie's grave, remarking how she lived the long peaceful life they never could.

Biographies of the Creators

Natalie Babbitt

The author of the novel *Tuck Everlasting*, Natalie Babbitt, née Moore, was born in Dayton, Ohio on July 1932. As a child she was an avid reader and one of her favorite books was a version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* illustrated by John Tenniel. This particularly sparked her interest to be an illustrator and led to her study of art at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she met her husband Samuel Babbitt, a writer. Three children and many years later, Babbitt had still not launched her career as an illustrator. In an interview with Kirsten Chapman, Babbitt comments that women in the 1950s rarely looked for jobs outside the home because they “had to meet all the expectations of society before [they] did anything.”⁵ By the mid-1960s, however, Babbitt decided to pursue illustration and gave her husband the idea for *The Forty-Ninth Magician* (1966). Inspired by this publication and with encouragement from her husband, Babbitt went on to write her own children's picture books, such as *Dick Foote and the Shark* (1967) and *Phoebe's Revolt* (1968) before advancing to juvenile fiction novels including *The Search for Delicious* (1969), *Kneeknock Rise* (1970), and, of course, *Tuck Everlasting* (1975).⁶

“Babbitt's books have been praised for their wit, clear and poetic writing style, and themes that address thought-provoking questions about life and human nature.”⁷ *Tuck* is unique among Babbitt's works because while it is a fantasy, it takes place in the everyday world, what Glencoe calls an “earthbound fantasy.”⁸ The fictional setting of Treegap is based on Clinton, New York, a small town in the Adirondack Mountains where Babbitt once lived with her husband. The Glencoe study guide suggests Treegap may also have been inspired by Norse

mythology, owing to the huge ash tree in the center of the woods which seems to resemble Yggdrasil, the tree at the center of the world with mystical water at its base.⁹

Selma Lanes, in her 1977 *New York Times* book review acclaimed Babbitt as “indisputably one of our gifted and ambitious writers for children,” a sentiment confirmed by Babbitt’s reception of the Newberry Honor, Christopher Award, and the E.B. White Award.¹⁰ Although Babbitt passed away on October 31, 2016, she continues to be remembered through her books as new generations continue to discover the magic of her writing.¹¹

The Creative Team

The creation of the libretto and music for the musical adaptation of Babbitt’s *Tuck Everlasting* resulted from the combined efforts of four artists. Chris Miller, a graduate of Elon University and NYU, served as the show’s musical composer. While *Tuck Everlasting* is currently Miller’s only Broadway credit, some of his other notable works include Off-Broadways shows, such as *The Burnt Part Boys*, nominated for Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical in 2011, and *Fugitive Songs*, which was nominated for a 2008 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Revue, and *Stars of David*, all of which were constructed in collaboration with lyricist Nathan Tysen.¹² Besides his work with Miller, Tysen also is the lyricist for the Broadway musical adaptation of the movie *Amélie* with co-composer Dan Messé. Tysen holds an MFA in Musical Theatre Writing from NYU, as well a BFA from Missouri State University, and is married to Kait Kerrigan of the Kerrigan-Lowedermilk composer/lyricist team.¹³ The book for *Tuck Everlasting* was written by Claudia Shear and Tim Federle. Shear is a playwright whose Broadway credits include *Smell of the Kill* and *Dirty Blonde*, both of which won Drama League Awards.¹⁴ Federle, a former Broadway dancer, is an award-winning screenwriter, novelist, and playwright. The San Francisco native is not only the co-playwright for *Tuck Everlasting*, but also

a co-writer for the Golden Globe and Academy Award-nominated animated feature film *Ferdinand*, which won the Humanitas Prize.¹⁵

Production History

Film and Stage Adaptations

Prior to the musical, Babbitt's novel inspired a number of other media adaptations, such as plays for young audiences. Though not the first of its kind, one of the more widely produced staged versions was written by Mark Frattaroli, who incidentally was Babbitt's son-in-law.¹⁶ Frattaroli's play premiered at Louisville Children's Theatre as a workshop in 1991, but has since received other productions, notably one at The Coterie Theatre, where *Broadway World* praised it for, "bring[ing] the enchanting story wonderfully to life."¹⁷

Other manifestations of the story include two film adaptations. The 1981 version gives a fairly faithful portrayal of the novel with some minor artistic license, such as the opening of the film, which features Jesse showing off as he climbs a Ferris wheel and unintentionally exposes his immortality when he survives a fall from it. More widely known is Disney's 2002 film adaptation featuring Alexis Bledel as Winnie Foster, which introduced a new generation to, albeit, a highly romanticized version of Babbitt's tale. The film was met with mixed reviews, with Robert K. Elder of the *Chicago Tribune* bemoaning that despite the good acting, the piece "suffers a laconic pace and lack of traditional action," and *Hollywood Reporter* critic Michael Rechtshaffen scathingly declaring that, "Even at 90 minutes, the tottering *Tuck* sure feels everlasting."¹⁸ Nevertheless, Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* remarked that while the movie "targets an audience of girls in their early teens, [it] has been made with such skill and sensitivity that its appeal spans generations."¹⁹ The resurgence of this timely story was soon followed by its musical counterpart.

The Broadway Musical

The Alliance Theater in Atlanta, Georgia birthed the premiere of the musical adaptation of *Tuck Everlasting* in 2015. The production transferred to the Broadhurst Theater in New York City, where it began previews on March 31, 2016 before its official opening on April 26th. The Broadway production ran for thirty-nine performances before closing on May 29, 2016.²⁰ *Tuck Everlasting* received a Tony nomination for Best Costume Design of a Musical, but on the whole the production was overshadowed by musicals such as *Waitress* and *Hamilton*, the latter of which swept the 2016 Tony Awards.²¹ The Concord Theatricals website includes a list of upcoming productions, which, in addition to Southern Illinois University Carbondale, includes several high schools, church groups, community theaters, and youth theaters.²²

Play Analysis

Dramatic Structure

Tuck Everlasting: The Musical is a two-act musical play with eleven scenes in each act.³ The first few scenes and songs, including “Live Like This” and “Good Girl Winnie Foster,” provide exposition for the play, framing the world of the play for Winnie, the Tucks, and the Man in the Yellow Suit.⁴ They lay the foundation of stasis that will be disrupted by Winnie’s decision to run away from home, which functions as the inciting incident. Subsequent actions contribute to the rising action by way of a series of crises and complications. Some of these include Winnie discovering Jesse drinking from the spring, the Tucks’ uncertainty of how to handle Winnie’s knowledge of their secret, Winnie’s disappearance creating a missing persons case for Hugo and Constable Joe, Jesse exposing his immortality at the Fair to MIYS, and Jesse

³ See Appendix A Directorial Breakdown of Beats for more information.

⁴ For a full list of the dramatic function of each song in the show, see Appendix B.

offering Winnie the chance to drink from the spring and live forever. The climax of the musical occurs when the Tucks and Winnie are confronted by MIYS, who attempts to bargain with them and then mortally threatens Winnie in exchange for the spring water. Mae's decision to kill the Man in the Yellow Suit to save her family and Winnie marks the start of the falling action, during which Winnie says goodbye to the Tucks, considers the choice of drinking the water, and ultimately decides to live out a full and mortal life. The play resolves with the Tucks reconvening at Winnie's grave to remark how wonderful it is that she lived how they never could.

Given Circumstances

Time

The action of the play largely spans twenty-four hours from the morning of August 1, 1893. However, the beginning of the show actually takes place eighty-five years earlier, in 1808, and the show ends several decades later – the exact year is unspecified – following the death of Winnie. In the novel, Winnie dies at the age of seventy-eight and the Tucks visit her grave two years later. If this timing is applied to the musical, that puts the final scene in the year 1962; however, I decided to place the Tucks' visit at the end of the play in 1963, in order to sync events up with their decennial gatherings.⁵

Historical Events

The year of the play's main action, 1893, was an interesting mark in American history. Major events of that year include Grover Cleveland being sworn in as the 24th President of the United States; the World's Fair being held in Chicago; the song "America the Beautiful" and the

⁵ See Appendix C Theorized Timeline for *Tuck Everlasting* for a linear depiction of the chronology.

melody for what would become “Happy Birthday” are penned; and the New York Stock Exchange crashes creating The Panic of 1893, which introduces an economic depression.

According to W. Jett Lauck in *The Causes of the Panic of 1893*, “On account of the constantly growing demand for money from far and near, the hoarding of money by individuals, and the universal desire to convert goods, securities, and all descriptions of obligations into gold because of the fear of a reversion to a silver standard of payments, the tightness in the money market finally developed into a money-famine.²³ This crash was exacerbated by the collapse of several prominent railway corporations, such as the Reading, the Northern Pacific, the Union Pacific, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, the Erie, and the New York and New England. However, Lauck notes that the most prominent feature of the depression of 1893 occurred during the summer as a result of numerous bank failures and suspensions causing, what he describes as “financial and industrial chaos.”²⁴

As the musical takes place during August of 1893, the characters and town are most certainly experiencing the height of this economic depression. The arrival of the Fair, therefore, is intriguing, as it does not seem to be a time when such a trade would be lucrative. Indeed, this could be why the Fair only stays in town for one day (“Today a new town / And a new one tomorrow”), as most towns would be unable support the luxury of the Fair for more than one evening.²⁵ Nevertheless, it seems to be a welcome distraction for the community, highly anticipated by Winnie, as she’s “been waiting forever” for the Fair that evening²⁶.

Setting

The musical takes place in the fictional town of Treegap, New Hampshire. Within this world, the dramatic action primarily occurs in four location: Treegap Wood, the Foster House, the Tuck Cottage, and the Fair.

Treemap Wood

“The wood was at the center, the hub of the wheel”.²⁷ In the novel, Babbitt describes the wood as having a strange quality to it, something that gave it “a sleeping, otherworldly appearance that made you want to speak in whispers.”²⁸ The wood belongs to the Fosters, and is recognized as private property, despite there being no perimeter to inhibit public access.

For the wood was full of light, entirely different from the light she was used to. It was green and amber and alive, quivering in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between the tree trunks. There were little flowers she did not recognize, white and palest blue; and endless, tangled vines; and here and there a fallen log, half-rotted but soft with patches of sweet green-velvet moss.²⁹

The tree, at its center, is an old ash tree with a “T” carved into it by Jesse Tuck on the eve of their first visit to Treemap Wood.³⁰ At its roots bubbles a spring, which, after the Tucks realize its power, is covered and hidden with pebbles. Being the source of this Fountain of Youth, Treemap Wood serves as a site for several points of dramatic action, including the climactic confrontation with the Man in the Yellow Suit.

The Foster House

“On the left stood the first house, a square and solid cottage with a touch-me-not appearance, surrounded by grass cut painfully to the quick and enclosed by a capable iron fence some four feet high which clearly said, ‘Move on – we don’t want *you* here.’”³¹ This description of the Foster House from the novel is similarly encapsulated in the lyrics of “Good Girl Winnie Foster,” wherein Winnie sings of being “trapped” in a sad and lonely house and how her family “lock[s] [them]selves behind that door.”³² The stage directions describe it as “sterile,” but other than the mention of a rocking chair for Nana, there are no other clear descriptors provided in the

script.³³ However, the Foster House is utilized for both interior and exterior scenes. The fenced yard is not given much detail except that Winnie calls it a cage and references a gate.³⁴

The Tuck Cottage

Three locations are used within the Tuck Cottage: exterior, interior, and upper-interior. The exterior is not described in the play except for the mention of Angus sitting on the porch. The primary action while at the Tuck Cottage occurs inside. The novel breaks the cottage up into four areas – a kitchen, a parlor, a bedroom, and a loft – and “everywhere evidence of [Mae and Angus’s] activities.”³⁵ Babbitt describes at length the details of the cottage to create the image of a very lived-in home:

Every surface, every wall, was piled and strewn and hung with everything imaginable, from onions to lanterns to wooden spoons to wash tubs...the furniture loose and sloping with age, was set about helter-skelter...[there were] patches and scraps of bright cloth; half-completed quilts and braided rugs; a bag of cotton batting;...every surface dim with the sawdust of countless standings;...and a stack of wooden bowls, their sides smoothed to velvet, the topmost bowl filled with a jumble of big wooden spoons and forks.³⁶

Conversely, the musical libretto leaves much of the set to the imaginations of the director and scenic designer, save for the stage direction of Angus sleeping on a chaise. There is also a line of text when Mae brings Winnie up to the attic and confesses to it being an embarrassment, but rationalizes that “when you never have guests, why clean?”³⁷ The attic contains a trunk, from which Winnie pulls Thomas’s clothes and Mae’s dress, and has a window which functions as an egress for Jesse to pop in and Winnie to sneak out when they go to the Fair.

The Fair

The Fair is an added component to the musical adaptation of the novel. Its inclusion provides subsequent encounters between Winnie and Jesse and the Man in the Yellow Suit, as well as serving the dramatic function of fostering the growing fondness between Winnie and Jesse (and allowing for a big musical song and dance number, “Partner in Crime”). Once again, the set is left to the imagination of the designer, as there is only mention of “stalls,” presumably for the various games and attractions the Fair has to offer.³⁸

Themes, Conflict, and Imagery

Water is the strongest image in this play, not only because it is the premise of the plot but also because it is represented in other themes and symbols in the musical. In the first line of the script, Jesse exclaims that he sees water up ahead. Angus makes a toast to the family, declaring, “Where there’s water, there’s opportunity. And where there’s opportunity, there’s our new life.”³⁹ Additionally, when Miles claims that he and his brother are “dying of thirst,”⁴⁰ this has a symbolic parallel to the biblical story of “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well” wherein he offers her “Living Water” that will cause her to never thirst again, an allusion to everlasting life.⁴¹ The spring in *Tuck*, as revealed later on, does indeed bestow eternal life, which sets into motion the events of the play.

Water also has a thematic function as evidenced in “The Wheel” when Angus sings about the water cycle as a parallel to the life cycle, observing that “all people ebb and flow with the tide, tide, tide.”⁴² Cyclical elements, which are more prominent in Babbitt’s novel, are present in various forms throughout the musical. For example, the Tucks’ decennial gatherings are cyclical in their pattern of coming together and then dispersing. Miles makes references to the circular movements of a clock in “Time.” In “Live Like This,” each of the soloists makes a prophetic

wish with the preface “today is the day” in hopes of breaking the cycle of their everyday lives (“I can’t live like this forever”). While each of these wishes is fulfilled over the course of the play, the notion of maintaining or breaking cycles is repeatedly explored, such as Winnie trying to break free of her home life routine (“Some days / I want to raise a little something more than heaven”) or Angus praying to be released of his immortality so he can die and complete his cycle (“Show me how to climb back on the wheel”).⁴³

Time, of course, is a major theme in this musical, as characters navigate either its limitation in their mortality or its infiniteness in their immortality. Miles bitterly regrets his inability to move forward in time; Angus and Mae are apathetically stagnant in time; Jesse relishes his escape from time; Winnie impatiently wants to enjoy time; and the Man in the Yellow Suit fears the terminability of time.

Since this story is told over the course of twenty-four hours, the urgency of each character’s objective is heightened, in that they are all literally running out of time: the Fair is only in town for one day; Winnie can only be separated from her family for one day;⁶ after MIYS discovers Jesse’s secret, the Tucks have less than one day to remain together. Even Hugo, though a supporting character, also finds himself captive to time, as he knows he must find Winnie before time runs out (i.e., as soon as possible).

While the obvious conflict in *Tuck Everlasting* would seem to be *The Tucks vs. The Man in the Yellow Suit*, the theme of *time* also highlights the larger conflict of *Mortality vs. Immortality*. MIYS seeks immortality and invests his entire life searching for it, while most of the Tucks spurn their immortality and have resigned to living day to day without purpose. Winnie, however, is offered a choice, and the ethical dilemma at the heart of it seems to be

⁶ Mae is reluctant to keep Winnie overnight, but Angus insists he will take her back “first thing in the morning” (Miller, et. al 39).

whether it is wise to drink the spring water and live forever or to live a full and mortal life. In conjunction with the theme of *time*, the conflict seems to suggest it is not how much time one is given but how they use it that is important.

Character Analysis

Winnie Foster

Eleven-year-old Winnie Foster is a self-ascribed “good girl.”⁴⁴ A daughter and granddaughter, Winnie is reluctantly obedient to her mother Betsy and grandmother Nana. She has lost her father sometime in the last several months and has subsequently found her home to be much stricter, her mother perhaps more overbearing for fear of losing more family members, as Winnie likens herself to being “tied to a string like a precious pearl / it’s a really tight leash for a really good girl.”⁴⁵ While the novel version of Winnie is often inhibited by caution and fear, her musical counterpart is rather cavalier. She runs away without looking back, it takes little to no convincing from Jesse for her to climb the Tree, and she relishes the adventurous prospect of sneaking out of the Tuck Cottage to go to the Fair with Jesse. Bold as she is, however, Winnie is still naïve about the world. Angus must explain to her the negative consequences of eternal life and why it is important for living things to die. Nevertheless, her innocence is one of her endearing characteristics, as it makes her curious, yet compassionate. She is able to comfort Miles and empathize by discussing her relationship with her own father. Winnie’s lack of a paternal figure – indeed, any male figure – in her life greatly drives her attraction to the Tuck men. She finds a father in Angus, a brother/uncle in Miles, and a friend in Jesse. The musical is primarily a journey through her eyes as she learns about themes of mortality and friendship, and her decision at the end of the play to not drink the water is a mark of her wisdom and growth

from this experience. Winnie uses her life – her time – to leave behind a legacy of lives she has touched.

Jesse Tuck

Whether he is viewed as seventeen or one-hundred and two, Jesse Tuck remains the same. He is adventurous to the point of recklessness and always on the move for the next experience. In the book, he is “so glorious” to Winnie that she immediately falls in love with him.⁴⁶ Jesse is a climber, as seen by his scaling of the Treegap Silo, the Tree, and the side of the Tuck Cottage to the attic, and he therefore must have some amount of agility and physical fitness. He is like a bird that never lands, and in many ways, he is bird that never *can* land. He declares, “I think I’ve been everywhere in the world except the Fair...But because of my predicament / my peculiar situation...I’m a one-man operation.”⁴⁷ Though in the book he claims to be glad he never married (before getting to know Winnie), in the musical he makes a flat-out proposal to Winnie to marry her when she turns seventeen and drinks water from the spring. The excitement he finds with Winnie has brought to light the loneliness of his adventuring (“I refuse to keep living alone in the shadows”), and he consequently seeks Winnie’s companionship.⁴⁸ However, Jesse does not quite have the maturity to process the ramifications of these actions. Mae reveals in the novel that the water “stops you right where you are,” and it seems that this is the case not only physically for Jesse but also psychologically.⁴⁹ Unlike his brother, Jesse still seems to have the mentality of his original age and lacks the maturity and wisdom eighty-plus years would have otherwise brought. Nevertheless, his encounter with Winnie appears to have jumpstarted that process for him, for he displays some sense of acceptance – and by extension, growth – as he stands at Winnie’s grave reprising “The Wheel.”

Miles Tuck

Jesse's older brother, Miles, is as different from him as possible. Unwittingly frozen at twenty-two, Miles married and had a son (and a daughter, per the novel) for many years until his wife left him for fear of his immortality.⁵⁰ Consequently, Miles views the spring water as a curse, that not only stole his wife and son from him, but also denies him any hope of a family in the future. The loss of his family has made him bitter and reluctant to welcome joy into his life. He has retained paternal characteristics from his time as a father and set himself as a voice of reason and caution in the family, steeply rooted in fear that if the family secret gets out he will have to relive the traumatic rejection he experienced earlier in life. He admonishes Jesse, who has not experienced such loss, remarking how it is easy to ignore consequences "when you've never looked out for anyone but yourself."⁵¹ At the end of the musical, however, Miles attempts some reconciliation with Jesse.

Mae Tuck

"Mothers can always tell," answers Mae Tuck when Winnie asks how she knew the latter's dress was scratchy. Mae wholly embraces her identity as a mother, and indeed, she seems to thrive on it. Her excitement in "Live Like This" is palpable at the prospect of seeing her sons later that day, and, therefore, resuming her role as a mother. The thrilling notion of her family reuniting seems to shake her out of a decade-long stupor and break the monotony of her daily life. Winnie's appearance further draws out her maternal personality, as Winnie actually does need a nurturer, and moreover, because Mae longs for a daughter.⁵² Mae is sentimental, as seen by her attachment to the music box Angus gave her and her reminiscent song "My Most Beautiful Day." She is nostalgic for days gone by and envies Jesse's plans for Winnie because "at least he's looking forward to something again."⁵³ Her affection for Winnie's wellbeing and

future are fully manifested when she strikes the Man in the Yellow Suit in the head with the rifle to protect Winnie.

Angus Tuck

Patriarch of the Tuck family, Angus chooses his words and actions carefully. The side effects of immortality have left Angus rather passive and, consequently, subject to stagnation. In fact, the first time he meets Winnie, he is still in his undergarments, showing how he can hardly bother to get dressed for the day for lack of purpose. Much like Mae, however, Winnie's presence seems to revitalize him, and in the novel, he goes so far as to say, "This is the finest thing that's happened in – oh – at least eighty years."⁵⁴ Owing to his sedentary lifestyle, he lives vicariously through Jesse's adventures, even allowing Jesse and Winnie to sneak out, unbeknownst to Mae. While he may demonstrate lax parenting, he is still respected by his wife and sons for his leadership and wisdom. When Winnie is first revealed to Mae and Jesse, they resolve to take her to Angus because "he will know what to do."⁵⁵ Angus feels responsible for everything that has happened to the family from the moment they drank from the spring, confessing, "This is my fault. I never should have taken us to Treegap Wood in the first place."⁵⁶ Yet in spite of his guilt, he continues to provide wisdom, most notably in the musical through his song "The Wheel," where he explains to Winnie the importance of life ending, so as to complete its natural cycle, and counsels her to not be afraid of death but to "be afraid of not being truly alive."⁵⁷

The Man in the Yellow Suit

Described in the novel as "remarkably tall and narrow" with a long chin that fades into "a thin, apologetic beard," "dry, gray hair," and a "light" voice, the Man in the Yellow Suit receives a detailed portrayal in the novel.⁵⁸ "His tall body moved continuously; a foot tapped, a shoulder

twitched,” Babbitt writes, “But at the same time he had a kind of grace, like a well-handled marionette...[Winnie] was half-charmed...She frowned and looked at the man more closely. But his smile seemed perfectly all right, quite agreeable and friendly.”⁵⁹ These characteristics are maintained in the musical adaptation but manifest themselves more justifiably and completely by MIYS’s portrayal as a fair barker. In this version of the story, MIYS has been working for the Fair most of his life and travels with them daily from town to town, secretly hoping to encounter someone who can help him discover the immortal family from his grandmother’s stories. His employment as a barker makes him much less ominous and symbolic than in the book, instead transforming his potentially creepy qualities into attributes of enticement, while still positioning him dramatically as the antagonist. He boldly invites all to “join the parade” and yet cunningly scouts for clues about the supernatural family. He possesses the shrewd ability to perceive a person’s age by looking in their eyes, part of what allows him to discern Jesse’s endless youth.⁶⁰ His affinity for the yellow suit that gives him his character name is one of his more peculiar characteristics. Although the musical allows for better rationalization of it, owing to the flamboyance associated with fairs, it still draws much commentary from the other characters in the play, prompting an entire song, in fact, by Constable Joe and Hugo (“You Can’t Trust A Man [Dressed in Yellow]”).

Hugo Jackson

Hugo is not originally in the book. Rather, he was created for the musical adaptation to serve as a sort of comedic relief duo with his father, Constable Joe. Hugo is described as being “[fifteen], shy and nervous” and is a deputy-in-training.⁶¹ His song “Hugo’s First Case” and its reprise emphasize his anxiety with two-syllable phrases and a steady percussive beat, evocative of a palpitating heart. He is enthusiastic, and his nervousness seems to stem from an eagerness to

be professional and impress Constable Joe, whom he calls “Sir” for the duration of the play, except for his last scene with him when he mistakenly calls Joe “Dad.” There is no mention of a mother figure in Hugo’s life, so there could be much speculation about how much emotional support is present in this father-son relationship. It is likely his self-esteem has not been attended to at home, for after Winnie tells him that he’s not a dope, he responds, “That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said about me.”⁶² Nevertheless, it cannot be said that his relationship with his father is abusive, even if distant; there is some affection in Constable Joe’s affirming line in their final scene together, “You’ll make deputy yet.”⁶³ Despite his youth and endearing nervousness, Hugo is very bright, as evidenced by his first encounter with the Foster family regarding their missing persons case, often deducing clues before his father does. He also has an elevated vocabulary and an affinity for factual correctness, which he showcases in “You Can’t Trust A Man” opposite his father. Finally, Hugo displays loyalty and protective instincts, which sum up his actions throughout the play in his objective to find Winnie, whom he eventually marries, when he nobly proclaims, “Just remember, Winnie: you’ll always have me to protect you.”⁶⁴

Constable Joe Jackson

Constable Joe is not revealed to be Hugo’s father until the last few scenes of the musical. He appears to put his professionalism before his family, which explains the rather rigorous discipline of his deputy-in-training. In his fifties, it is possible that Joe is also out of shape, as Hugo tends to arrive to every scene before him, and Joe complains that Hugo shouldn’t have gotten so far ahead. Nana, additionally, remarks that he is as “fast as molasses.”⁶⁵ Despite his position of authority, Joe does not seem to be the brightest detective, or is at least not as intuitive and astute as Hugo, whom he often chastises for speaking before repeating what Hugo just stated. While his wits may be lacking, he does seem to be an excellent judge of character. He

takes an immediate disliking to MIYS and sings an entire song with Hugo debasing men who wear yellow for their universal bad qualities, such as having poor handshakes (conversely, he takes a liking to Angus Tuck after experiencing his firm handshake).⁶⁶ Constable Joe seems to be sweet on Betsy Foster. It is subtle, but he appears quite happy to help her or find an excuse to see her, even telling her, “Oh, you’re never a waste of time, Betsy. Always a pleasure.”⁶⁷

Surprisingly, even greater than his disdain for MIYS or his fondness for Betsy Foster, Constable Joe hates clowns.⁶⁸

Betsy Foster (Mother)

Recently widowed sometime in the last year, Betsy Foster raises Winnie (with some help from Nana) to the best of her ability. However, she often displays more militant qualities than nurturing ones, exemplified when she commands Winnie to “march upstairs and put [her] proper attire back on.”⁶⁹ She prefers things neat and orderly and confines Winnie to the perimeter of the house property. She denies Winnie’s request to go to the Fair on the basis that it hasn’t been a full year since Mr. Foster’s funeral, “And we can’t be seen carrying on in public as if nothing has happened.”⁷⁰ It is unclear whether these traits were preexisting or a recent development stemming from her husband’s death. It is likely that she has always been someone who favors structure, responsibility, and duty because Winnie argues that her father would have taken her to the Fair, suggesting he was possibly the more relaxed and playful parent. It is also feasible that Betsy’s husband’s death has exacerbated the aforementioned characteristics for fear of losing what little family she has left. When Constable Joe and Hugo respond to her missing persons report, Betsy implores, “Find her, Joe. I can’t bear the thought of losing anyone else.”⁷¹ Upon further speculation, given that Betsy is in her late thirties and Winnie is eleven, it would seem she bore Winnie in her mid-to-late twenties, which may suggest that she and her husband

struggled to have children and would further intensify Betsy's protective, if not extreme, measures for rearing Winnie.

Nana Foster

Nana is Winnie's paternal grandmother, evidenced by the fact that she has heard Mae's music box "on and off" her whole life, "and it always comes from our wood!"⁷² Though she, too, mourns the loss of Winnie's father – her son – she takes a much more relaxed approach to the social convention of mourning, advocating for Winnie to attend the fair. "Keep your potato peeling, Betsy. We want cotton candy," is just one example of her blunt personality, though a number of other instances are snidely and unabashedly directed toward the MIYS, the most pointed being, "Oh, would you drop dead, already."⁷³ In the novel, Nana believes in magic and attributes the melody of Mae's music box to "elves." It is therefore ironic that in the musical her beliefs are discounted as senility because of her age when she is actually correct about magic lying dormant in Treegap Wood.

Conclusion

It is easy to see why this beloved novel has endured through the decades and found new life in its various film and stage adaptations. The thematic concerns and assorted complex characters make for an engaging story accessible to young audiences yet relatable and available to mature spectators, as well. And the musical in particular, through song and dance, brings this mundane yet magical world to life.

⁵ The Glencoe Literature Library. *Study Guide for Tuck Everlasting*. (McGraw-Hill)

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⁶ Glencoe 9.

⁷ Glencoe 9.

⁸ Glencoe 10.

⁹ Glencoe 10-11.

¹⁰ Lanes, Selma G. "Love Story, Sea Story." *The New York Times Book Review*, 13 Nov. 1977, p. 10,

<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/13/archives/love-story-sea-story.html>.

¹¹ Associated Press. "Tuck Everlasting Author Natalie Babbitt Dies at 84." *The Guardian*, 31 Oct. 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/01/tuck-everlasting-author-natalie-babbitt-dies-at-84>.

¹² Concord Theatricals. "Chris Miller." Concord Theatricals, 2020,

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¹³ Concord Theatricals. "Nathan Tysen." *Concord Theatricals*, 2020,

<https://www.concordtheatricals.com/a/116519/nathan-tysen>.

¹⁴ Concord Theatricals. "Claudia Shear." Concord Theatricals, 2020,

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¹⁵ Concord Theatricals. "Tim Federle." *Concord Theatricals*, 2020,

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¹⁶ Bush, Catherine. *Tuck Everlasting Study Guide*. (Barter Theatre, 2008)

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¹⁷ "Tuck Everlasting - The Play." *Stage Partners*, 2019, <https://tuckeverlastingplay.com/the-play>.

¹⁸ "Tuck Everlasting Reviews." *Rotten Tomatoes*,

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¹⁹ "Tuck Everlasting Reviews." *Rotten Tomatoes*,

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tuck_everlasting/reviews?type=top_critics&sort=&page=2. Accessed 24 Sept. 2020.

²⁰ "Tuck Everlasting." Internet Broadway Database, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/tuck-everlasting-501949>.

²¹ "Winners/2016." *Tony Awards*, 2020, <https://www.tonyawards.com/winners/year/2016/category/any/show/any/>.

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- ²² Concord Theatricals. "Tuck Everlasting." Concord Theatricals,
<https://www.concordtheatricals.com/p/60640/tuck-everlasting>.
- ²³ Lauck, W. Jett. *The Causes of the Panic of 1893*. (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1907) 102.
- ²⁴ Lauck 106-7.
- ²⁵ Miller, Chris, et al. *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. (New York: Samuel French, 2017) 10.
- ²⁶ Miller, et al. 8.
- ²⁷ Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*. (New York: Square Fish, 1975) 4.
- ²⁸ Babbitt 6.
- ²⁹ Babbitt 24.
- ³⁰ Miller, et al. 34.
- ³¹ Babbitt 6.
- ³² Babbitt 14.
- ³³ Babbitt 13.
- ³⁴ Babbitt 18-19.
- ³⁵ Babbitt 51.
- ³⁶ Babbitt 52.
- ³⁷ Miller, et al. 41.
- ³⁸ Miller, et al. 50.
- ³⁹ Miller, et al. 7.
- ⁴⁰ Miller, et al. 7
- ⁴¹ *The Bible*. English Standard Version. The Classic Thinline Edition. (Crossway Bibles, 2002) Jn 4:4-26.
- ⁴² Miller, et al. 79.
- ⁴³ Miller, et al. 8-12, 16, 79.
- ⁴⁴ Miller, et al. 15.
- ⁴⁵ Miller, et al. 15.
- ⁴⁶ Babbitt 25.

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- ⁴⁷ Miller, et al. 48-49.
- ⁴⁸ Miller, et al. 66.
- ⁴⁹ Miller, et al. 41.
- ⁵⁰ Miller, et al. 68.
- ⁵¹ Miller, et al. 39.
- ⁵² Miller, et al. 41.
- ⁵³ Miller, et al. 69.
- ⁵⁴ Babbitt 49.
- ⁵⁵ Babbitt 26.
- ⁵⁶ Babbitt 65.
- ⁵⁷ Babbitt 80.
- ⁵⁸ Babbitt 17.
- ⁵⁹ Babbitt 18.
- ⁶⁰ Miller, et al. 16.
- ⁶¹ Miller, et al. 28.
- ⁶² Miller, et al. 89.
- ⁶³ Miller, et al. 86.
- ⁶⁴ Miller, et al. 89.
- ⁶⁵ Miller, et al. 29.
- ⁶⁶ Miller, et al. 77 and 86.
- ⁶⁷ Miller, et al. 73.
- ⁶⁸ Miller, et al. 76.
- ⁶⁹ Miller, et al. 13.
- ⁷⁰ Miller, et al. 13.
- ⁷¹ Miller, et al. 29.
- ⁷² Miller, et al. 18.
- ⁷³ Miller, et al. 13 and 74.

CHAPTER 2

BIG DAY, FIRST MAINSTAGE:

CONCEPTUALIZING FOR THE MCLEOD STAGE

One of my biggest fears about directing has always been that my imagination will not be enough, that my interpretation and subsequent transformation of a text into a dramatic experience on stage will be inadequate to the dynamic production it deserves. However, in my first semester of graduate school, while working on my mock qualifier⁷, *Sunday in the Park with George*, I was struck by a lyrical phrase written by the brilliant Stephen Sondheim. In an inspiring song to rally George to his art, the character Dot sings, “Stop worrying if your vision / is new. Let others make that decision – / they usually do. / You keep moving on.”¹ This became my mantra throughout graduate school, a constant reminder to keep doing what I am doing because I am enough. Nevertheless, I grappled with allowing myself to dream for this production with reckless abandon.

My previous SIUC productions, as well as many of my directing experiences prior to graduate school, had conditioned me to be a practical artist, confining me to the limitations of funds, space, time, and other resources. Turning off that pragmatic mentality became a recurring challenge throughout the production process, as I was in a constant state of, “What about the budget? What can we afford?”. At the suggestion of my supervisor, Segun Ojewuyi, I allowed myself to be caught up in the fantasy of a production with no resource limitations – no restrictions. As it turned out, “fantasy,” indeed, became a crucial component.

⁷ At SIUC, a *mock qualifier* is a practice proposal that prepares the student for the proposal of their qualifying project, which is used to adjudicate the student’s work in their specific area in comparison with professional theatre standards.

Vision and Concept

Upon reading Glencoe's study guide for the book *Tuck Everlasting*, I immediately latched onto the phrase "earthbound fantasy."² This summed up everything I see in both the book and the musical. This is a story about a young girl who finds a piece of magic in her own backyard and an extraordinary family in an ordinary town. The book heavily indicates Winnie's infatuation with Jesse, and while he is also enamored with her (in a different way), this is not a romance tale. This musical is a reminder that it is not how much life you have to live but how you choose to live it. Time is a gift, but it only has meaning if you use it. We see the Man in the Yellow Suit squander his mortality chasing after immortality, as he sings "My whole life employed to a travelin' fair."³ Conversely, we see Winnie decline a chance for immortality in exchange for a normal – and by all accounts, thoroughly lived – life, with the legacy of a son and grandchildren. The impact of her actions is indeed a ripple in water, not the least of which is her influence on the Tucks, who by the end of the play have a reignited passion for life.

In his scene on the pond with Winnie, Angus Tuck makes one of the most profound statements of the play: "You don't need to live forever, you just need to live."⁴ In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found this line particularly resonating with not only my own circumstances, but the nation at large. Many Americans, myself included, generally feel that they do not have enough time to get things done. In a 2019 *Washington Post* article entitled "Why you never seem to have enough time," psychology research Ashley V. Whillans was quoted saying, "People often complain of being in a time bind not only because they are objectively busy, but also because they perceive a lack of control over their time."⁵ However, when COVID-19 found its way to America, citizens suddenly found themselves with *too much* time. At first glance, the shelter-in-place orders seemed optimal for productivity, particularly for introverts. *HuffPost*

writer Connor Garel recalls his initial optimism at having so much free time and his hope “to be so productive I would, inevitably, surprise myself.”⁶ What he found instead was an overwhelming sense of burnout⁸. This is not unlike the Tucks, who find themselves privy to endless time, although the initial blessing of immortality is soon realized to have its immortal consequences, as well, including what seems to be immortal burnout. Their encounter with Winnie, however, reignites their spark for living, and although Winnie chooses a mortal life, the text suggests she that makes the most of it. Therefore, I wanted this production to be a reminder for the audience to not let their allotted time dictate their fulfillment of it. It is not how much time you have, but what you do with it that matters.

While Angus’ aphorism and the metaphor of a ripple in water are foundational from a conceptual standpoint, the ash tree is the backbone on which I chose to build the world of the play from a production perspective. As I drew from Norse mythology and explored the entity Yggdrasil, the World Tree, I came to regard the ash tree in Treegap Wood as such and thus recognized it as being at the center of everything. It is connected to everything and the spring at its roots is a source of life. In many ways, I am reminded of The Tree of Souls in James Cameron’s movie *Avatar*⁹. There is an energy that binds everything in the world together, and through that energy, The Tree of Souls is connected to everything. The same is true of this ash tree in *Tuck Everlasting*. But it is more than conduit – it is alive.

The heartbeat of *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical* is the musical motif “day na na day na na day na” repeated throughout the play. It is at once primal, magical, and universal. “What does it mean?” and “How does it manifest?” were my two biggest questions as I developed my concept.

⁸ *Burnout* refers to a prolonged state of emotional, physical, or mental exhaustion as the result of accumulated stress.

⁹ “The Tree of Souls is a giant willow-like tree that is said to be the closest connection to [a spiritual entity of the entire planet of] Pandora...The tree has the capability to connect directly to the human nervous system, despite humans lacking a queue. The roots of the Tree of Souls are capable of initiating a neural link...” (Avatar Wiki).

My thesis supervisor, Segun Ojewuyi, challenged me to consider the larger global themes at play, which immediately reminded me of the end of Babbitt's novel. In the book, Angus and Mae Tuck return to Treegap some decades after their encounter with Winnie and learn that the woods containing the life-giving spring were bulldozed, either covering or destroying the magic source. Land development and capitalism erase an enchanted part of nature. I therefore decided that nature would have a physical embodiment. As I was already inspired by Norse mythology for the tree itself, I further drew from it to conceive three nature spirits, or nymphs: a water nymph for the spring, a wood nymph for the ash tree, and a rock nymph for the earth surrounding them both. The triad tied in neatly with the Norns, the Norse Fates. In Norse mythology, the World Tree, *Yggdrasil*, is fed by three wells, and the first of these is *Urdarbrunnr*, or the Well of Destiny, where the Norns reside and influence the destiny of all living things.⁷

Building on the idea that all lives are connected by the destinies woven by these nymphs, I realized that this is how the "day na na" motif would manifest: primal, as it is the raw energy of thought manifest through sound; magical in its haunting yet uplifting musicality; and universal as it connects all living things because it is the sound of all things living their lives. The nymphs help embody these three characteristics through their dancing and movement interwoven throughout the play. Taking it a step further, I decided to pull from the mischievous nature of Norse gods and spirits so that our nymphs directly yet invisibly play a part influencing the characters' actions over the course of the plot. They bestow eternal life to the Tucks and all who drink from their life sources, but they can also be threatened by external forces, for example, MIYS, who would sell the water for profit, or, in the novel, land development, which eradicates the pocket of paradise. In his book *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and*

Beliefs, John Lindow quotes a Norse poem that states, “Norns are called those women who shape what must be.”⁸

One useful example of this “shaping” would be utilizing a nymph to manipulate the toad Winnie finds so that it entices her to leave her yard, explore the woods, and consequently encounter the Tucks. Rather than negotiating the logistics of having a puppet or automated toad elude Winnie, using a nymph makes the plot point an intentional choice to draw Winnie into her adventure. However, as my vision centered around the idea that “It’s not how much time you have, it’s what you do with it that matters,” I wanted agency to be a crucial part of this production. Therefore, the nymphs would never be a compelling force for characters’ actions, but they would provide the nudge or “shaping” in hopes that their preferred choices would be taken. Another instance where I intended to employ this was that while Winnie followed one nymph with the toad, another nymph would remove part of her dress or hair bow, to be found by Hugo in a later scene. This would reinforce his determination to pursue her and foreshadow the nymphs’ desire for Winnie to choose a mortal life with Hugo.

The contrasting theme of *fate vs. free will* created by these events, in tandem with my vision that contrasts allotted lifetime with how it is used, led me to consider other contrasting elements throughout the play, for example, the opposition of life and death noted by Angus as he sings, “You can’t have living without dying / So you can’t call this living what we got.”⁹ I found environmental contrasts, character contrasts, and thematic contrasts such as the following examples:

Table 2-1. Examples of Contrasting Elements

Examples of Contrasting Elements	
Passive Immortality	Active Mortality
Fate	Free Will
Natural Treetop Wood	Artificial Fair Grounds
Jesse: A bird that can never land	Winnie: A bird that can never fly

These contrasts would serve as the vehicle for my vision, the concept around which the design elements would rally for our production.

Suggested Design Elements

Highlighting these contrasting aspects became the foundation of my suggested design elements. For example, I knew scenically that I wanted to create a clear distinction between the earthy, living, and vibrant Treegap Wood and the varying vitality of the other locations. The woods being the cornerstone of the play, I desired for the set to extend into and transform the theatre into Treegap Wood, drawing largely from Babbitt's aforementioned description of Treegap Wood in the novel (quoted here again):

For the wood was full of light, entirely different from the light [Winnie] was used to. It was green and amber and alive, quivering in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between the tree trunks. There were little flowers she did not recognize, white and palest blue; and endless, tangled vines; and here and there a fallen log, half-rotted but soft with patches of sweet green-velvet moss.¹⁰

The wood ought to feel warm and inviting, fertile and growing, and, ultimately, alive, transporting the audience to another world the moment they enter the theatre and engaging all human senses possible: feeling the texture of moss or bark, hearing the tranquil forest and bubble of the spring, seeing the vibrant flora, smelling soil and foliage. This first exposure to the play should be a slice of Eden left untarnished by man. Here there is life and potential for magic. To assist with this, I really wanted to explore the idea of a double-revolve, a turntable with an inner and outer ring. The novel emphasizes how the Tree is at the center of everything – the hub of the wheel.¹¹ A revolve would manifest this notion and provide the possibility for smoother set changes. The addition of the outer rim would allow opportunities to contrast movement and

stillness, such as Hugo walking in place while Winnie independently considers her decision in “Everlasting” or Winnie’s life and memories literally passing before her eyes near the end of “The Story of Winnie Foster” or simply options for shenaniganry during the Fair scene.¹⁰ In adherence to my vision of “Earthbound Fantasy,” the ideal set would be a hybrid of Naturalistic and Symbolic elements, relying on man (actors) and magic (automation) to achieve transformations.

Specifically, on the topic of Treetop Wood, I loved the prospect of Jesse and Winnie having architecture on which to climb. As Jesse is like a bird that never lands, his affinity for being up in the air needed to be satisfied by the set, and in particular, I knew he ought to lead Winnie on some kind of journey during “Top of the World.” I envisioned this manifesting as actual climbing, or automated assistance that lowered some part of the Tree to create the illusion of climbing, or even other actors creating makeshift branches from set pieces for Jesse and Winnie to climb and walk on.

While Treetop Wood is warm and inviting, the Foster House is clearly not. Winnie describes herself as being “trapped in a house of sad and lonely.”¹² She laments that nothing ever happens, that she never gets out of the house, and she is restrained by “a gate and a lock and rules to abide.”¹³ The stage directions define the parlor as “sterile.”¹⁴ The Foster women are still in mourning, as it has not been a full year since the father’s death. These details conjure an image of a crypt or tomb. The Fosters have ceased to live life – there is an atmosphere of death not unlike dying because they are not living. The space is cold but not cruel so much as constrained. As the Fosters seem to have (or had) a decent amount of money, I wanted their House to have the appearance of putting on airs. It should feel like a house but not a home.

¹⁰ For budgetary reasons, this aspiration would not come to fruition. For more information, see Chapter 3.

The Tuck cottage, by contrast, is very much a home, but it is a stagnant dwelling. Mae bemoans her cabin, “where the only thing that moves / Is the clock on the wall.”¹⁵ The cottage, while cozy, ought to reflect indifference and neglect. It is not dirty, but it is messy because there is no urgency to maintain a home when you have all the time in the world. The Tucks are not hoarders of decades of belongings; they lead simple lives and get by on what they have. My desire was to collaborate with the scenic and lighting areas to find a way to transform the Tuck cottage from Winnie’s initial impression of it as a captor’s hideout into a loving hearth of safety. On a similar subject of collaboration with lighting, it is worth noting that my preference was to include some kind of hanging sheet – possibly on a clothesline – that would create a screen, to be utilized during “Time” by creating shadow play, though this did not need to be present for the entirety of the show.

The Fair strikes me as actually more of a carnival. The website AirFun Games explains that historically fairs were more community-driven, centering around a harvest time for farmers to showcase crops and livestock. Carnivals, on the other hand, tended to consist of traveling troupes of entertainers and included music, dancing, games, rides, and food.¹⁶ Since the Man in Yellow emphasizes that they travel to a new town every day, I argue this event more closely resembles a carnival. For this production, I wanted it to feel commercial and artificial. Everyone knows this is a façade, a temporary inducement of euphoria and a distraction from life’s problems. MIYS sings, “They say it won’t last / And sonny they’re right.”¹⁷ The actual scenery did not need to be intricate, as I intended to rely on characters with “stage business”¹¹ to flesh out

¹¹ *Stage business* refers to any incidental activities carried out by the actor on stage. These may be in the script or they may be devised by the actors and directors. Examples could be “sewing on a button,” or “counting billnotes,” or “playing a guitar” (Trumbull).

the world of the Fair. However, any assistance from the set that would help the audience buy into the charade of the Fair was appreciated.

Period appropriate clothing was preferred for costumes but more important was allowing for freedom of movement. This was particularly true for Winnie, whose costumes I envisioned as beginning with restriction and becoming increasingly freer throughout the musical, reflective of her breaking out of her family's constraints and her own inhibitions: mourning dress to Fair dress to Thomas's clothing and even throughout "The Story of Winnie Foster." On the note of "The Story of Winnie Foster," I thought it would be advantageous to solidify a theme for Winnie, such as a color or accessory, to help the audience track her character throughout the dance, as well as a similar concept for Hugo.

Given how little they venture into the public eye, Angus and Mae warranted lower-class clothing and slightly out-of-fashion at that. I wanted Angus's garments to be bland and rather forgettable at first. Throughout the play, Winnie's presence brings a little life to him, which I hoped to subtly manifest via some color or accessory as his clock starts ticking again. Similarly, I thought Mae might also embark on such a journey, as she takes pride in her appearance, though only in maintaining it, not improving it. However, Mae, being sentimental, might have a favored and worn shawl or a patched skirt with various fabrics from her years. While Mae and Angus are behind the times in clothing, Miles and Jesse are quite up to scratch with their attire, at least for being lower-class. Miles strives to be as unobtrusive as possible in the world so that he will never again endure the shunning he experienced from his wife. I therefore envisioned him with clothing appropriate for his status – possibly better groomed in honor of the family reunion – and inconspicuous enough to blend in with the crowd. Nevertheless, I wanted to ensure that he did not, in fact, disappear against the ensemble's costumes, so I hoped my designer could negotiate

that. Jesse, by contrast, demands an audacious wardrobe to match his adventurous personality. I imagined him in an 1890s style, but unlike Miles, rather unkempt and less concerned with what he looks like than what he is doing. After all, Jesse takes after Angus while Miles takes more after Mae.

The Man in the Yellow Suit's clothing is described in the novel as a "jaunty yellow that seemed to glow in the fading light."¹⁸ Both in the book and the musical he is mocked by other characters for his attire. Nana remarks, "Where do you find a suit that color – and why would you buy it?", and Hugo observes that it "sure isn't a nice yellow."¹⁹ I did not want the shade of yellow to be unsightly, but there certainly needed to be something ostentatious about it. I wanted him to clearly evoke "carnival man," possibly including a hat or a cane. His overall appearance needed to be simultaneously inviting and disingenuous. Regarding the ensemble, I wanted them to largely reflect the lower class with rustic elements, although the Fair presented an excellent opportunity for the town to don their slightly-less-than Sunday best.

Finally for costumes, I wanted to utilize three ensemble members as the three aforementioned nature spirits. These nymphs would be the essence of The Tree or The Spring or rocks, moss, etc. Most importantly, these nymphs needed to be able to camouflage against the set of Treegap Wood, so they would be undetectable by the audience at the top of the show, allowing for a grand reveal after the Tucks drink the immortal water. These spirits are not malevolent, but they are mischievous guardians of the Tree and the Spring, and they have a strong relationship with the repeated "day na na day na na day na" motif.

I intended to heavily rely on lighting for amplifying the moods I envisioned and securing the desired atmospheres for the play. Particularly in Treegap Wood, lighting was necessary to provide camouflage for the nature spirits, highlight the spring, and ultimately breathe life into the

scene by means of colors and textures, again inspired by Babbitt's writing: "For the wood was full of light, entirely different from the light [Winnie] was used to. It was green and amber and alive, quivering in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between the tree trunks."²⁰ Likewise, lighting was to evoke a sense of serenity, but also a tingling for potential magic, like a charged atmosphere.

I hoped for lighting to assist scenic elements by completing locations where a set could not be fully realized, such as Winnie's front yard, the lake, and even the silo referenced by the script. Isolation would be crucial for establishing these various settings. Masking would also be a necessary role for lighting. "My Most Beautiful Day," "Time," and "The Story of Winnie Foster" all bring memories to life, and as some of the characters would need to be doubled, lighting would help mask identity for transitions or storytelling. For example, during "Time" I wanted shadow play to depict the story of Miles and Thomas.

The element of choreography was most obviously crucial for "The Story of Winnie Foster," as the song is entirely danced; however, I felt dance elsewhere should exist fluidly in this world. The overall style I wanted to explore was folk dance, in accordance with the style of the music. For "Partner in Crime," I wanted a combination of traditional folk dance and gritty "improvised" movement, à la the film *Newsies* or the scene from the film *Titanic* where Rose watches the third-class dancing. I saw these as townsfolk and carnival folk using what they had around them to have fun, incorporating tricks and stunts with props such as a long length of rope coiling/uncoiling or utilized as a jump rope. By contrast, dances in "My Most Beautiful Day" and parts of "The Story of Winnie Foster" struck me as more ritualized and traditional. Elegance and form would permeate more in the choreography for these numbers. Further contrasted in

movement were the nymphs, whose characters would draw from Modern or other dance forms that evoke primal and ancient imagery.

Role of the Audience

Tuck Everlasting: The Musical seemed an odd choice for our audience demographic, given that it is a family-friendly show adapted from a book geared toward elementary children, and our audiences are primarily made up of Theater 101 students and older patrons.¹² However, my justification for this production actually developed out of the COVID-19 global pandemic. About a week after Chancellor Dunn's decision to extend spring break for SIUC, as mentioned in my introduction, Governor J.B. Pritzker issued a stay-at-home order for the state of Illinois, effectively shutting down activity for all campus buildings and prompting a transition of all curriculum to an online format.²¹

Mandated social distancing, while an effort to flatten the infection curve of the coronavirus, suddenly provided students with an excess of unstructured time. Routine became broken and reports from various SIUC faculty and my own peers suggested that students were at a loss of how to handle this newfound time on their hands. In the musical, Miles laments, "I'm left with nothing / nothing but time." Similarly, Mae reflects, "Time we've been granted so much time / but what if all this time / did more than pass us by? / Life even infinite / still must have life in it," to which Angus responds by resolving, "We'll stay / more / connected / we'll do / what we / can / we'll / stop sitting / wondering / why."²² I believed that lyrics such as these, as well as the general plight of the Tucks, would resonate with students, faculty, and the general public attending or viewing this production, as all have been affected by this epidemic. My wish was that they would recognize, recall, and, as a result, empathize with the Tucks, having also

¹² There is precedence for the DoT offering matinee performances to surrounding schools, and had the pandemic not ensued, this likely would have been the case for our production of *Tuck Everlasting*.

experienced what it feels like to have their lives frozen, if only temporarily. Additionally, these uncertain times of health have been a sobering reminder of how indefinite life is. I say this not to be morbid but to draw attention back to my vision, that it matters not how much time you are given but what you do with it. Hopefully the audience would be reminded of their time during lockdown and feel challenged to make the best of every day they are given.

Directorial Interpretation and Approach

In preparation for the realization of my concept and vision, I first and foremost needed the cast to read Natalie Babbitt's original *Tuck Everlasting*. The source material is rich in characterization and imagery that greatly supplements the lack of those qualities in the script. It would also provide us with a common language and resource, and, I hoped, some sensory references upon which we could draw throughout the rehearsal process.

As is common in the industry for directing musicals, I prefer to have all music learned before staging or choreography occurs in order to provide the actors with a foundation for the acting, as well as better empower them to understand how their journeys will track for each scene or song. For this production, however, I wanted to collaborate with the music director to determine a means for me to work with some principal actors while he taught other music. In general, I tend prefer a concurrent rehearsal schedule where some actors can be rehearsing music while others work staging or choreography – there is always something that can be worked on at rehearsal. One reason I wanted to maximize my time is that I desired to build in room to work on creating familial backstories with the Tucks and the Fosters, respectively, using a combination of Goffman Frame Theory¹³ and Meisner¹⁴ exercises. In shows where relationship histories play a

¹³ Erving Goffman was a Canadian-born anthropologist who studied the rituals and performances of everyday life. His essay "Frame Analysis" explores the structuring and organization of experiences.

¹⁴ Sanford Meisner was an American actor and acting teacher whose methodology focuses primarily on the reality of doing or living truthfully under imaginary circumstances.

major factor, I tend to employ these exercises, which draw first from the text for factual support and then gradually transition into the realm of improvisation. I find these useful to also help actors establish, near the end of the exercises, what they want from the other characters, individually or collectively, and I believe this fosters a certain type of community that translates effectively on stage.

Another reason I preferred to buffer in more time is that with musicals, I prefer to coach using my training from Tracey Moore's method of "Acting the Song," which is rooted in Stanislavsky acting technique. I have found this approach incredibly useful for musical theatre songs, where students can easily become distracted by the task of singing and neglect the dramatic action. Using exercises from her book, *Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre*, such as "The First Two Acting Questions," and some of my own developed practices, as needed by the individual actor, I planned to work with my principals to ensure they understood what they were singing, why they were singing, and how that song moved them forward as a character, or, as Moore phrases it, "to tell one part of the story at a time; each part fully explored, from moment to moment."²³

Finally, I wanted to build in time for exploration with staging and choreography. I never intended to choreograph *Tuck*, but I aim to direct any musical staging by collaborating with the choreographer to ensure a uniform production. I had planned to come to rehearsals with most of the book scenes loosely outlined for staging; however, I believed some of the scenes, such as "Partner in Crime" or "Time" needed to be approached more organically, which admittedly is one of the styles of staging with which I feel least confident. My vision for "Partner in Crime" in particular included an enormous aspect of play while crafting the song and scene, and some of that needed to include devising with the actors and determining what they could best contribute

to help tell the story of that song, in tandem with the choreographer's vision, and it so happened that the staging of that song would reveal an important discovery to me as a director.

Anticipated Production Challenges

Although there were many challenges that arose during the production, part of my pre-production process, which was initially pre-COVID, was to identify and address potential obstacles I might encounter. *Tuck Everlasting* is a big musical. Photos from the Broadway production showcase the caliber of scenography for which the creative team was striving. I wanted this production to achieve the same level of grandeur but scaled down to the appropriate size of our theater space, budget, and audience. An immediate challenge, then, was collaborating on how to achieve these various locations with fullness and effectiveness, so they did not look cheated. For example, there was no need to bring on the entire interior of a house as one might do for *Mame*; however, the text is clear that action occurs inside the Foster House and the Tuck Cottage, in addition to exterior scenes. Therefore, some semblance of these locations needed to be firmly established. I was comfortable to assist this by eliminating some unnecessary locations suggested by the script, such as Treegap Silo, upon which Jesse sits the first time he is introduced in 1893 and also at the end of Act I with Winnie. As this location does nothing to serve the play except reinforce Jesse's love for climbing and suggest that he and Winnie are in an intimate and secluded spot, I felt comfortable cutting it and changing those two scenes to a more neutral location or something already established.

One of the major production challenges, even before the pandemic and the introduction of social distancing, was going to be balancing the rehearsals of a large cast who would need to rehearse music, staging, and choreography to an equal degree amidst the various other

commitments of the school year. The Kentucky Theatre Association pre-screening auditions,¹⁵ for example, are generally held in November, and usually occupy a large amount of the students' focus and time. Events such as these would require the utmost organization between the stage manager and me, and clear, constant communication with the actors and creative team. Additionally, orchestra rehearsals for past productions have usually been held on Thursday evenings, depriving the semester musical of a music director and sometimes an accompanist. I knew it would take careful foresight and strong communication with my collaborators to create a schedule that would achieve my aforementioned desired rehearsal time.

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

Famed director Peter Brook provides sage advice to directors and rehearsals in his book *The Empty Space*:

A director learns that the growth of rehearsals is a developing process; he sees that there is a right time for everything, and his art is the art of recognizing these moments. He learns that he has no power to transmit certain ideas in the early days. He will come to recognize the look on the face of an apparently relaxed but innerly anxious actor who cannot follow what he is being told. He will then discover that all he needs is to wait, not push too hard.²⁴

The largest criticism I received at my First Year Review was to learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable. For someone who is a meticulous planner and favors having control of situations, that is indeed a challenge. "Trust the process" is a phrase I have heard so many times since I arrived at SIU that I can no longer recall its original source; however, that is what summed up my anticipated learning outcomes for this thesis production. Knowing that I would be

¹⁵ The Kentucky Theatre Association hosts a pre-screening audition event in which student actors may be approved to attend the Southeastern Theatre Conference in hopes of obtaining performing work.

collaborating with designers for the first time in a decade, having been my own designer for most of my directing projects; leading a cast of at least sixteen, which was six greater than I had ever managed during a musical; and working side by side with a music director and curating the instillation of several dance numbers with a choreographer, having never worked either, as I have always assumed those positions myself, was a terrifying and “uncomfortable” thought, which I likened to being thrown into the maelstrom of a production process at the mercy of Dionysus. I knew I would have no choice but “trust the process.”

Conclusion

So, I resolved to be comfortable being uncomfortable and enter the collaborative phase of the pre-production process, going in with all the preparation I knew that I could muster, including a prodigious organized rehearsal plan (of attack) and an arsenal of suggested design elements, with which I hoped to inspire my designers to rally around my vision and concept for the production.

¹ Lapine, James and Stephen Sondheim. *Sunday in the Park with George*. (New York: Music Theatre International, 1984) II.41.

² The Glencoe Literature Library. *Study Guide for Tuck Everlasting*. (McGraw-Hill)
http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/tuck_everlasting.pdf. 10.

³ Miller, Chris, et al. *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. (New York: Samuel French, 2017) 10.

⁴ Miller, et al. 80.

⁵ Newman, Kira M. “Why you never seem to have enough time.” *The Washington Post*. 25 March 2019.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/03/25/why-you-never-seem-have-enough-time/>.

⁶ Garell, Connor. “Burnout Is A Hidden COVID-19 Crisis, And You Might Have It.” *HuffPost*. 14 August 2020.
https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/covid-19-burnout_ca_5f31b5d2c5b6fc009a5c1a6a.

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- ⁷ Lindow, John. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. (New York: Oxford Press, 2001) 243-45, 319-22.
- ⁸ Lindow 243.
- ⁹ Miller, et al. 80.
- ¹⁰ Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*. (New York: Square Fish, 1975) 24.
- ¹¹ Babbitt 4.
- ¹² Miller, et al. 14.
- ¹³ Miller, et al. 8.
- ¹⁴ Miller, et al. 13.
- ¹⁵ Miller, et al 9.
- ¹⁶ “Fair vs. Carnival: What’s the Difference?” *AirFunGames*, 22 Aug. 2019, <http://www.airfungames.com/party-rental-resources/fair-vs-carnival-whats-the-difference>.
- ¹⁷ Miller, et al. 48.
- ¹⁸ Babbitt 17.
- ¹⁹ Miller, et al 18 and 75.
- ²⁰ Babbitt 24.
- ²¹ Weisenstein, Brad. “Pritzker Gives Stay-At-Home Order for Illinois, in Effect until April 7.” *Illinois Policy*, 20 Mar. 2020, <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/pritzker-orders-illinoisans-to-shelter-in-place-until-april-7/>.
- ²² Miller, et al. 68-69.
- ²³ Moore, Tracey, and Allison Bergman. *Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre*. (Allworth Press, 2008).
- ²⁴ Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. (Touchstone, 1968) 106.

CHAPTER 3

MEETING MY PARTNERS IN CRIME:

THE DESIGN PROCESS

“You need a partner in crime,” Winnie, Jesse, and the ensemble rapturously sing near the end of the first act. “Stuck in a sticky situation / Lucky the trick’s collaboration / Why should the road be long and lonely?”¹ They are absolutely right, and nowhere is the sentiment of collaboration truer than in theatre. Since our first year together as a cohort, I had dreamed of working with my fellow graduate students, Jess Rigdon and Nate Mohlman. We started the journey of graduate school together, and it seemed only fitting that our culminating project should be together. However, the excitement of getting to partner with my friends and colleagues was equally tempered by the anxiety of collaborating with designers for the first time in a decade, as well as the fear of working with my friends.

I have no formal training on how to pitch a vision and concept for a design meeting. I knew from observing a handful of design meetings at SIU that there is a certain balance that must be struck between being too vague in ideas for the designers to latch onto and being so specific that the director has all but designed the show for them. One of the most valuable tools I have learned from graduate school is to use the text to prompt the vision for the show, which in my case was Angus’s line, “You don’t need to live forever, you just need to live” (Miller, et al. 80). With this vision and concept in hand, I assembled a brief presentation¹⁶ to communicate my ideas through imagery and language.

I had originally envisioned our first design meeting being in person around the long board meeting table of the Observation Room, where great collaborative artistry has traditionally been

¹⁶ Director’s Design Presentation may be found in Appendix D.

forged. However, the pandemic insisted we maintain our distance for safety, and so our meetings were converted to a digital interface, prompting me to alter my presentation. The two points I wanted to drive home for the design team were the significance of the tree and the necessity of contrasting elements in the various design areas. During my presentation, I read short passages from the novel because Babbitt's image-filled language was richer for communicating the saturation of nature that I desired for the set and lighting. I also walked the team through a brief sensory recall exercise where, using the visuals in my presentation, I prompted them to imagine the smell, texture, and sounds of being in a secluded forest. Finally, I presented a comparison chart that highlighted the differences between principal characters, such as Jesse and Miles, and also locations, such as the Tuck cottage and the Foster house. This initial design meeting proved to be the springboard for our subsequent virtual meetings, which would invite their own communication challenges as we relied on words and visuals rather than the physical and tangible.

Scenic Snafus

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I was excited to explore the possibility of a revolve, and moreover, a double-revolve. The scenic designer, SIU alumnus Logan Reagan, eagerly latched onto the prospect of a revolve and began designing a world centered around this piece of practical spectacle, which would allow for convenient set changes and a three-dimensional presentation of the Tree. However, by Design Meeting #3, it became clear that the revolve was not a viable component for our production. As the technical director, Nate Mohlman bore the burden of bursting our bubble: investing in the revolve would effectively decimate our budget for the rest of the production. Or, to summarize the production manager's words, I could have the revolve but that is all I would be getting. This was a healthy experience for me, in that I allowed

myself the freedom to dream big and then allowed myself to accept reality of budgetary restrictions. Unfortunately, my focus on the revolve caused me to lose sight of the scenic element I had originally given the most emphasis: the Tree.

I dropped the ball as a director. When we lost the revolve, I blindly accepted the rest of the scenic design without considering the functional needs of the drama. I agreed to Reagan's Tree design, assuming that it satisfied those needs and in doing so committed the oversight of neglecting how the Tree creates opportunities for actor engagement. Sometime in July, I was listening to "Top of the World" and realized that Jesse could not move to the Branch Unit until after the first chorus. For the song to dramatically build, it was necessary not to peak with the spectacle too soon, and his climbing out onto the Branch Unit for the first chorus would leave little room for the action driving the song to go anywhere. I brought this to the attention of Reagan and Mohlman, which resulted in a handful of separate breakout meetings.

I argued that "Top of the World" is literally about climbing a tree, and therefore, the actors need to be able to climb the Tree. This immediately raised concerns about safety, as per Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) regulations, any object climbed or walked on at a height above four feet would require protective railings.² Mohlman, therefore, endeavored to create a structure that provided safety, met Reagan's scenic design, and stayed within our budget, and I struggled to know my place in these discussions, unsure if I was to be a mediator or executor as they conversed in circles about the problem of the Tree. What ultimately resolved the issues was my recognition that the Tree no longer needed to be viewed from 360°. Reagan had originally intended for the Tree to rotate and display its backside when in its upstage position; however, without the revolve, there was no artistic gain to rotating the tree, meaning that the back of it could be as practical as needed for structural stability and safety precautions

without any regard to visual aesthetics. Consequently, by Design Meeting #5 we had a Tree that allowed for a climbing journey. It was fortunate that I recognized the pitfall before the final designs were approved, but it was also highly embarrassing that I did not catch it sooner.

Costume Conundrums

My costume designer, Jessica Rigdon, initially regarded me like a boy impatiently waiting to open his Christmas presents. We both began working on our research for *Tuck* in a course for thesis preparation, and for a time, our work overlapped, so we shared exciting new findings about the novel or Natalie Babbitt or themes in the musical. However, as our worked diverged into our respective areas, I was compelled by Rigdon to restrain my excitement and discoveries until the first design meetings. She wisely wanted to maintain a sense of artistic boundaries that would allow us the purest form of collaboration when all the designers were gathered and all cards laid on the table.

I felt a particular struggle in my collaboration with Rigdon, which I attributed to differing artistic approaches that hindered communication about the costume designs. Costumes, of course, are an extension of who the characters are. I think of characters in terms of who they are based on how they interact with other characters in the script and what they do, both influencing what they might wear. As an example, Jesse Tuck climbs trees and references bar fights, so therefore, he is an adventurous and active young man. His costume, likewise, should reflect how he lives in the world of the play, so rather than donning pristine trousers, Jesse would be more likely to have distressed pants, possibly with holes or patches, that allow for free and varied movement. Conversely, Miles, based on his careful actions and lack of impulsivity in the script, is more likely to wear clothing for presentation rather than practicality, and so would appear

more put together with neat, clean trousers. I frequently referred to my design presentation when discussing costumes with Rigdon. The following is an excerpt from my character contrasts:

Table 3-1. Jesse and Miles Character Contrasts

Jesse Tuck	Miles Tuck
Immortality is a Blessing	Immortality is a Curse
“One-Man Operation”	Had and Lost a Family
17 (despite being 102)	107 (despite being 22)
Prankster	Parental
Cheerful and Carefree	Bitter and Burdened
Proud to Stick Out	Tries to Blend In
Welcomes Treegap	Wary of Treegap

These varying attributes are what create the individualities of the characters, and I desired these differences to manifest in the costumes. Jesse was a difficult design for Rigdon and me to solidify. Her initial sketch depicted the basics of Jesse – a young man of lower class with some wear and tear. However, he lacked the specificity that would distinguish him from any other young ruffian at the time; this sketch was someone who could easily be lost in a crowd, whereas my interpretation of Jesse was someone who takes pride in standing out.

At our fourth design meeting, Rigdon presented a color rough of Jesse as “urchin chic,” which did provide me with an idea of what she was thinking for colors but gave me no insight into how she saw Jesse based on my concept and living in the world of the play.³ In the novel, Jesse is “so glorious” that Winnie is immediately enamored. The musical includes incidental music¹⁷ entitled “Jesse at the Spring” during which Winnie regards Jesse with fascination as he drinks from the spring. There is an exciting and possibly dangerous mystery to Jesse that draws Winnie to him. The costume design for Jesse at this point in the design process conveyed none of those qualities to me.

¹⁷ *Incidental music* is background accompaniment, usually instrumental, use to underscore dramatic action in a musical (Blumenfeld 159).

One observation my mentor Tom Kidd offered was that Jesse's design did not seem to consider his lived experiences from the last eighty-plus years. When I meditated on that, I realized all of the historical events through which the Tucks had lived that we were largely ignoring. Had Jesse fought in the Civil War? Was he present at the inauguration of the Eiffel Tower? We were neglecting not only the time periods Jesse had experienced but also the cultures that might have influenced him, given that he has seen "the Pyramids, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Rio Grande, the Rhine," just to name a few.⁴ These were details necessary to elevate Jesse's costume design.

However, I was struggling to communicate these ideas to my designer, and I was reluctant to be so forward as to pitch my own sketches to her. Instead, since my initial design prompts utilizing language and excerpts from the novel and play were failing me, I proposed to Rigdon that we each gather ten images from various decades of the nineteenth century to see if these visuals could inspire our collaborative efforts to ameliorate the issues with Jesse's costume. We submitted to one another a miscellany of historical photos and paintings that represented different geographic regions, cultures, and classes, but frankly, many items that spoke to me, such as the Indian *kurta* or the Civil War cap, did not seem plausible for a cohesive design, according to Rigdon's vision.

Still, I strongly believed that Jesse would collect mementos from his journeys, and I wanted those trophies displayed somehow. When Rigdon offered to add a travel coat to the design, I immediately knew that would be our answer: he would wear a coat with mismatched buttons collected from his various adventures. The coat would serve to enigmatize Jesse and thus create intrigue for Winnie. Figure 3.1 shows the progression of Rigdon's design for Jesse over the course of our design meetings from sketch to color rough to the final rendering presented at

Design Meeting #5. The collaborative compromise of designing Jesse was a large step forward in my artistic relationship with Rigdon and would serve as a foundation for us when we attended to new obstacles during the production process.



*Figure 3-1. Jesse Tuck Costume Design Progression
(Rendered by Jessica Rigdon)*

Lighting Lessons

I am very pleased that I elected to take a lighting design course as part of my graduate curriculum. Being able to discuss lighting with designer Henry Crowder using a common vocabulary alleviated a great deal of anxiety I felt toward the magic of lighting. Crowder's initial inspiration responses to my concept unnerved me because his fondest images were quite rainbow centric and evoked an air of fantasy that bordered on the edge of fairy tale. I reminded him that *Tuck Everlasting* is an "earthbound fantasy" grounded in the reality of everyday life with a hint of mysticism. I worked with Crowder to find a palette that would utilize the highly saturated color scheme he envisioned without it tipping into a surreal and unnatural environment. We

ultimately agreed on a color arrangement that would heighten the contrasting elements of the set, per my concept, such as warm yellows for Treegap Wood and cool blues for the Foster House.

Crowder also invited us to explore atmospheric, which I had not considered, and which therefore affirmed the benefits of collaborative artistry. As a director, I constantly fear demonstrating my ignorance of various theatrical elements, at the risk of losing the respect of my colleagues. Crowder kindly explained to me the differences between haze and fog¹⁸ and how these atmospheric can be used to enhance lighting and elevate a scene. He very much wanted to apply low-lying fog to Treegap Wood, and I supported the mystery with which it might imbue the Wood, particularly for the opening of the show. However, I had to constantly remind Crowder that our setting was New Hampshire, and so steer him away from the swampy bayou he kept envisioning.

My collaboration with Crowder was my first wake up call to the challenges a director faces when creating and maintaining a cohesive production. The lighting designer introduced the idea of imbuing the Tree with fiber-optic lighting, which would activate whenever the Nymphs were engaging with the action of the play to further accentuate the mystic atmosphere. This was another instance of collaboration bearing fruit that I had not considered, and it opened a conversation to crossover with other design elements. Most obvious was the impact on Reagan's scenic design, as the integration of fiber optics would affect his Tree; however, in the interest of homogeneity, we further explored what it might look like to infuse fiber optics into the costumes of the Nymphs – an ambitious endeavor that would not pan out, but merited consideration all the same.

¹⁸ *Haze* refers to an effect created by dispensing very fine liquid droplets into the air for the enhancement of lighting or to create a misty atmosphere. *Fog*, while similar, is a thicker and more opaque substance commonly used for special effects, such as simulating clouds or mystifying a graveyard.

Although Crowder intended to implement a zone lighting design¹⁹, he also proposed utilizing side light to accentuate the choreography, as side light is common for dance concerts. While I did desire the three-dimensional sculpting that side light offered, I was also vaguely aware that multiple booms²⁰ could create potential set change problems, given the enormity of some of our set pieces. This clash of my managerial and artistic qualities would continue throughout the thesis project as I battled with the foresight to circumvent catastrophes while maintaining an open artistic mindset. Furthermore, having been largely responsible for my own design elements in past productions, I now found myself welcoming the diverse artistry of my design team while also navigating the task of keeping the design elements harmonious – a task that would intensify during the production process, particularly between costumes and lighting.

Choreography Collusions

I have never collaborated with a choreographer. I do not identify as a choreographer, but I craft musical staging well, I know how to tell a story through movement, and I excel at having a general vision for choreographed numbers as a whole. My choreographer, Rion Towery, challenged me to nail down the more ethereal components of my concept. One of the first things he asked me was, “What does the ‘day na na’ motif look like to you?”. I hadn’t considered the physical manifestation of the motif beyond the nymphs, but at his prompting, circular and spiral images came to mind, evocative of Martha Graham’s style.²¹ Suddenly, my choreographer and I shared a common language, and we began to build off one another’s thoughts and responses, a process that would become the template for our working relationship throughout the production.

¹⁹ *Zone lighting* is a lighting design technique that divides the stage into “zones” and arranges instruments very close to the objects being lit. It creates strong entrances and exits for performers and is a common practice for dance productions (Palmer 184-5).

²⁰ A *boom* is a vertical scaffold pole on which lighting instruments may be hung to create side lighting.

²¹ Martha Graham was an American choreographer renowned for her experimentation with basic human movement, notably rooted in the principles of *contraction* and *release* in tandem with breath (Martha Graham).

While I was very excited to start exploring movement with Towery, our initial engagement for collaborative choreography was frustrating. I found myself repeating content or concepts, and I feared (and rightfully so, as I would learn) that this would waste time and ultimately inhibit our process during rehearsals. However, once we focused on one component, for example, a single phrase of a song, and actually started moving we found a really nice collaborative groove, feeding off of each other's ideas and instincts. I became more confident in saying, "I need this" and Towery graciously and patiently found ways to accommodate. In these pre-rehearsal meetings, we grew stronger in the art of compromising and conceding to the "better idea."

Conclusion

I could never have anticipated the journey our design team would take as we gathered virtually for that first meeting to begin designing a musical amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Though admittedly I found our digital engagements frustrating, as I longed for in-person collaboration, I recognized the value of this experience, which would prepare me for the professional industry where many meetings often are held remotely. Furthermore, these early design conversations were crucial for fostering trust as we navigated not only the traditional challenges of a production but also the added complications of a global health crisis, and they prompted me to experience what it is to essentially captain a ship as sailed into the headwaters of production. But first, we had more crew acquire: I needed a cast.

¹ Miller, Chris, et al. *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. (New York: Samuel French, 2017) 51.

² United States Department of Labor. “Duty to Have Fall Protection and Falling Object Protection.” *Occupational Safety and Health Standards*, 2020,

https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_id=9720&p_table=STANDARDS.

³ *Tuck Everlasting Design Meetings*. Design Meeting #4. 00:43:00

⁴ Miller, et al. 48.

CHAPTER 4

THE STORY OF THE CAST:

AUDITIONS, CALLBACKS, AND CASTING

This musical emphasizes a variety of ages in its characters as it focuses on multiple generations. However, I believe an educational institution should utilize the full potential of its students, and that includes their versatility in playing various ages. I, therefore, did not desire to use age-appropriate actors, such as children or older adults, for such characters. The only character for which I considered a more traditional casting was the Man in the Yellow Suit, as his desire for immortality amidst his aging body would be an interesting juxtaposition against the rest of the more youthful actors of the world.

Where I did intend to utilize diversity was with regard to ethnicity. SIUC's Department of Theater student body is primarily White, but it does include a handful of Asians, African Americans, Latinx, and South Asians, and although the Tucks historically and musically lend themselves to an Irish heritage, I wanted to approach this production with color-conscious casting²². I believed that a diverse cast could offer an interesting statement about immigration, and the inability to settle and integrate would tie in well with the Tucks' constant migrations. A crucial lyric sung by Mae Tuck states that the Tucks "tore from the West to settle in the East,"¹ which lyricist Nathan Tysen claims was merely his echo of Babbitt's origins story for the Tucks,² in which they travel to the east to settle.³ However, this is contrary to developing colonial settlements of the early United States, which would have expanded into the West, and thus

²² *Color-conscious casting* is the ideology that actors ought to be cast in a manner which intentionally considers their race and ethnicity in an effort to disrupt certain racist traditions of show business that were once acceptable (Crager).

justified diverse casting. Additionally, given that *Tuck* is an earthbound fantasy, I assumed the audience would spectate under a suspension of disbelief with regard to the characters' race.

I was adamant, however, about casting white actors in the roles of Man in Yellow Suit and Constable Joe. Owing to MIYS's dramatic function as an antagonist, I was reluctant to place an actor of color in a role that might subconsciously villainize an already marginalized group.²³ Similarly, Constable Joe demonstrates many buffoon-like tendencies that lend to an unflattering, if not downright derogatory stereotype for an actor of color. Otherwise, I welcomed a diverse casting for our characters.

I proposed a cast of sixteen actors. At a minimum the script requires ten actors for the principal roles, but it encourages an ensemble to portray "various memories, spirits, travelers, townsfolk, carnival workers, and patrons."²⁴ I suggested the addition of six ensemble actors – three men and three women – to fulfill these various roles, add vocal strength to the music, and ultimately flesh out the world of the play. I intended to use three of these ensemble members for the aforementioned Nymphs, ideally two women and one man, although the spirits may be gender neutral. Some principal actors were also intended to play ensemble roles to bring fullness to the stage. "Partner in Crime," for example, should be heavily populated and busy, so as to provide contrast to the seclusion of Treegap Wood and create dynamic and interesting movement, and members of the Foster or Tuck families might be disguised as fair goers or workers. I hoped to build a team that did not prioritize one character over another but worked harmoniously to build a cohesive world for the audience.

Certain negotiations came into play when deciding a final cast size. My music director, for example, argued that a cast of at least eighteen to twenty was needed to do full justice to the

²³ Admittedly, an unfortunate consequence of my casting and directing resulted in MIYS being portrayed as a queer-coded antagonist, which, in fact does villainize a marginalized group.

harmonies written into the score. On the other end, the department chair was adamant that I reduce the cast size to ten or twelve, in order to allow an even distribution of department talent to the other season productions and student projects. I compromised these demands with a proposed cast of sixteen actors, the minimum number of performers with which I believed I could appropriately execute my vision for the production. To the department head, I reasoned that the department housed at least sixteen BFA Musical Theater majors that needed musical experiences as part of their education. To the music director, I offered that we supplement the ensemble parts with either off-stage singers, preferably vocal majors, or possibly sweetener tracks²⁴. Everyone seemed content with this decision, and everything seemed on target to set auditions in the fall. Of course, that was before the coronavirus struck.

Auditions

The COVID-19 pandemic effectively paralyzed the theatre industry. However, interestingly enough, it also accelerated the evolution of many theatre practices by launching them into the digital age. Auditions, for example, while traditionally an in-person format and occasionally executed via video submission, were suddenly thrust into the realm of exclusively digital, either by video recording or live-feed. In the safety interests of both the performers and the creative team, I elected to hold video auditions through submission, requesting a 32-bar cut of a contemporary musical theatre song, preferably something in the wheelhouse of the writers, Miller and Tysen, such as folk-style; however, anything that would best feature the performer would be acceptable²⁵.

²⁴ *Sweetener tracks* are the act of mixing a pre-recorded ensemble track to enhance the existing live ensemble (Abrams).

²⁵ See Appendix C for full audition notice.

Traditionally in the SIUC Department of Theater, auditions for the season's mainstage productions are announced at the departmental fall orientation held the first Wednesday evening of the semester. The intention seems to be to allow such information to be distributed to the collective student body at once to ensure everyone is on the same page. Furthermore, auditions for the season productions are typically held that same weekend. My concern with this practice is that offers the students, particularly freshmen and transfer students, very little time to prepare for a process that will affect their primary performance opportunities for the entire school year.

For *Tuck*, I had hoped to provide the students with advanced notice of the auditions, something I had been inclined to do even before COVID-19 to give them the chance to adequately prepare their best audition for the show. With the added component of filming their auditions for *Tuck*, I absolutely wanted to give them at least a week's notice to allow them to choose appropriate material and make time to comfortably construct an audition amidst their first week back to school during a pandemic. To my frustration, I was nevertheless limited by the institutional policy to forego dissemination of audition information until after orientation. To mitigate this hurdle, I prepared an audition notice e-mail with the necessary material and sent it to the Department of Theater Office to be dispersed later that evening or the morning after orientation. Unfortunately, because of complications from COVID affecting administration, the notice distribution was delayed by two days, and by the time of its release, students had barely twenty-four hours to prepare an submit an audition video.

One might ask why the deadline for auditions could not be extended. This was due to a common practice in the department to have final cast lists, for at least that semester's mainstage productions, due by the Monday of the second week of the semester, owing to the needs of the

production manager²⁶ to have a list of which students are cast in which roles for which shows so he can assign students enrolled in THEA 300/400 Production to the needed technical roles of the productions, such as light board operator, run crew, wardrobe, etc. Furthermore, the costume shop required a final cast list in order to begin their production process and maintain their timeline. Given the extenuating circumstances, and to honor my request to allow an appropriate time for callbacks, the production team agree to extend the casting deadline to Wednesday of that week. Nevertheless, I was disappointed with the audition turnout.

Twenty-five students submitted audition videos for our production of *Tuck Everlasting*, including our BFAs, who are required to audition for all Department of Theater productions.²⁷ I received the submissions with a mixture of surprise and disappointment. As is common in educational theatre environments, directors do not so much pre-cast their shows as survey their student talent pool to anticipate casting needs. I was largely disappointed by the auditions of our senior BFA students. Knowing their capabilities from working with them the past two years, I found their submissions to be a poor reflection of their talents. Unlike the professional world, where casting is primarily based off first impressions of an audition, educational theatre provides the opportunity to make casting decisions based on prior experiences with an actor, which, in this case, was advantageous both for the students²⁸ and me.

I was surprised, however, at the talent of some our newer students – freshmen and transfers – and also at the elevated skillset of the returning sophomores and juniors. Some students, particularly the women, demonstrated characteristics for roles I had not considered. For

²⁶ The *production manager* at SIU is responsible for many budgetary items and safety concerns for each production, but also assigns or hires students to work the various crew positions for each show (wardrobe, fly operator, board operators, etc.), often through the course THEA 300: Practicum.

²⁷ According to the College of Liberal Arts Advisement Office, SIUC had 17 BFA Musical Theater students and 23 BA Theater students (Wolf).

²⁸ Students that auditioned were extended the opportunity to arrange a meeting with me to receive feedback about their auditions, and nearly all who auditioned took advantage of this.

example, one actress I had anticipated to be in the running for Winnie gave a lovely audition that read as much more mature and maternal, and therefore, much more suitable for Mae or Betsy.

Men, however, were few and far between, complicating potential casting even further. Among our current student population, we do not have a crop of strong male singers. Our male BFAs were chiefly proficient dancers or good movers. Fortunately, none of the characters required a triple-threat²⁹ performer, but the principal characters – and specifically the male characters – required vocal range and musicality. This is not to say that we did not have options for our male principals, but the pickings, as the saying goes, were rather slim.

Callbacks

The music director, Andrew Abrams, agreed to meet with me the Sunday morning following the submission deadline, to ensure we could compile a callback list and disperse the appropriate materials within a reasonable time for the students to learn them. We were of similar mind for callbacks, on the whole, though we did each contribute a few names to our lists that we hoped would offer an educational experience to the students or reveal performance skills absent from their initial auditions.

Callbacks were set for the subsequent Monday and Tuesday evening via Zoom, again to ensure a safe work environment for all involved, and broken down into the following schedule:

²⁹ A *triple-threat* refers to an actor that excels equally in the areas of song, dance, and acting.

Table 4-1. Callback Schedule

Monday, August 24th		
Time	Character	Activity
6:00pm	Jesse	Sing “Top of the World”
6:30pm	Jesse, Winnie	Read p.20-21
6:45pm	Winnie	Sing “From Attic to Porch” and “Everlasting”
7:15pm	Winnie, Mae	Read p.41-42
7:30pm	Mae	Sing “My Most Beautiful Day”
Tuesday, August 25th		
Time	Character	Activity
6:00pm	Hugo, Constable Joe, Mother, Nana	Read p.28-30
6:45pm	Angus	Read p.78
7:00pm	Angus	Sing “The Wheel”
7:15pm	Miles	Read p.65-67
7:30pm	Miles	Sing “Time”

In an ideal world I would have preferred to have had group callbacks that would allow me to see potential Tucks together, as well as Fosters and Jacksons. I was more interested in the family dynamics among the characters than the homogeneity of physical appearance. However, given the circumstances, I opted instead to focus on the most crucial relationship of the show – Winnie and Jesse – and overlapped their callbacks accordingly. My music director and I sought to see not only how well the actors learned their callback material, but also how they performed it with musicianship and dramatic intention. The “Waiting Room” function on Zoom effectively allowed us to create a nontraditional holding room for callbacks, allowing the actors the privacy to rehearse or prepare until they were called into the “callback space.” Additionally, Abrams and I could disable our cameras and microphones in the callback room to provide further privacy to the performer and alleviate the awkwardness of performing to a screen.

Subsequent to each singing callback, Abrams would offer vocal corrections, and, if I felt inclined, I would offer some acting suggestions. More often, however, I found myself giving notes during the reading portions of the callbacks, to see if the actors could take direction. I

sometimes gave character descriptions or explained the circumstances of the scene to help clarify the characters' intentions, but I primarily tried to influence the actors using infinitive action verbs, such as *to apologize*, *to inspire*, *to shame*, etc. One of the benefits of the Zoom callback was that with Abrams and me muted and hidden from view, the reading partners could simply talk to each other without voyeurism of the creative team.

Man in the Yellow Suit is noticeably absent from the callback schedule. As mentioned in my casting proposal, I had originally toyed with the idea of casting an age-appropriate actor for MIYS in order to create a contrast of ages between a character who desire but could not obtain immortality and those who had received it despite not seeking it. This, in addition to an awareness of our limited pool of male performers, led me to consider sources outside the traditional student body. I had highly considered recruiting one of our performance faculty to step into the role, both to meet my casting needs and also to provide the students with an opportunity to work alongside a master artisan. However, upon engagement, my intended professor ultimately decided his attention was greater needed for some family matters, and he declined.

Although I wanted to provide as many opportunities to our students as possible, the music director and I remained convinced that we did not have a performer capable of carrying the role of MIYS. I, therefore, reached out to an SIUC Department of Theater alumnus, Graham Luker, to gauge his interest in returning to the McLeod stage as a guest artist. Although I did not have a grant to fund him, and I do not condone unpaid work for professional artists, the actor had lost two performance contracts for the year due to COVID and was eager for an opportunity to perform regardless. He submitted an audition video for consideration along with the SIU students, and it was decided that no callback was necessary – he was our Man in the Yellow Suit.

Casting Politics

Casting a show always presents a variety of challenges, knowing that at the end of the day the cast list needs to serve the production to the best of its ability, all the while considering numerous variables such as skill, appearance, personalities, and sometimes affordability. In educational theatre, there is the additional factor of ensuring that students are receiving equal and accessible opportunities to grow as performers.³⁰ Furthermore, national incidents of racial injustice throughout 2020 challenged many in the theatre industry to assess their roles in creating or hindering inclusivity and employment diversity. Our own Department of Theater stepped back to analyze its conscious and unconscious racist practices in the classroom and on stage. In a statement to the faculty and patrons of SIUC Theater, Professor Segun Ojewuyi expressed clear intentions for the department moving forward to correct the inequitable actions of the past, among them addressing, “white privilege and favoritism as abhorrent obstacles to equality and inclusivity, for our collaborative practices in casting” and observing that “our Black and minority students have been perennially ignored or cast in minor roles.”⁵ As mentioned earlier, I was very open to the possibility of a diverse, yet color-conscious cast, but my awareness of the implications of my casting decisions was heightened by this statement.

To begin casting, I first considered the needs of the production. For example, the role of Winnie Foster is a soprano; the music cannot be changed (at least not without several exchanges with licensing, the writers, and a complete overhaul of the show score), and therefore, the actress playing Winnie *needs* to be a soprano. The actress also needs to believably play a young girl – if

³⁰ As a general rule, I strive not to let student seniority influence my casting decisions. However, according to the National Association of Schools of Theatre accreditation guidelines (of which SIUC is a member), BFA Musical Theater students are required to perform in a “significant role” in a musical theatre production no later than their senior year, and therefore students approaching graduation must be more heavily considered for principal roles (National Association of Schools of Theatre).

not by herself, then at least by comparison to the other characters on stage. Some of these needs, particularly the music ones, made aspects of casting much more straightforward. I relied heavily on the wisdom of Abrams and together with choreographer Rion Towery we weighed where the strengths of our students would fall to provide the best casting possible.³¹ Casting ultimately became relatively straightforward when it became clear that one actor may have the skillset for Role X and Role Y, but another actor only had the skillset for Roll X, leading us to cast the first actor in Role Y. Starting with the needs of the production and then trickling down through the aforementioned filters, we constructed a highly dynamic, enthusiastic, and very capable cast of principals and ensemble.

I confess that I felt pressured by the deadline imposed by the production team, and therefore had stage management release our casting immediately following the casting discussions, to ensure that performers would indeed accept their roles before submitting a finalized cast list to the various design areas. While I do not believe I was hasty in my casting decisions, I recognize that I did neglect to submit my proposed cast list to my supervisor for approval before releasing it to the students. Consequently, although the selected actors agreed to their roles, the cast list was suspended until my supervisor and I could meet to discuss the implications of such a list, the glaring flaw being that despite my efforts to strive for inclusivity amidst my color-conscious casting, I nevertheless ended up with a predominantly White principal cast, with my marginalized actors in ensemble roles. Notably, for example, the casting of a Black female senior BFA as a Tree Nymph appeared ignorant, oppressive, and insensitive – without proper explanation for such an action. I justified the casting to my supervisor by insisting that the assignment of roles was the result of placing students according to their strengths, not

³¹ Towery, had prepared two brief dance pieces for the auditioning students to submit separately from their singing auditions. Though I did view these, I relied on Towery for his assessment to utilize our strongest movers.

tossing the marginalized students table scrap or degrading roles. For example, this particular Black woman is an extraordinary dancer, far stronger than what is required of the principal female characters, who require stronger singers. The Tree Nymph is the leader of the Nymph trio, and I needed this woman's expertise in movement to thread the Nymphs throughout the story.

To mitigate my actions, my supervisor and I agreed that I should reach out to the marginalized students that auditioned to hear their thoughts on the proposed casting. I met with each of these students either by phone or in person and conversed with them for a half to a full hour to listen to their experiences with this particular audition process and past production experiences, too. I sought to see this industry – even at the educational theatre level of SIUC – through their eyes to try to understand how they feel perceived by those in power and the effects felt by white ethnocentric casting. I also aimed to frame the conversation in a way to let the students respond to their proposed roles in this production without them fearing retaliation. Each student seemed genuinely excited about their role in *Tuck Everlasting*. The Black woman actually said that while a principal role would be a good experience, she would have a more enjoyable experience in a dancing position for this show, which prompted me to offer her an understudy role to one of the principals, in order to receive some of that experience, and also ask her to take on the responsibility of dance captain³² – an excellent résumé credit.

Conclusion

Satisfied with my engagements with the marginalized cast members, my supervisor approved the cast list, and it was distributed to the design areas. I was happy with my cast. I

³² A position of honor, the *dance captain* serves as the cast member responsible for keeping dance routines according to the choreographer's vision throughout the rehearsal process and maintaining the integrity of the set choreography during the run of performances (Blumenfeld 85).

knew that I had assembled a worthy team to tell this enchanting story. But I had learned something in the casting process – not just the pros and cons of video submissions and live-stream callbacks. I learned in my talks with the students that many of them face oppression in the world and in the industry in ways I never have, and likely never will. The students deserve to be seen and heard, and I hope as I transition into the professional realm that I will continue to grow by seeing and hearing the artists of color in the theatre community.

¹ Miller, Chris, et al. *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. (New York: Samuel French, 2017) 34.

² Tysen, Nathan. Interview by Author, 8 Apr. 2020.

³ Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*. (Square Fish, 1975) 37.

⁴ Miller, et al. 5.

⁵ Ojewuyi, Segun. “Department of Theater Statement of Inclusivity.” *SIU Department of Theater*, 13 June 2020, www.facebook.com/SIUTheater/posts/4181726228566657.

PRODUCTION

CHAPTER 5

NOTHING BUT TIME:

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

There is a circular relationship between the rehearsal process and the production process. Both germinate from the fertilizer of the design process, but both are susceptible to changing elements as they grow. Rehearsals begin mounted on the intentions of the designs, and yet a disturbance in the production process – often a miscalculation of money, time, space, or labor – inevitably affects scenery, costumes, or lighting, etc., and induces adjustments in the rehearsals. Similarly, rehearsals, being a collaborative journey among artists, invite unforeseen obstacles – sometimes spacing, staging, or actor needs, though they are more often the products of creative discovery – which then must be accounted for in scenery, costumes, or lighting, etc. It is, therefore, difficult to cleanly divide the two processes into two chapters, and so some overlap of topics is necessary. Nevertheless, it is for these reasons, I believe, that the famous Russian director Kama Ginkas counsels young directors, “If you are the slave of your original conception, you will forgo a fantastic number of possibilities that could have become a part of your journey.”¹ Despite my best laid plans according to my initial concept, the production did indeed take a route of its own device, shaped in part by its own unique scheduled process and performance format.

Not knowing how the production would be performed was an enormous hindrance to the production process, and yet it became an elephant in the living room that we were almost determined to ignore since it could not be resolved. This was simply a byproduct of navigating the pandemic one week at a time, but it did nothing to help us plan for a stable and scheduled

production. In an attempt to provide the safest conditions possible for all involved with the project, the chair of the department decided to cancel all season productions except *Tuck Everlasting*, as it was the thesis project for not only me but for Mohlman and Rigdon, and diverted all department resources to support it, particularly shop labor and time. Additionally, the faculty elected to delay the performance of *Tuck*, originally slotted for mid-November, until Spring of 2021. The two-fold hope was to have a clearer idea of how live performances might be handled should the pandemic abate, and in the meantime, provide a generous amount of rehearsal and production time to accommodate any impact from social distancing. Although well-intended, we did not foresee the negative consequences of such a drawn-out process.

Divisive or Decisive

“The director is the alpha and omega,” Ginkas has stated, referring to his theatre training from George Tovstonogov. “Nothing can arise in the theater without the touch of the director, and nothing can disappear in the theater without the director willing it” (33). I have never been a director with a god-complex, rather I whole-heartedly insist on a production flourished from collaboration among designers, actors, and director. Nevertheless, Ginkas is correct in that a director has final say in leading to how a production will culminate. Decision-making has never been my strength, and particularly making abrupt decisions with finality. I attribute this seeming flaw to my strength as a counselor who weighs the outcome of various possibilities, which, as a director, includes the artistic implications of certain choices. For most of my directing career this hasn’t been an issue since I have taken the responsibility of managing assorted production elements by myself, operating on my own timeline. Introducing other artists into the equation, and particularly for a larger production, also introduced deadlines beyond those of my own, and some of those inevitably required a more rapid and decisive directorial response.

Take, for example, my initial meeting with props, headed by scenic graduate student Bailey Crawford and supervised by Assistant Professor of Scenic Design, Gennie Neuman-Lambert. I requested flowers for Hugo to present to Winnie when he courts her during “The Story of Winnie Foster,” and that was as far as my brain had gotten. When I was prompted with “What kind of flowers?” and “How many?” and “What color?” I tried to be decisive but could not help considering all of the potential outcomes of my choices. Purple was my first thought, since it would tie into Winnie’s dress, but then I thought something brighter would stand out, so I thought yellow, which could be fun as a complementary color, though we were considering that for Winnie’s daughter as a hint of rebellion, so what would “rebellious flowers” indicate? I also thought about white or whatever flowers were part of the set dressing in the woods because I liked the tie-in to that, as well, but then I wondered if that would remind Winnie too much of Jesse; although, I countered to myself that she and Hugo shared a very memorable walk home through the woods and perhaps the flowers were his way to remind her of that. Yes. This was how my mind processed the innocuous decision of flower color. Ultimately, I settled on asking to wait on the color. I simply did not know, and as the answer was not urgent, we could afford to wait. Other decisions, I would learn, did not have such a luxury.

Setting the Scene

One of my shortcomings as a director is my limitation in thinking three-dimensionally. This can be quite an impediment to the necessity of interpreting scenic designs. From the Scenic Design course offered by our department, I learned that white models³³ are a useful tool for circumventing that hurdle, as they allow me physically interact with the set on a smaller scale. The downside of having a scenic designer *in absentia* was that Reagan could not offer me a

³³ A *white model* is an unpainted scale replica of the set design (Fletcher and Irelan 45).

model of his design. Although Reagan did provide me with a digital model and frequently presented with it at production meetings, I still found myself inhibited by the two-dimensional screen, and so believe I did not fully grasp how space was being occupied on stage. Fortunately, I am rather decent at interpreting ground plans in so far as they translate to taping out a rehearsal space (a credit to my Stage Management course), as well as converting them into a functional white model myself, and while I did manage to start construction of a quarter-inch scale model, I ultimately found myself unable to devote the time to finish it. Nevertheless, the set pieces I did create, namely those in the Fair scene, provided me with enough details to recognize we were going to face some serious spacing issues.

This complication created further cyclical issues, the first being that I had a strong need to use our set pieces, or as close a representation of them as we could find. Some pieces, such as the chaise in the Tuck Cottage, could be substituted in rehearsals with actor blocks and other stock rehearsal furniture. However, other pieces, like the table in the Tuck Cottage, needed to be selected and approved by Reagan, which meant that we had no precise measurements for that set piece. In the Tuck Cottage, this was problematic because we had no accurate spatial awareness for the actors' movements.



Figure 5-1. Tuck Living Room Rendering (Created by Logan Reagan)

As seen in Figure 5-1, the set pieces rendered provided little information about how much room the actors had to endow the set as a whole, particularly in the upstage space among the table, chairs, doors, and walls. My staging for these interior scenes became guesswork at best, as I tried to engage with the architecture while fighting against cramped picturization, tight traffic patterns, and, of course, social distancing with the unknown scenic parameters. Similarly, I struggled to obtain a clear understanding of the set pieces intended for the breaking down of the Fair at the top of Act II, and by mid-October, four weeks into rehearsals, I was no closer getting answers. This warranted what I considered to be an emergency production meeting, which is to say, a production meeting outside of our scheduled set.

Understanding that even the most seemingly innocuous changes for one design area can impact another design area, I elected to call a Friday afternoon meeting with scenery, technical direction, properties, lighting, costumes, and choreography. I stated my concerns and asked very specific questions to the group: What were the table and chairs for the Tuck Cottage going to be? What was going to be onstage during “Ev’rything’s Golden”? How does the wagon rendered in Reagan’s design for the top of Act II function; how does it move; is it sit-able/stand-able? What is the choreography trying to achieve and what is needed to enable that? Which area – scenic, props, or costumes – is facilitating the set dressing and properties that MIYS procures and dons during his song?

I found myself frustrated by the silence that seemed to follow these questions. No one seemed confident enough to take initiative for resolving them, as if everyone were waiting for someone else to make the first move. Mohlman provided sufficient explanation about the wagon, but there was little headway with my other questions due to the argument that Reagan would need to select and approve the set pieces and set dressing. Fortunately, Neuman-Lambert

suggested that Props prioritize shop hours that afternoon to pull optional furniture and pieces for Reagan, and I was grateful for this proactive attempt to expedite the production process. Towery and I, along with Neuman-Lambert, Crawford, and two of our stage managers, visited the furniture storage and selected an assortment of pieces that would meet our staging and choreography needs, pending Reagan's artistic approval.

Although this greatly helped in solving questionable spacing issues, there remained some character activities, such as "Top of the World" and "The Story of the Man in the Yellow Suit," that could not be staged until we were able to actually interact with the set pieces. Furthermore, I felt we had rehearsed as much as we could without adding the layer of scenic elements. By mid-November, we were finally able to start using most of the scenic wagons in the McLeod, allowing us two weeks to find comfort with them before the students returned home for the remainder of the semester. I decided to devote nightly rehearsals to runs of the individual acts, for the purposes of cleaning, adjustments, and overall, continuity.³⁴ It was during these runs that I became highly aware of continuous issues with crowding and failed social distancing, and ultimately, and at the recommendation of my supervisor, I realized we needed to use the apron.³⁵

When set design had first been discussed, there was question of whether we would use the apron or reserve the pit for Abrams to conduct. At some point in the design process, we decided to reserve the use of the pit for the music director in the event it was needed, so I foolishly dismissed its use to me as staging space. Although I am inclined to attribute this oversight to my lack of physically having a scenic model to understand spacing, I nevertheless take full responsibility for neglecting the potential the apron space could offer. Unable to call

³⁴ I also intended for the various design areas to observe the runs, so they could better understand, though I found only technical direction and costumes took advantage of this.

³⁵ *Apron* refers to the part of the stage that extends out past the proscenium arch and into the audience. In the case of the McLeod Theater stage, much of the apron is able to be lowered in order to serve as an orchestra pit for musicals.

another emergency production meeting, and unable to wait a full week until the next scheduled one, I hastily reached out to each designer to ask if utilizing the apron for staging would negatively impact them. Scenic and costumes had no concerns, and technical direction only cautioned against set pieces rolling across the apron/pit threshold. Lighting suffered the largest repercussions, as Crowder had planned for a design that primarily lit the stage proper. He agreed to negotiate with the change as best as he could, but I would not fully understand the consequences of this late adjustment until tech week.

Fabrication and Follies

Costume Connectors

I found myself unwittingly proving Kama Ginkas right, as my initial concept of connecting actors through measured rope began to slowly transform into deliberate artistic decisions that affected various design areas. For example, the shawl that Rigdon had intended for Mae was rendered to be secured around her waist, as was the fichu³⁶ attached to her top. However, as a director who favors stage business, I wanted these items detachable so that Mae could assemble or disassemble her wardrobe as needed. As it turned out, we discovered in rehearsals how wonderful a tool the shawl could be for connecting characters, and thus, future tools of this nature were coined “Connectors.”

Throughout the production process, I tried to make it a habit to stop by the various shops at least once a day to check in on progress and address any concerns from the production team or my own. I was beginning to find that despite our biweekly production meetings, maintaining communication between departments to foster a unified production was much like herding cats. I suppose I had assumed some of that responsibility was going to be delegated to stage

³⁶ A *fichu*, a Neoclassical accessory, is a soft, transparent neckcloth that surrounded the neck and was tucked into neckline or sash, or tied around back.

management or production management, but I found myself managing anyway, and for the most part, it was beneficial to the production. However, there was an incident in which I overstepped some boundaries.

At the beginning of October, having finished at meeting with Crowder, I popped into the costume shop at a time that just so happened to coincide with a fitting for Jesse's 1963 costume. I was deeply concerned with what I saw. Everything about the costume read too contemporary to me. Rigdon attempted to explain the historical accuracy of each garment, and yet I could not shake that it all felt too close to current fashion. The difficulty of these final looks for the Tucks was that they needed to read as 1960s while also feeling very removed from the present, so as to help the story keep its distance from the audience. And Jesse's costume did not meet that standard. Rigdon apologized and agreed to rethink the attire, assuring me that she would set up a later time to meet. But it wasn't until I was prompted by her faculty advisor that I made the glaring realization: I had never actually been invited to sit in on that fitting.

In my contented state of fluidly moving among the various production shops, I had developed the assumption that I, as the director, should be privy to everything. It did not even strike me to consider that a designer may wish to first examine her work alone, without the charged opinions of the director, or at least not without invitation. It would be no different than a designer coming into my rehearsals and assessing a scene without context or permission from me. In my narrowed focus to keep the production unified to my vision, I had inadvertently stepped on Rigdon's toes, and by doing so in front of her peers and an actor, disrespected her. The next day I apologized to Rigdon for overstepping. She forgave me and reemphasized that she would reconsider Jesse's '60s look. We met again the following week, Rigdon having taken time to digest my concerns with her own aesthetic inclinations, and I was presented with a truly

wonderful iteration of Jesse that reflected his growth from his encounter with Winnie and also suggested the appropriate decade while simultaneously distant from contemporary fashion.

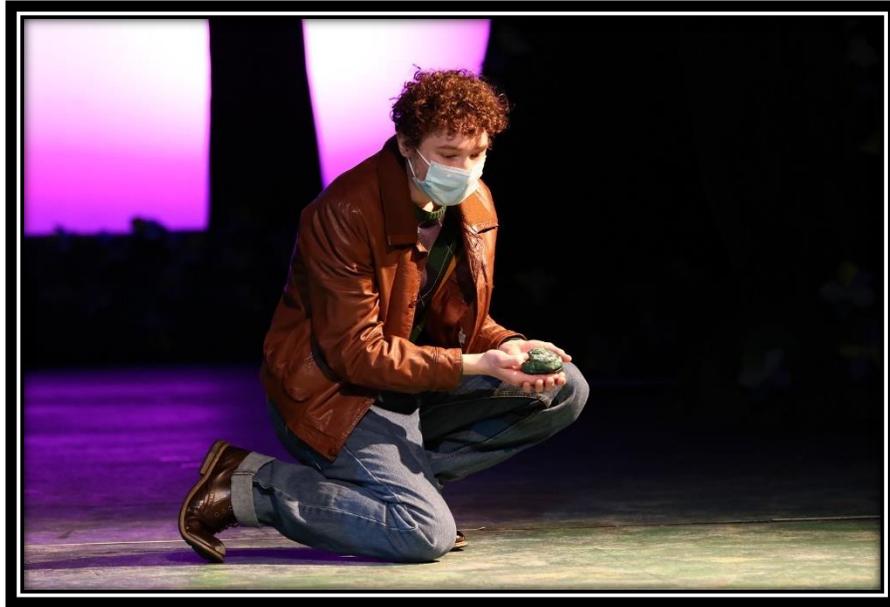


Figure 5-2. Jesse Tuck, 1963 (Photo by Jon Lambert)

Duck Everlasting

To help address the complications of COVID safety protocols, Rigdon, Zea, and our costume shop manager, Jane Pivovarnik, collaborated to devise a mask that would meet the safety needs, allow the performers to sing, and provide as much aesthetic as possible. Drawing from the Broadway Singer's Mask,³⁷ they created a prototype singer mask that would accommodate singer-actor diction and technique while also accommodating microphone elements. Unfortunately, the functional purposes of this design left little to be desired for the fashion of it.

³⁷ The Broadway Singer's Mask was developed by the Broadway Relief Project for singers to contain droplets while allowing space around the mouth to sing comfortably (The Singer's Mask).

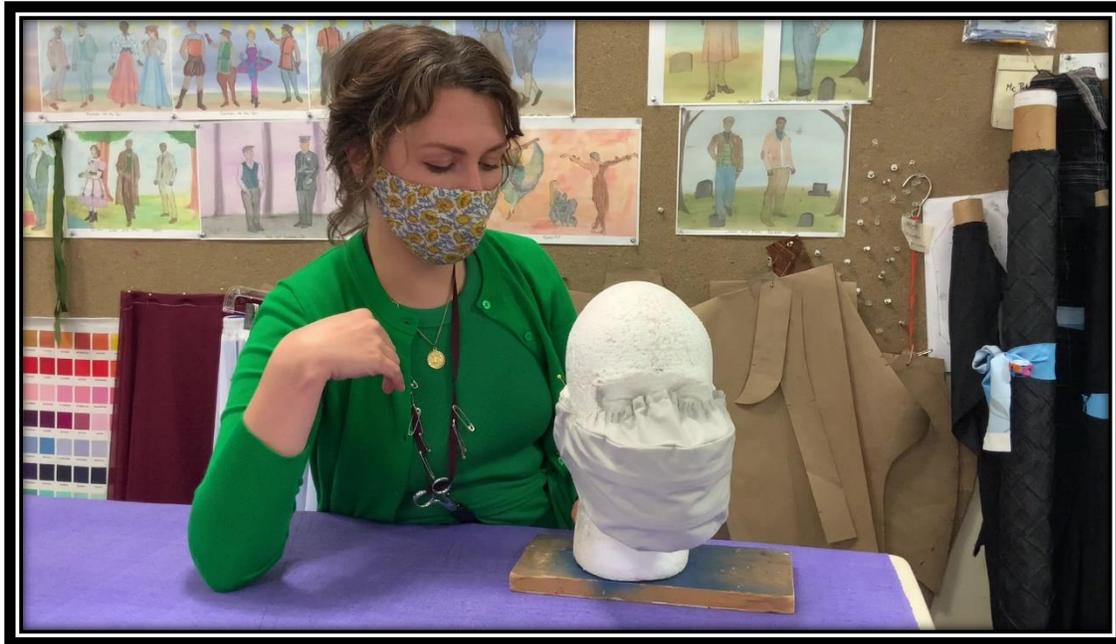


Figure 5-3. Singer Mask, Final Design (Photo by Author)

To put it frankly, our singer masks looked like duck bills, and frankly, I was not entertained by the inescapable pun “Duck Everlasting.” Although the thought of using fabrics that would coordinate with the costumes of each character was an appealing prospect to mitigate the aesthetic anomaly, Associate Professor Wendi Zea strongly encouraged Rigdon and me to consider using a neutral fabric across the board for all characters for the benefits of saving budget, eliminating the need for “mask changes” alongside costume changes, and the assumption that as a uniform component, the masks were more likely to “disappear” for the audience.³⁸

illuminating Ideas

Lighting is a mysterious element to work with prior to tech week, as it is all fairly theoretical until it can actually be shown. However, Crowder and I were able to address some design interests during the fall production phase.

³⁸ As it so happened, just shy of tech week, the cast unanimously voted to use generic medical masks instead of the singer masks, citing breathing complications during the heavy dance numbers. During performances, I found that Zea was correct, in that the uniformity of the masks – probably in tandem with the social normality of wearing masks – caused them to fade away until I did not even notice them.

Shadow Play

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I was very interested to explore the prospect of shadow play to support Miles' story in "Time." The script says that during the song, "A small boy [THOMAS] enters. MILES watches his former life play out around him."² Not only was I reluctant to pass off a college man as a "small boy," I did not want to add more costumes to the shop's workload, which was already numbering fifty-one. But the truth is that I was heartily married to an image in my mind of Thomas' silhouette on a sheet while Miles sings his final phrase, "I'm left with nothing..." followed by Miles ripping the sheet down only to find nothing there, and so ending, "Nothing but time."

To achieve this, I needed some independent and dependent variables. The dependent variables would need to include the position of the clothesline, including its angle and height, the translucency of the sheet, and a stable light source. The independent variables consisted of the position of the light source and the position and angle of the actor(s) being lit. Unfortunately, the clothesline, which would be attached to the Tuck Porch, was a low priority for scenic, so Crowder and I, along with his assistant lighting designers experimented as best as we could with an ETC Source Four lighting instrument on castors, a sheet draped over two music stands, and taking turns as model actors.

It was necessary to play with the mechanics of the light and subsequent shadow it produced. In accordance with the inverse square law, the further away the light source was from the object being lit, the larger it became, and the fainter its shadow was cast. At this point in the process, I was less concerned with the precision of the effect than its viability as a storytelling method.



Figure 5-4. Shadow Play Testing and Performance (Photos by Author and Jon Lambert)

Lighting Fabric and Skin

Other design components Crowder and I were able to discuss at this point in the production process included gel colors and gobo³⁹ textures. In the lighting lab, Crowder set up some sample gels he was considering, as well as prospective gobos, to gauge my feedback. However, I knew from the lighting courses I had taken that light does not provide an accurate representation of its quality unless its intended objects are lit. I, therefore, insisted that Rigdon join our conversation, along with swatches from her prospective fabric choices for the costumes. This was useful for both design areas, as it demonstrated not only how the light might be perceived but also how it transformed the various fabrics. In fact, the latter effect helped Rigdon and me narrow down fabrics for Mae's dress and MIYS's suit fabric because of how they appeared under Crowder's lighting conditions

³⁹ *Gobos* are steel cutouts that can be inserted between a lighting instrument and its object to mold a beam of light into a desired pattern or design, for example, tree branches (Fletcher and Irelan 57).

One color for which Crowder advocated but toward which I held reservations was green. Pouncing off of my desire to see the verdant nature of Treegap Wood magnified, Crowder hoped to emphasize the landscape with some green lighting. My objections to this were that green lighting often conveys sickliness or villainy, and moreover, the Nymphs, who lived in that world for the majority of the play, were embodied by some women of color. Generally speaking, green light on a Black body or an Asian body is not flattering. These characters – these women – were heroines to me, champions of this forest and had no business being anything but beautiful and mysterious. I needed the lighting to support that. In the end, Crowder compromised by minimalizing his instruments with green gels so that the majority of the lighting for Treegap Wood was saturated in a less viridescent hue.

“Prop”er Protocol

One of my greatest and most consistent causes of frustration during the production process came from the props department. At SIUC, the props department falls under the supervision of the scenic professor, and often becomes the responsibility of the scenic designer. In Reagan’s absence, Crawford took on the role of Props Master, but there was very large overlap between properties and scenic painting, and this, I believe became the primary reason for my prop problems.

For the most part, Props was very good about providing our rehearsals with stand-in objects for the actors to use. This was chiefly a biproduct of two of the stage managers working in the scene shop, and therefore, having an acute understanding of what was needed. However, some of the props were being constructed or pulled in ways that were not conducive to how they were being used in the play. One example of this was the cotton candy Winnie enters with as she and Jesse arrive at the Fair. One of the props artisans had crafted a very pretty, very dainty cotton

candy replica. However, Winnie’s cotton candy is stolen by Jesse during “Partner in Crime” and becomes casualty of a keep-away war between Winnie and him throughout. The soft excuse for sugar floss issued by props was never going to stand a chance in this number!



Figure 5-5. Final Cotton Candy Prop (Photo by Jon Lambert)

This and other similar properties concerns could have been better addressed, or even avoided, by having a props representative attend an occasional rehearsal or run. Although members of stage management lived in both worlds, it would have been far more beneficial to have someone devoted to seeing how a prop was intended to be used so as to better understand what was needed for the show.

Another consequence of stage management overlapping with props and props overlapping with scenic painting was the simple drop in communication for items of priority and delegation. I found myself frequently having to reiterate and clarify to stage management and properties what the Winnie-Jesse Rope Connector, Winnie-Hugo Ribbon Connector, and

Winnie's Daughter-Young Suitor Ribbon Connector were, and how many were needed. I seemed to be the only person that could track these items throughout the play, and I found myself at a loss, despite numerous meetings, on how to communicate this any clearer. I believe one obstacle was the confusion about who was responsible for which items. For instance, the Winnie-Hugo Ribbon Connector needed to be of similar color, if not the same fabric, as Winnie's dress. That did not necessarily mean that Costumes was responsible for creating this prop, but they would need to collaborate with Props for it to be created. Similarly, the Connector for Winnie's Daughter and Young Suitor needed to match Daughter's dress, and therefore needed the cooperation of Costumes and Props to achieve this. This failure to communicate often caused me to question my ability to communicate my ideas and lead other artists to manifest them, and I think it ultimately contributed to an exacerbation of my controlling nature.

Tracking with the Tucks

In my professional experience, recorded orchestra tracks are becoming increasingly common among regional theaters, particularly non-Equity⁴⁰ venues. More and more, the beautiful tradition of live orchestration is sacrificed for the trade-off of a more economic production via recorded or synthesized orchestration, although there are benefits to either method. Live instrumentation provides subtlety and nuance and allows for easier adjustments as required by the cast or production. Tracks provide better consistency and a cost-effective rehearsal experience for the cast right up through performances. Furthermore, designs can be timed reliably to the music and thus allow for better preparation earlier in the design production process. Nevertheless, the immediacy of the art is lost. Film is not a replacement for theatre; canned music is not a replacement for live orchestras. And we greatly desired to use live

⁴⁰ *Actors Equity Association*, commonly referred to as Equity, is the national union for stage actors and stage managers.

orchestration for our *Tuck Everlasting*. However, COVID eventually made it evident that this was simply not an option.

Through Right on Cue Services, a company that specializes in tracked music for plays and musicals, we acquired a package of rehearsal tracks for *Tuck*. Using an app called ShowReady, actors were able to download the orchestration for the show and rehearse with the tracks at their own leisure. Abrams, Towery, stage management, and I used the authorized logins that enabled us to adjust tempi for songs, add or remove vamps, and insert fermate⁴¹ as we desired. This became immensely advantageous for rehearsals, as the actors had months to become familiar with the tracks, and we enjoyed the luxury of our own personal on-demand accompanist. The cost, however, was additional labor for the stage management team, who by default were charged with the responsibility for learning how to operate the software in addition to running it during rehearsals while juggling their other duties. Furthermore, utilizing the tracks diminished the need for Abrams to be as present at rehearsals, which, exacerbated by COVID occupancy restrictions, denied our production the benefit of a complete creative team throughout the rehearsal process.

Conclusion

The production process for the fall semester, indeed, felt long and drawn out. Maintaining communication among the various design areas felt like a colossal feat, and I am not convinced it was very successful. Regardless, its interplay with rehearsals, also long and drawn out, resulted in an unprecedented experience for me of trying to bring together production elements that would not be fully implemented until the following semester.

⁴¹ *Fermate* or *fermata*, singular, are a musical notation derived from the Italian for “stop,” which informs the musicians to hold the given note beyond its given value.

¹ Ginkas and Freedman 66.

² Miller, Chris, et al. *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. (New York: Samuel French, 2017) 67.

CHAPTER 6

MY MOST BEAUTIFUL DAYS:

FALL SEMESTER REHEARSALS

When a mother nurses her newborn, the process releases oxytocin, which is a hormone that promotes emotional bonding between the two.¹ Research has shown this effect may also occur in social bonding situations and “increases both trust and empathy” among those present.² I can only assume this is the chemical response that transpired when I engaged in rehearsals with my cast. There is something transformative about the rehearsal process, and its effect on a team of artists collaborating is somewhat magical. That is not to say that a rehearsal process is sunshine and roses and campfire songs; rather, it is the hardships of the process that forge and temper the bonds among the actors and the creative team.

Rehearsal Logistics

The Story of the Hat

It started as a joke, but it became a running gag with function throughout the rehearsal process. As part of my graduate assistantship, I served as the instructor for the stage management course, which entailed teaching a class for the enrolled students, as well as supervising them as stage managers during an actual production, in this case, *Tuck*. This posed a challenge to my goal of being less managerial and more artistic during my thesis. It also was problematic for the stage management students, as they struggled to discern when they were working with me as a director and when as their supervisor. During one rehearsal where we were collectively frustrated by this, I aggressively twisted the baseball cap I was wearing to the side and exclaimed, “There! Now I’m wearing my stage management supervisor hat!”. We all laughed at the ridiculousness of the situation, but from then on, I came to utilize the literal action of hat shifting to help everyone

compartmentalize which role I was performing at a given time. The default position of my cap, bill forward, became my director hat. When the bill was shifted to my right, we knew I was the stage management supervisor. On rare occasions, I shifted the bill to the back and proclaimed myself an actor. And, one time, upon feeling completely overwhelmed, I removed my hat completely. One of the stage managers, Allison Shore, asked me who I was in that moment, and I sighed, “I’m just a student.”

All joking aside, while the hat did serve to externally signify my various positions in this production, internally I did not compartmentalize as easily. I found myself distracted from my directing work by an assortment of administrative and logistical needs, such as managing rehearsal space needs, procuring rehearsal furniture and props, and occasionally taping out neglected ground plan markers. These managerial concerns also extended to the task of rehearsal space coordination. Although these scheduling and space operations are typically handled by stage management in the professional realm, as the stage management supervisor – and also the director who had boasted his plan for COVID-compliant rehearsals – I found myself dishing the responsibility onto my plate.

Location, Location, Location

I had anticipated the challenge of holding rehearsals in a socially distanced manner and had therefore organized and divided the rehearsal needs between two spaces: Altgeld 116 and Communications 0022, a.k.a., “The Studio” (a.k.a., “The Dungeon,” according to many of the students). Altgeld 116 has long been the traditional rehearsal space for SIUC musicals, owing to its spacious capacity for a cast, accessible piano and speaker system for music rehearsals, and full-length wall of mirrors for dance rehearsals. However, at the request of Professor Ojewuyi, and in accordance with SIUC administrative protocols, I limited the maximum occupancy of this

space to ten people, including cast, creative team, and stage management. I similarly implemented restrictions on the Studio, and since our cast extended to sixteen, our full rehearsal team of four stage managers, one music director, one choreographer, and one director would have numbered twenty-three.

My original intention had been to rehearse *Tuck Everlasting* like a finely devised jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces would finally come together to form a safe and cohesive picture on the McLeod stage in the final weeks of production. However, in our first production meeting, it was suggested that I consider Furr Auditorium as a possible rehearsal space, particularly for design runs, so as to accommodate our numbers safely.³ Although I meticulously organized the rehearsal schedule to accomplish my scene work and Towery's choreography between Altgeld and the Studio, we did, indeed, pursue Furr as venue for setting "The Story of Winnie Foster," as the climactic piece required twelve of our cast members to choreograph and rehearse to completion.

Unfortunately, after receiving the proper permissions from the instructors that utilize Furr Auditorium, following the appropriate channels of scheduling, and navigating a successful week of choreographing the number, we were informed by our resident production manager, Tom Fagerholm, that Furr Auditorium had previously been subject to an internal risk assessment and been deemed unsuitable for any Department of Theater productions, including rehearsals. By this point in the rehearsal process, we had reached the end of October and were at somewhat of an impasse; yes, we could continue to rehearse and clean scenes and songs, but what we now needed was space to allow the actors a sense of show continuity, trafficking and positioning, and ultimately to bring everyone together. Scenic and technical direction kindly agreed to make arrangements that would grant us the McLeod stage for our final two weeks of fall rehearsals,

and the access to this space allowed me to develop some of my recently realized staging practices.

Directing Gems

Staging Practices (Triangulation)

Marshal Mason advocates that a director, “must have a keen eye for discerning how movement can tell us what’s happening...must understand what the move[ment] will *mean* to an audience.”⁴² I have always prided myself as a director who excels at stage composition. I know that I can create dynamic picturization that strongly communicates the action of a scene to the audience. What I did not quite recognize, until *Tuck*, was the power my staging could wield for the motivation of the actors.⁴² In particular, I became aware of my fondness for triangulation. *Tuck Everlasting* is riddled with complex relationships among characters, particularly given the history and propinquity of the Tucks.⁴³ I found that when I placed a character in conflict, most often Jesse, in between his adversaries, the result was a polarizing, dramatically charged, and ultimately more effective scene.

One example of this was in Act I, Scene 5, when Winnie is first introduced to Miles and Mae. Mae is immediately panicked by Winnie, incredulous toward Jesse, and supplicant to Miles; Miles is startled by Winnie, outraged toward Jesse, and heuristic to Mae; Winnie is confused by both Mae and Miles and indignant toward Jesse; and Jesse is simply caught in the middle of it all. I realized, what better way to manifest this conflict than by actually placing Jesse in the middle of it all? Trapped among his accusers, Jesse was consequently inclined to various tactics of appeasement, and by his own impetus rather than my direction. I find this echoes

⁴² I believe that on some subconscious level I was still achieving these results, but my awareness of it was significantly heightened during *Tuck* rehearsals.

⁴³ See the “Contrasting Elements” slide in Appendix D for examples.

Mason's suggest sentiment, "All movement must appear to originate in the actors' impulses and should never look as though an actor is moving because a director asked her to."⁵ I found other scenes in which to apply this technique, such as Act I, Scene 7, when the Tucks bring Winnie home to Angus and accusations are once again raised, as well as during "The Story of the Tucks," when Jesse, Miles, and Mae are all vying for Winnie's attention as they recount their genesis. I came to enjoy watching a character who is caught, and I decided to try it for comedic effect elsewhere.



Figure 6-1. "The Story of the Tucks" Rehearsal (Photo by Author)

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Constable Joe functions (with Hugo) as the archetypical musical comedy relief. His character, while truthful, is larger than life, and I decided to capitalize on that, both to help the actor and, consequently, his scenes. Given that Constable Joe is forever wooing Betsy Foster and yet perpetually annoyed by Hugo, I sought to trap his character in triangulation between those two for the majority of his scenes. Any time he attempted to court

Betsy with machismo and bravado, he was often interrupted by Hugo, prompting him to chastisement and exasperation, the physical effect of this being a humorous juxtaposition of codeswitching.

Triangulation was not always the most effective staging practice. In my original blocking for Act II, Scene 3, where Winnie unwittingly betrays Jesse's plan to have her drink the immortal spring water when she turns seventeen, I had placed Jesse sitting at the table in the center of the Tuck Cottage, so that immediately following this revelation, all eyes on stage would zero in on him in a conflagration of shame, shock, and disappointment. However, once we allowed ourselves the luxury of using the apron of the stage, I found while spacing the scene that I could create a much more powerful picture by placing Jesse downstage left, so that when Winnie, who holds focus with Mae and Angus upstage right, announces the plan, the audience pans with the characters' various gazes as they lock onto Jesse. Furthermore, this staging adjustment enabled Mae to make a much more driving and determined cross to Jesse to shame him before dramatically exiting through the upstage door. In addition to discovering some fun staging tricks, there were a handful of other, what I might call "directing gems," I unearthed throughout the rehearsal process.

Connectors

The Connectors were truly an ingenious dramatic device born of my aforementioned whimsical reverie but nourished by the clever souls of the artists in rehearsals. Mae's shawl, which I mention in Chapter 5, became one of the first Connectors, and so sprang into being through the actress' impulse to connect to her family. In Act I, Scene 5, Miles enters to find Mae at the Tree waiting for Jesse and him, and the sentimental mother chastises him with, "Hey, can I have a proper hello, here?" followed by stage directions for an attempted hug.⁶ Driven by

character instincts but inhibited by social distancing, the actress was torn by how to reconcile the need to touch her scene partner. The shawl, of course. “Hug him with your shawl,” I suggested.

Suddenly, Mae had a world of possibilities for interacting with the other characters. The shawl became an extension of her being, by which she could comfort, chastise, tease, seduce, etc. other characters as fit her needs in the moment. The Connector was empowering the actor to maintain her social distance while creating corporeal relationships with her peers onstage. So, I hungrily looked for more opportunities for Connectors.

In general, I sought to find an item for each principal character that was justifiable within the world of the play and could become their means of interacting or connecting within that world. Some of these items were intentional from my initial concept, such as the Winnie-Jesse Rope Connector.



Figure 6-2. Winnie-Jesse Rehearsal Rope Connector (Photo by Author)

Other Connectors were spawned by moments of inspiration in rehearsal. Two examples of this were Angus’ fishing pole and Constable Joe’s billy club. Much like Mae’s prescribed action of hugging, both Angus and Constable Joe were scripted to have handshakes with other characters. To circumvent this obstacle, I decided they would have objects that would be extensions of their characters; Angus has a proclivity for fishing, and Constable Joe has gear appropriate for law enforcement. The result was a creative albeit unusual solution where characters could grasp these objects to suggest a handshake.⁴⁴

Working with these Connectors was a challenge for the actors that certainly warranted more attention than what I gave. The following is a breakdown of the various connectors, which characters used them, the characteristics of those objects, and the flow of energy suggested by them:

Table 6-1. Breakdown of Connectors

Connector	Characters Using It	Characteristics	Energy
Broom	Betsy	Rigid and Strict	Direct
Fishing Pole	Angus	Simple and Straightforward	Direct
Shawl	Mae	Embracive and Sheltering	Indirect
Sash	Mae and Angus	Youthful and Unbound	Indirect
Billy Club	Constable Joe	Sturdy and Martial	Direct
Winnie-Jesse Rope	Winnie and Jesse	Wild and Adaptive	Indirect
Winnie-Hugo Ribbon	Winnie and Hugo	Innocent and Valuable	Indirect
Nymph Branch Staff	Tree Nymph	Firm and Guiding	Direct
GGWF Ribbon	Water Nymph, Betsy, Nana	Dense and Restricting	Indirect
Cane	Man in the Yellow Suit	Driven and Unyielding	Direct
Whip	Cat Tamer	Aggressive and Pouncing	Indirect

Although this chart was compiled after the production, the information was disseminated to the actors throughout the rehearsal process. The late J. Thomas Kidd, one of my acting mentors, attended one of our final rehearsals of the fall semester and noted a lack of intentionality with the

⁴⁴ In the post-mortem, it was observed that although the conceit was unconventional and less subtle than the use of the shawl, the suggested effect was nevertheless achieved.

Connectors when they weren't being actively used. For instance, the Winnie-Jesse Rope Connector was clearly active when it was taut between Winnie and Jesse; however, throughout scenes where only one of them had the Connector, if they weren't immediately engaged with it, it often lost energy and became disconnected from the character. These Connectors, when forgotten by the actor, became neglected extensions of their character – the equivalent of dead limbs. This delightful artistic discovery would therefore need to continue to be nurtured into the spring semester in order to yield the full crop of its worth.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, I had plenty of other pressing matters of engagement with my actors.

Working with Actors

In an instance that both terrified and amazed me, one directing gem became excavated while orchestrating stage business for “Partner in Crime.” During the summer of 2020, Towery and I had more or less crafted the sequence at the beginning of the number, before it accelerates into a full-blown dance break. In the measures leading up to that, however, there was a gap in which Winnie and Jesse were the featured dancers before the rest of the characters joined in. Against the focused foreground of the two leads, I wanted organized chaos happening around them.

Contrary to my usual directing style, I found myself approaching *Tuck* rehearsals without preconceived blocking. That is to say, I knew the various images I wanted set in scenes and songs, but I did not enter rehearsals with the staging meticulously notated the way I might if I had been stage managing. The risk, of course, was being unprepared, and the accompanying discomfort I have in situations beyond my control. The gain was unknown and pending the success of my endeavors. I knew the offstage starting positions of the ensemble, though, and

⁴⁵ A list of production photos of the Connectors in use can be found in Appendix F.

from there I began to direct. I called out characters and traffic patterns and movements and actions. I gave timings and formations and intentions and exits. And then, I asked to see it all together, under tempo but in sequences.

It worked. There was Tamer Girl cracking her whip on the beat with Strong Man walking down to her on a diagonal while two Townies ran past with stolen goods, narrowly avoiding Constable Joe and Hugo, who likewise barely avoided Clown, who was magicking an endless scarf train for Winnie and Jesse while Fortune Teller propositioned the heartbroken Townie picking flowers. It was satisfying and all but complete, and had been staged with surprising speed. There was the gain, twofold. I managed to flesh out the scene while inspiring the actors to give it life, and I earned a reward of confidence that I am an insightful and clever director who is capable of working on the spot when necessary. Trust the process.

Director William Ball asserts, “The most important thing a director can do for an actor is to awaken the actor’s intuition and assure the intuition that it is going to be witnessed and used.”⁷ I believe that a good director is neither feared nor respected but trusted. It is trust that establishes a safe space for the actor to bring forth their intuition, and it is trust that sustains that intuition and shapes it into the realm of the director’s vision. One of the hardest ways I found to help my actors trust me was by learning to be wrong.

Young actors in particular can be hesitant to make strong choices that may counter what a director has given. Many times in rehearsals, I noticed impulses within my actors to move or take actions that I had not given them. On those occasions, I would address the suppressed movement: “Did you want to move there?” “You looked like you wanted to hug him.” Almost always, the actor would confirm that they had had an impulse but refrained from executing it. Time and again I tried to encourage them to try things, to remind them that I would let them

know if their choice wasn't working. It would not be until spring semester before they well and truly began to take risks, but even in the fall I strove to fan the flame of their instincts, sometimes at my own expense.

In one particular instance, I was working with Angus and Mae on their staging and text during "Time (Reprise)". Specifically, I was trying to help Mae understand why she sang the phrase "left with nothing" apart from the other three characters. I had suggested it was motivated by desperation to not be alone, but the actor playing Angus politely objected that he thought it was more victorious than that, that Mae was more likely celebrating the progressive reconnection she was making with Angus, propelling her into the closing dialogue of that scene. And he was right. His suggestion was much more logical and in line with the unfolding of the dramatic action of the scene. I told him so, and oh, how humbling it was to be wrong; but, how satisfying it was to know that an actor felt comfortable enough with me and dedicated enough to the production to courteously argue against my suggestion.

This trust further manifested as we collectively crafted the climactic encounter with Man in the Yellow Suit in Act II, Scene 8. The main difficulty of this scene being that our actor for MIYS could not join us until later in the process, we worked as best as possible to assume his position and account for it in the staging and composition. This was a highly uncomfortable scene, not because of the content but because of the crowding. In a socially distanced production, a scene where six characters are onstage and in need of equal access to the audience's attention was incredibly difficult to shape. I managed to justify splitting the characters onto either side of MIYS, who, threatening the Tucks and Winnie at knifepoint, needed to be clearly visible, but that meant no character downstage of his plane could turn their backs to him, and thus, they were forced to negotiate cheating out or upstaging themselves.

At a loss, I asked for the actors to collaborate with me by trying the scene from the top, but allowing them the freedom to move as motivated. It took several tries, as they explored what felt natural while I commented on what looked aesthetically pleasing. Eventually, they found positions and movements that were dramatically justified, aligned with their characters, and provided reasonable visibility of all characters throughout the scene. With their continued collaboration, we established the fight choreography by determining a slick and socially distanced method for MIYS to injure Angus and capture Winnie (prompting Jesse to offer the vial of spring water as a ransom and motivating Mae to shoot MIYS). Not all of my actor interactions, however, were gems.

Actor Grievances

Something I insisted on for this production was a Non-Equity Deputy for the cast. The concept of the Non-Equity Deputy (NED) was developed as a part of the Chicago Theatre Standards⁴⁶ as a means to provide nonunion casts with a confidential liaison between actors, stage management, the creative team, and producers.⁸ There have been past issues with SIUC Department of Theater productions where casts have felt powerless to express concerns to production and creative staff who are often also faculty members. My hope with instituting an NED for this production was to provide the cast with a voice, in addition to setting a precedent for future SIUC productions. By mid-November, the cast had indeed found a voice, but they did not utilize the NED to express it. Rather, they implemented what I can only call an intervention.

The Sunday evening of our final week of rehearsal for the fall semester, Production Stage Manager Alex Brue pulled me aside before its start and notified me that the seniors in the cast

⁴⁶ The Chicago Theatre Standards is a “cultural document” comprised of tools for self-governance among Chicago non-Equity theatres. They were constructed by artists and administrators seeking to end sexual and other forms of harassment in the theatre industry and introduce methods of monitoring and accountability (A Chicago Theatre Community).

wished to have a discussion with me after rehearsal. On that happy note, we executed a full run, stopping only to adjust any tempo or vamp issues, since Abrams needed to inform Right on Cue Services of any changes we would need for our performance tracks in the spring. After rehearsal, the seniors lined the edge of the stage, seated to face me, in the first row of the audience, and I let them initiate the conversation. In short, they were concerned about the length of rehearsals set for the upcoming week, scheduled for 7pm to 10:30pm. They claimed that although university final exams weren't scheduled for another few weeks, many of their instructors had chosen to give finals this last week of in-person classes before students dispersed for Thanksgiving break.

Over the next hour, I listened to the nine seniors express grievances that entailed not only the rehearsal process but their academic and personal experiences of the pandemic at large. I politely listened to everyone, wanting them to be heard and to know they were heard, but I confess that it seemed to slip into a *Breakfast Club* therapy session. Yes, they felt 10:30 was too late to be rehearsing. Yes, they felt over-rehearsed as they entered their "finals week." However, complaints about having to take online biology classes where students feel like they are self-taught were outside my purview. Frustrations about this being the only show they would get to perform their senior year were beyond the scope of my remediation. The multilayered cloak worn by a director in educational theatre was heavy as the line between industry professionalism and academy professionalism blurred.

I felt attacked, to say the least; not because there wasn't value or validity to these grievances but because I was facing a firing squad of nine burnt out students striving to make it through their senior year. That would not happen in the industry. At the very least, it would happen with notice and not be sprung on the director mere hours before. But more to the point, it would be handled via the Equity Deputy, or, in our case, the Non-Equity Deputy, whose very

existence I instituted for this very reason. I found it very difficult to sift through the barrage of complaints to hear the essential concerns I could address, when as a student myself, I was simply trying to execute a production while teaching and working and taking classes amidst a global pandemic, too. At the risk of sounding dramatic, I felt like Atlas shouldering a world of grumbles. Still, I sought to console the actors and assure them they were heard and that their protestations would be addressed.

First, I thanked them for expressing to me their disquietude, though I emphasized the significance of utilizing the NED for this production. I explained how this situation would never be handled in such a manner at a regional theatre, and I certainly would have been more emotionally equipped to handle issues filtered through one person than a swarm of them. Second, I acknowledged the extended rehearsal time for the week, and I stated that it was within my rights as a director, per the DoT Production Handbook, to hold rehearsals for up to four hours outside of tech week. My reasoning for the additional half hour, I continued, was to ensure I could complete planned work for the week. I had no active intentions of rehearsing until 10:30pm each night; however, if by some chance we needed to go a handful of minutes past 10pm to finish something, it seemed appropriate to make that known ahead of time rather in the moment when everyone would be tired. Nevertheless, I conceded that I would return rehearsal times for the week to their usual 7pm to 10pm. Third, I acknowledged their burnout and thanked them for the work they had contributed thus far. I impressed upon them the necessity of getting the bones of the show in a good place before we left for break, primarily because we did not know what the spring semester would hold for us regarding COVID, as evidenced by lost rehearsal time earlier in the fall semester. I was not intending to rehearse much upon our return

in the spring other than to dust off the production and polish it up for tech week. Therefore, it was essential that we take advantage of and push through this final week in the fall.

Finally, I recognized feedback they expressed about me as a director during their protests, which had highlighted a lack of articulating what I wanted in rehearsals and poor time management of those rehearsals. These, I think, were the most useful comments for me to hear that night, though I struggled to separate which qualities were applied to me as a director overall and which were applied to me as a director at this point in time: a graduate student teaching four new courses (to me) while taking twelve hours of classes and directing a musical production during a global pandemic while supervising his managerial team. To me, that explained a great deal of my failure to articulate clearly, though it did not excuse the repercussions. I can reflect on rehearsals where my mind was clear and focused, which often coincided with well-rested nights, calmer daytimes leading up to those rehearsals. I could not reallocate my duties, but I did resolve, to myself and to the cast, to make stronger efforts to be clearer and slower with my communication in future rehearsals. Acutely aware of my contribution to the communication gap within the production process, I was not keen to be complicit to a communication gap in the rehearsal process. The spring semester would be the marker of my held or failed resolution.

Compromises and Complications

Choreography Compromises

As I have stated, collaborating with a music director and a choreographer was a new experience for me. Over the summer, Towery and I had developed a shared vocabulary and system of communication for manifesting the choreographic needs of songs in accordance with my vision. These methods and ideas incubated through late summer and into the start of the fall semester, whereupon in our separate rehearsal spaces, a gap in communication between my

intentions and Towery's executions began to grow. The crack in our collaboration first became evident three days into rehearsal. I had spent the first two days discussing character with my principals, in preparation for the staging we would do that week; meanwhile, Towery commenced with teaching the ensemble choreography for the opening number, "Live Like This." Rehearsals were structured this way in order to maximize time while still complying with social distancing and occupancy capacity for rehearsal spaces.⁴⁷

The advantage of this system was efficient rehearsals, but they came at the cost of a cohesive vision. When I finally joined Towery to integrate the principals into the number with the Nymphs, I saw where Towery had overchoreographed and prematurely introduced the ensemble, denying the piece a dramatic build. The truth is that I had not been clear with my intentions for this number, and in hindsight, I am not sure I could have articulated them outside of the context of staging it. It was the first of many blows we would feel from COVID's restrictions that prevented us from creating in the same space. Had I been present at the initial teaching of the number, I could have guided Towery and helped shape his beautiful movements into the story I was striving to tell. As it was, we had to backpedal our work to find the compromises that would let us merge the staging with the choreography. It was relatively painless, and we navigated it professionally, but I resolved from then on to be as present as possible for future initial choreography.

To be clear, Towery's work far exceeded my expectations. He was able to bring life to the characters – and particularly the Nymphs – in innovative ways I would have never imagined. His training and experience shone brightly through his choreography, and his enthusiasm and positive attitude, coupled with a driving work ethic, were invaluable to me in rehearsals,

⁴⁷ Additionally, Towery was slotted to direct his heightened language project later in the semester, and so it was necessary for him to bring his contributions to our production as early in the process as possible.

particularly on days where my energy for inspiring the cast was lacking. I came to rely on him as an artistic confidant whom I could trust for honest feedback and whose creativity compounded with my own. We catalyzed each other into a perpetual theatrical conflagration. But I was still driving the train, and forks in the choreographic railroad were not always easily navigated. In fact, “The Story of Winnie Foster” nearly came to blows.

The single most important dance piece of the show, “The Story of Winnie Foster” is written to depict Winnie’s life from the moment she chooses to pour the water on the toad up through her timely death. If not carefully crafted and built to convey a dramatic journey that embodies that elaborate life of this show’s protagonist in the span of ten minutes, the musical falls completely flat and suffers an anticlimactic and disappointing ending. Fortunately, Chris Miller included everything necessary for a beautiful “story” in his music, aided by milestones in the score⁴⁸ that guide the director, such as “Courtship Dance,” “Nana Dies,” and “New Baby.”⁹ The motifs scattered throughout the number harken to earlier moments in the play and demand that attention be paid to them.

Over the summer of 2020, Towery and I had talked through “The Story of Winnie Foster,” and I had even drafted a breakdown of the events in the song with their corresponding measures.⁴⁹ However, by late October when it was finally time to set the piece, we found that we were not on the same page, resulting in a terrible (and embarrassing) fight in front of the cast. Towery felt I was not allowing for his interpretation of the number, and I was adamant in executing my vision for the number. We found ourselves vying for jurisdiction of the song rather

⁴⁸ According to Abrams, this work may also be done by the arranger of the music, who collaborates with the composer, director, and choreographer to craft and notate such sequences. The arranger for *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical* is uncredited in the script and score.

⁴⁹ See Appendix G for “The Story of Winnie Foster” Breakdown

than forging a harmonious path through it, a situation exacerbated by the pressure of being in front of the cast and pressed for time.

I called for a rehearsal break. There were no harsh words exchanged, but it was evident we were both powerfully passionate at the moment, and there was no need to waste the cast's time and attention while we negotiated. I believe it was one of the first times in the production that I felt my directorial power was threatened, which in turn provoked me to grip more tightly to it. Towery presented me with the ultimatum to concede to his work or he would need to walk away from the project. In that moment, my ego warred with the wellbeing of my production. The production won out, so I asked Towery to proceed.

That confrontation was one of the scariest moments for me in the entirety of *Tuck*. I was not willing to lose my collaborator, but I was also not willing to lose my vision, because as a director, that's all I have. However, Towery and I managed to move forward with that rehearsal; in fact, we began to play and find interesting moments to include, such as Constable Joe catching Winnie's wedding bouquet and presenting it to Betsy. The following night, our collaboration was even stronger, with both of us feeding creative energy and respect into each other rather than fighting for control. By the end of the week, I was overjoyed with Towery's work, the cast's execution of the piece, and the story we were telling. There were some aspects with which I was still dissatisfied, but they were pawn sacrifices for the checkmate of a truly touching choreographed narrative. In the heat of the moment, everything seems immediate, urgent, and irrevocable. But I suppose the lesson I take away from this is that sometimes to gain, you have to give.

COVID Complications

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, the month of October in 2020 saw a 238% rise in cases for Jackson County, capping out at 201 cases per 100,000 people.¹⁰ SIUC was not spared the impact of this exponential increase.

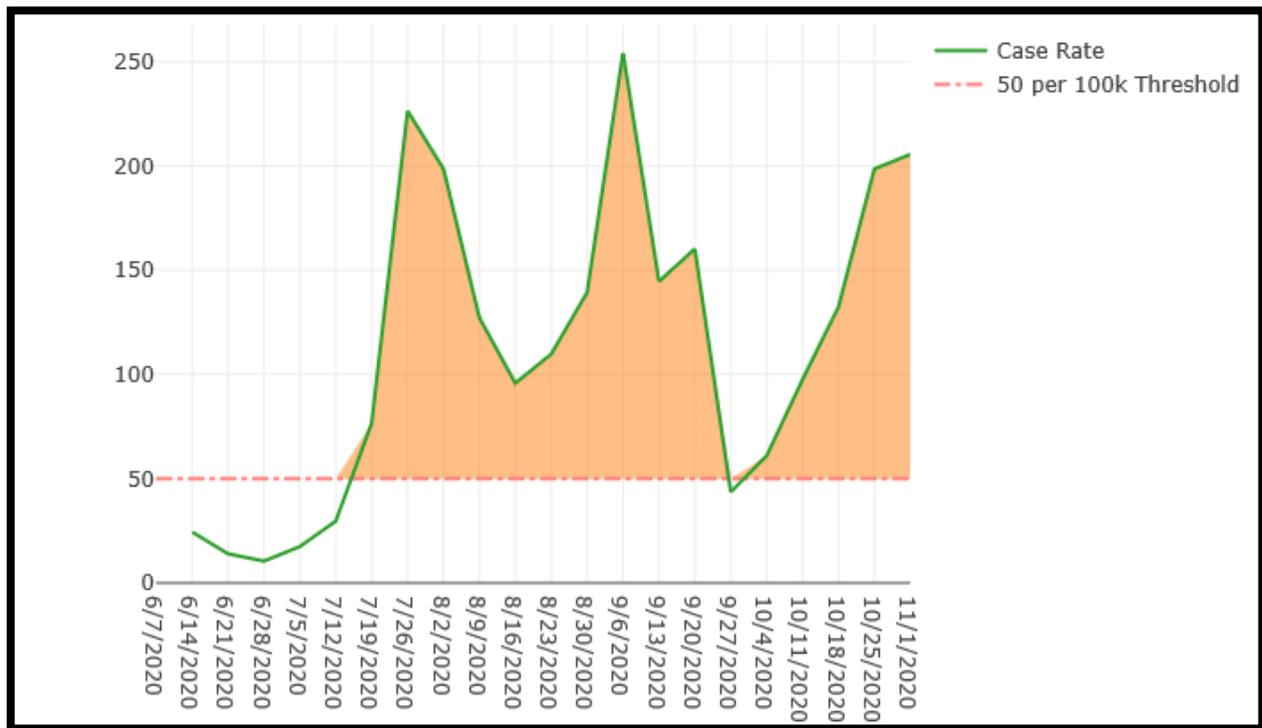


Figure 6-3. Jackson County Covid-19 Cases June through October

Throughout the rehearsal process, many company members were absent from various rehearsals, responsibly opting to get tested for COVID and then self-quarantine if they felt any ill symptoms. Despite our generous rehearsal plan (totaling nine weeks for the fall semester), the holes created by these absences inhibited cohesive rehearsal work. Moreover, many of the actors lived together or frequented proximity with one another, inciting a cascade of contact exposures: if one actor potentially contracted COVID, up to ten could easily have been affected by close contact. This was, indeed, what transpired during the middle of our seventh week of rehearsal in

early November. Although no cast member actually contracted COVID, the potential for exposure caused by one ill castmate created a wildfire of actor callouts as a precaution.

When the flames had died down, we realized only two cast members were unaffected by the potential outbreak: Constable Joe and his understudy in the ensemble. In an attempt to salvage any worthwhile scraps of rehearsal, Towery and I agreed to call them both in order to work through “You Can’t Trust A Man,” which I had musically staged, but I desired Towery’s expertise for polishing. An intimate but effective rehearsal, it was one of my strongest experiences with Towery in this production; we were very clearly on the same page and thusly jived. However, we could not justify cleaning that number for three days of rehearsal, and as a result, we were compelled to cancel the rest of the week and hope recoveries and negative test results would enable us to resume rehearsals the following week.

One of the largest blows from COVID, however, even after adjusting our game plan for the production, was a phone call from Graham Luker, our Man in the Yellow Suit. Luker had originally been scheduled to come to Carbondale during our final week of fall rehearsals for a put-in⁵⁰ before students left for winter break. However, Luker expressed concerns for his fall visit, owing to the spike in cases, in tandem with the travel restrictions instituted by New York City⁵¹. After hearing his explanation, I reasoned that it was indeed a heightened risk for him to visit Carbondale at this time, and we agreed that inviting him earlier in the spring would allow time for a proper put-in and pose fewer complications for risk and travel. My overall plan for the

⁵⁰ A *put-in* is a rehearsal or series of rehearsals where an incoming actor, typically a replacement, rehearses with stage management to receive their staging for scenes and often will have set rehearsals with the other actors to acquaint themselves with traffic and positioning on stage.

⁵¹ According to the New York State “Covid-19 Travel Advisory,” which went into effect on November 4, 2020, persons traveling outside the contiguous state area for more than twenty-four hours are required to take a COVID test three days prior to their return to New York, and, if the test is negative, also quarantine for three days upon their arrival to New York, to be followed by second test which must test negative in order to be released from quarantine (New York State).

fall semester would not be fulfilled, but a new plan was formed for the spring, and the bones of the show were set.

Conclusion

We could not live like this forever. By the end of the third week in November, we all eagerly and graciously welcomed time away from *Tuck Everlasting*. I encouraged the cast to step away from the production until the start of the new year (after which they should resume reviewing lines and videos of choreography). I, myself, intended to heed Kidd's advice to me, to take a break from working on the production and let it all digest; then, at some point, pick up the script and reread it for pleasure, and then read it to re-identify the major conflict in each scene, along with the single most important line of each scene. Other than that, I took a page out of God's book: I stepped back to appreciate my work, and I rested.

¹ "Bonding." *Lansinoh*. <https://lansinoh.co.uk/bonding/>.

² Feldman, Ruth. "Oxytocin and Social Affiliation in Humans." *Hormones and Behavior*, vol. 61, no. 3, Mar. 2012, 383. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yhbeh.2012.01.008>.

³ *Tuck Everlasting Production Meetings*. Production Meeting #1.

⁴ Mason, Marshall W. *Creating Life on Stage: A Director's Approach to Working with Actors*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007) 130.

⁵ Mason 131.

⁶ Miller, Chris, et al. *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. (New York: Samuel French, 2017) 25.

⁷ Ball, William. *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing*. (Hollywood: Drama Publishers, 1984) 17.

⁸ A Chicago Theatre Community. "Chicago Theatre Standards Pilot Project." *#NotInOurHouse*, 2021, <https://www.notinourhouse.org/chicago-theatre-standards-pilot-project/>. 8.

⁹ Miller, Chris, and Nathan Tysen. *Tuck Everlasting: Piano/Conductor Score*. (Samuel French, 2016) 201, 204-5.

¹⁰ Illinois Department of Public Health. “Jackson County Detailed Metrics & School Metrics.” *Illinois Department of Public Health*, 6 Nov. 2020, <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/countyschool?county=Jackson>.

CHAPTER 7

EV'RYTHING'S NOT GOLDEN:

SPRING SEMESTER AND TECHNICAL REHEARSALS

It seemed the world collectively rejoiced to see the backside of 2020 and to welcome the prospective embrace of 2021. For our production of *Tuck Everlasting*, it meant a return to production meetings and rehearsals for long-awaited yet rapidly-approaching performances. It was like coming back to a summer home that had been secured for the winter months, and now the process of sorting through what had been preserved and decayed had begun.

A Tree Gap in Communication

“Trunk”ulent Troubles

The Tree had been ready for some time now. The Tree had been carefully built to accommodate the climbing needs of Winnie, Jesse, and the Tree Nymph. The Tree had even been used in rehearsals a handful of time. Barely a week into February, mere weeks before performances, I was approached by Mohlman with concerns about actor safety: he did not know that the Tree Nymph would be barefoot for the production, and the Tree was not built to be barefoot safe. I was dumbfounded by this lapse in communication. At our first production meeting of the fall semester – way back in August – it had been clearly established that the Nymphs would be barefoot and the stage and scenery would need to be barefoot safe.¹ Rigdon's final renderings depicted the Nymphs as barefoot:

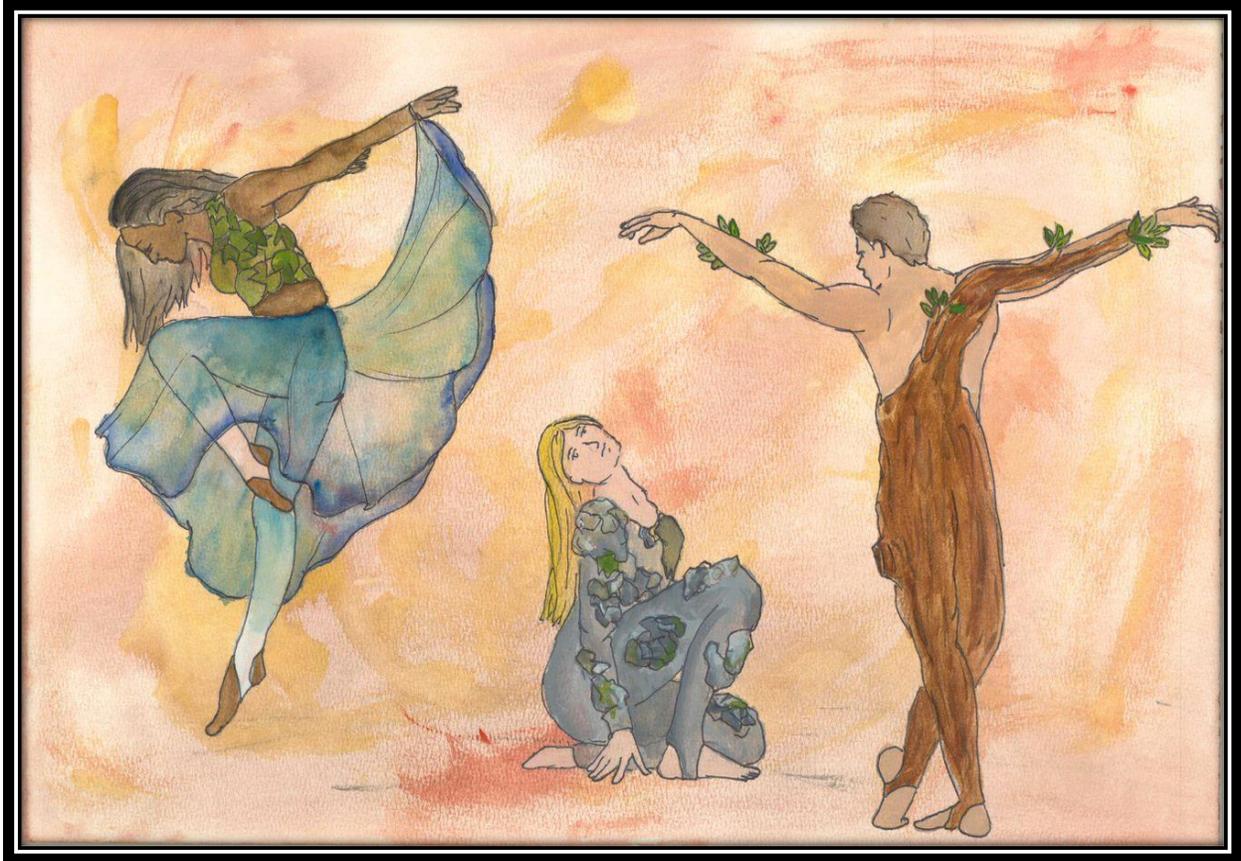


Figure 7-1. Nymph Final Costume Rendering (Rendered by Jessica Rigdon)

I could not believe this had been overlooked. Mohlman assured me that the stage had been planned to be barefoot safe, but explained that the Tree was not built with that safety in mind and at this point in the process with the current budget, it would not be possible to amend that. Fagerholm, his supervisor, insisted that although the production team knew that the Tree Nymph would be barefoot and that the Tree Nymph would be climbing the tree, it should never have been assumed that the Tree would be constructed to be barefoot safe without discussing it. Although I did not understand how such a logical conclusion could have been ignored, arguing or assigning blame for the gap in communication was a moot point: what mattered now was resolving the issue. As there was only one production meeting left in the process – and it would not be for another week – I hastily composed an e-mail to Mohlman, Rigdon, and Towery

(copying their supervisors) explaining the predicament so as to get everyone on the same page in order to problem solve. A solution was proposed to fit the Nymphs with jazz shoes, assuming there was budget to do so, and as it turned out that there was, the priority became getting the jazz shoes for the Nymphs so that they could get comfortable performing the show in them before performances. All in all, the solution was simple, and I confess that I was perhaps more alarmed at the dropped communication itself than its consequence, especially since it was not the only dropped communication we discovered in the spring.

“Shawl” shank Redemption

Early in the fall production process, when I was still conceiving connector options, I advocated for the shawl in Rigdon’s design for Mae to be removable and functional. Rendered as being tied around her waist, I envisioned this to provide Mae with stage business and a means to connect to other characters. This discovery led Rigdon and me to invest in paisley pashmina shawls for all of the women in “My Most Beautiful Day,” with the hope to integrate them into the courtship choreography. In one of our final rehearsals of the fall semester, it was revealed that costumes had made these shawls available to us for rehearsals some time ago. We had indeed seen some shawls among the costume pieces but had assumed they were for Mae, as that was a primary accessory for her costume. Towery and I agreed to revisit the shawls in the spring semester when rehearsals resumed.

True to our intention, during our first rehearsal of 2021, Towery worked with the dancers in “My Most Beautiful Day” to incorporate the shawls in some fashion. However, by the end of rehearsal, he expressed concern that the action of untying the shawls from around the waist would prove too complicated to maintain the graceful movements thus far achieved. I found myself embarrassingly caught between my designer, with whom I had collaborated to enhance

her dancer designs by adding shawls for the sake of serving my practical purposes within the production, and moreover encouraged her to invest part of her budget into these accessories, and my choreographer, whom I trusted wholeheartedly with preserving a cohesive aesthetic for the piece.

What saved us all from this communication blunder was actually the happy accident of another miscommunication: the shawls were never intended to be tied around the waist. Rigdon's renderings for the Memory Dancers depicted a sash-like item around the waist, and since we knew Mae often wore her shawl around her waist, the assumption was that the other shawls were likewise adorned. *Sashes*. The cinching accessories were, in fact, sashes, and the shawls had never made it into any of the renderings or fitting photos. Though relieved to have cleared up the confusion, we still faced a fashion v. function dilemma, as the shawls, now worn loosely around the shoulders, true to Neoclassical attire, were wont to flying off the dancers amidst the twirling choreography. It seemed unlikely they would enhance the choreography, being incorporated this late in the process, but they still held potential to add aesthetic to Rigdon's design, if they could be secured. Fortunately, ever the problem-solvers, Rigdon and Pivovarnik added elastic loops which would secure the garments to the dancers' biceps, and thus, the shawls for "My Most Beautiful Day" were redeemed. But, not to be outdone, Lighting had a communication blunder, as well.

Short-Sighted, Short-Circuit

Lighting really does get the short end of the stick by being highly theoretical until the actors are onstage for cue-to-cue.⁵² A lighting designer, director, and stage manager can expedite

⁵² *Cue-to-cue* is a rehearsal, typically held over the course of a day, devoted to adjusting the look and timing of cues for lighting, automation, sound, fly rails, etc.

this process with a paper tech,⁵³ or, at the very least, discussing where in the show specific cues might occur. The advantage of contemporary technology has enabled lighting designers to more effectively and precisely cue shows by video recording a run through from a rehearsal and then scrolling through the video at their leisure. Musicals have the added advantage, assuming all parties can read music, of containing a musical score where crucial lighting moments can be specifically noted by measure. Based off of my own experience stage managing SIUC's production of *Sunday in the Park with George*, where the majority of lighting and projection cues were called in tandem with musical motifs, I assumed⁵⁴ that such practices were common procedure. They certainly are not.

At Crowder's request, I arranged a meeting with him and one of his assistant lighting designers, Jorrey Calvo, to work through "The Story of Winnie Foster" cue by cue, as he rightly anticipated it being one of the cue-heaviest numbers. In fact, given that the entire piece is danced, uninterrupted for ten minutes, it seemed most sensible to me that the song be cued from the score – as I mentioned in Chapter 6, the composer had already provided the necessary clues in the score about noteworthy moments. However, as we began to meet, Crowder and Calvo insisted on using the rehearsal footage of the piece and referring to timestamps. I complied with their preference, but after a while it became difficult to communicate the significant changes or events. Didn't they hear the change in music? Didn't they see the accompanying action that manifested? No? Timestamps were proving to lack the specificity we needed. I again suggested

⁵³ A *paper tech* is a meeting of the director, designers, and stage manager for the purposes of defining and recording the technical cues that will occur during the production (Ionazzi 105).

⁵⁴ It should be observed that in each of the aforementioned incidents of miscommunication, I associate myself with the word *assumption*, and that, therefore, is my takeaway from these complications: assumption will yield a gap in communication.

using the score, if nothing else because the ShowReady app displayed both the measure number and a timestamp as the track played.

As it transpired, Crowder and Calvo did not know about ShowReady; they did not know that we had had access to the tracks for the show this entire time, to which they could have been cueing in preparation for cue-to-cue, secure in the knowledge that tracks are always consistent with their timing, and therefore any number of cues could be timed to auto-follow throughout the tracks. Another gap in communication. At this point I had come to realize there was no point in assigning blame for such a lapse. The only thing to do was move forward, and with only a few days before cue-to-cue, Lighting suddenly found itself armed with a handy new tool.

Rehearsals (Reprise)

I worried about the repercussions of not rehearsing in the new year until February. As much as we had drilled and cleaned and set during the fall semester, I couldn't help wondering what shape the show would be in upon our return. As it so happened, it wasn't too shabby at all. In fact, I was so pleased with how good the show ran our first week back that I elected to cancel rehearsals for the upcoming Monday and Tuesday. We were reaping the rewards of our hard work in the fall semester. I was pleased with how the cast was doing, I knew I could dust off and clean what I needed to in the time allotted, and I certainly did not want to burn them out so close to performances. Icarus was haughtily enjoying the rise of his production on the thermals of strong organization and determination. And then that accursed sun.

Actor Grievances Again

The second week of February brought the worst winter weather I'd seen in my three years in Carbondale. According to *The Southern Illinoisan*, some areas in southern Illinois saw totals of ten inches of snow accumulation.² Classes were cancelled for that Wednesday and

Thursday, including online classes, and by extension, my rehearsals. Naturally, this misfortune of inclement weather coincided with the arrival of Graham Luker, at last in town to be integrated into rehearsals, only to find there were no rehearsals being held. Fortunately, the weather cleared up enough for campus to open and allow us the opportunity to rehearse that Friday. But the good fortune ended there; the following Monday and Tuesday were again lost due to inclement weather.

I confess, I regretted my gesture of giving the cast two nights off, which were immediately followed by nearly a week off because of the snow. Yes, we had been in a good place, but we had been in a good place when there were still two weeks before cue-to-cue. I suddenly found myself rapidly reprioritizing, which included safely and cleanly inserting Luker into the show and working with set pieces in scene transitions to circumvent any catastrophes over the upcoming weekend. *Crew View*⁵⁵ was scheduled for Thursday, and I had originally intended to give Friday off for everyone to rest before the daunting cue-to-cue weekend. I unfortunately needed to repossess that evening, and moreover I invoked a Hail Mary four-hour rehearsal. Cue the break of the camel's back.

Allison Shore, who had assumed the role of production stage manager, following the graduation of Alex Brue, was bombarded with e-mails from actors upset by this news. Mainly seniors, students were citing the Production Handbook, which states that actors must have a "12-[hour] rest period between calls."³ As the official actor call time for cue-to-cue the following morning was 9am, by this protocol, I could not rehearse the cast any later than 9pm that evening. As the stage management supervisor, trying to guide and console my unnerved pupil, I asked Shore to delay responding until I had spoken with Fagerholm, who in turn contacted Chair

⁵⁵ *Crew View* is a run of the show where that students involved with the backstage operations of the production can enjoy the production as audience members before they assume their responsibilities during tech week.

Ojewuyi. Both professors confirmed that due to the extenuating circumstances brought on by the weather, coupled with the impending cue-to-cue weekend, I was within my rights to call a four-hour rehearsal. Armed with this knowledge, I instructed Shore to inform the students of the administrative approval to conduct my intended rehearsal schedule. However, as a measure of good faith to show that I heard their concerns, I also asked Shore to e-mail an adjusted daily call that compromised their demands by rehearsing 7pm-10pm instead of the original 11pm.

A couple of hours later I received a phone call from an actor: the Non-Equity Deputy for the cast. Pleased that they had at least gone through the proper channels, I was inclined to listen to the concerns of the cast regarding my revised rehearsal plan. Per the NED, some cast members felt disrespected and unappreciated by my dismissal of the Handbook and were adamant that they would not arrive to the follow morning's cue-to-cue any earlier than a full twelve-hour rest period between the end of the previous night's rehearsal. The compromise had not been accepted. This was truly a bind, as there was music, choreography, and scenic work that all needed to be rehearsed and limited time left before we began dress rehearsals. I weighed options with the NED, with Abrams, and with Towery, but ultimately received the same response: it was my decision and I needed to make it. So, I did.

I addressed the full cast at the start of rehearsal. I expressed my disappointment with them, not to guilt them but to honestly convey my very real and personal hurt that after listening to them in the fall semester when they were stressed and in need of a compromised rehearsal schedule, I accommodated them. And now, when weather had thrown us a curve ball and I asked for two hours, and then offered only one hour, I was denied like courtesy. If truth be told, I knew I wasn't going to overhaul the production with those two hours. In fact, it was unlikely I was ever going to work all the way to 11pm. But much like the fall semester, I needed the security of

knowing that I could work that late. I caved to the demands of the cast because when I weighed the options, I was more willing to sacrifice a polished show than to enter tech week with a mutinous cast.

But something broke between me and the actors that night. I felt betrayed. And though we finished out the rehearsal at 9pm as promised, I couldn't shake the feeling of that rift. The trust between director and actor was fractured, and as we left the McLeod to rest for tech weekend, I wasn't quite sure it was destined to mend.

Tech Week

Q2Q

I can't recall having ever been a part of cue-to-cue where I had any artistic input. The shows I've previously directed have either not warranted a true cue-to-cue, and the productions with cue-to-cue that I have attended have not warranted my artistic contribution. Even as an assistant director my cohesive aesthetic was not the focus. Now it was, and I anxiously embraced my role in synthesizing the assorted production elements.

Time management for cue-to-cue is an art. It's difficult to anticipate how long a show will take to cue, and sometimes impossible to restrain various personalities when time is running low and tensions are running high. Keenly aware of our need to maximize efficiency, Professor Mark Varns, Resident Lighting Designer for the DoT, advised me to spend today focusing on the location and timing of lighting cues rather than the look of them. In other words, he encouraged me to invest more attention in ensuring I had sufficient cues in each scene and song so that Crowder could create them and Shore could note them in her promptbook; the looks of the cues themselves could be adjusted later.

Bearing this in mind, I strove to concentrate on whether the cues were landing where they were most beneficial to emphasize or highlight certain moments, or if they were present at all. This became a challenge, I found, as Shore, being a new production stage manager, was experiencing her first time calling cues for a musical.⁵⁶ I struggled to discern which cues were placed at the wrong times as opposed to which cues were being called at the wrong times, or were nonexistent. We were fortunate to have Alex Brue back for the weekend to mentor Shore through cue-to-cue; I certainly was in no headspace to wear my stage management supervisor hat while also directing. Nevertheless, by our lunch break at noon, we had barely delved into Act I.

Revived by the break, Shore seemed more comfortable calling cues and the play had progressed beyond moments that demanded a denser, congested amount of cueing, as tends to happen with opening numbers, show stoppers, etc. As a result, I was able to give more attention to the look of lighting cues and either take notes to give Crowder later or tell him in the moment when possible. I also tried to wrap my mind around the automation Mohlman had installed for the portal trees onstage.



Figure 7-2. Automation Trees (Rendered by Logan Reagan)

⁵⁶ Musicals tend to be cue-heavy shows, owing to the spectacle used to elevate the scenes and songs. Whereas a non-musical may have 200 to 400 lighting cues, a musical may have upwards of 600 to 800+ lighting cues. Moreover, lighting cues in musical numbers tend to be called in a rapid sequence, and coupled with the cues of other production elements, can be overwhelming to a novice stage manager.

A great deal of the scenic budget was devoted to the use of automation. The Technical Director program has a great affinity for engaging with automation and robotics, and they excel at aiming to keep up with the high-tech breakthroughs of the industry. However, I confess I never gave much thought to automation once the revolve was cut. Apparently, automation was installed so that the portal trees could move on and offstage to suggest varied scenic environments. Though I was vaguely aware of the portal trees, in as far as how they encroached my playing space, my attention had been focused on the Tree and other set pieces with which the actors directly interacted. Now, suddenly, Mohlman and Fagerholm were trying to enlighten me to all the ways I could utilize the automated trees, and to be honest, I didn't care. A wiser and more creative artist would have taken the time to explore how they might enhance his story, but the trees were never on my radar as a tool for dramatic storytelling and I frankly didn't have the mental capacity to engage with them then, so I opted for them to move out when we weren't in Treegap Wood and move in when we were. Unfortunately, even that vision proved to be a struggle to execute.

Shore was not able to have a paper tech prior to cue-to-cue. Overcommitted to a slew of other obligations, she prepared her promptbook as best she could from Crowder's lighting cue sheet, but when I glanced at her book under the guise of stage management supervisor, I found it did not resemble the organization we discussed for a cue calling script. I believe that being underprepared, underexperienced, and ultimately overwhelmed contributed to the breakdown that ensued the following evening when we resumed cue-to-cue.

Thirty minutes past what should have been the continuation of our cue-to-cue, I ventured to the vending machine for a snack, encountered a red-eyed Shore, and promptly asked her to join me in one of the dressing rooms. In the privacy of the space she took time to compose

herself while I sat patiently and distantly in a corner. She knew I was sporting my invisible stage management supervisor hat and at her own pace divulged insecurities about calling the show, anxiety about letting people down, and an overarching feeling of distress and inadequacy for this job – and, of course, pressure to get it together because people were waiting. “Let them wait,” I told her. “It’s still my show, and we will resume when I’m ready.” I impressed upon her that as vital as she was to the show, the production could keep rolling on without her, not to threaten or belittle her, but to emphasize that no one person should feel they bear the burden for the entirety of the production. Except maybe the director.

So, I told her to take her time and that she was not to come out of the dressing room until she felt ready. I returned to the McLeod, informed Brue and Fagerholm of the situation and insisted she be left to her own devices for at least ten or so minutes. And then I grabbed the Voice of God,⁵⁷ slipped on a headset, and proceeded to run cue-to-cue for my own show. I can’t recall how much time passed. What I can recall is the pride I felt at being able to call cues for my production while noting necessary adjustments to Crowder – a perfect marriage of my administrative and artistic minds, and a shining reminder that I knew my show well enough to know where cues needed to fall. Some time later, never mind how much, Shore returned and reclaimed her position as production stage manager, and I resumed full devotion of mental capacity to artistry.

Conclusion

Looking back, I think I would have done anything for my production. To some extent, I think I did that, sacrificing where it was necessary for the good of the production. However, in the Percy Jackson book *The Last Olympian*, the goddess Hestia says, “Sometimes the hardest

⁵⁷ The *Voice of God* is...

power to master is the power of yielding.”⁴ For a director, at least for this director, I think the hardest power is yielding the production to the collaborators who will now take it to its final incarnation: performance.

¹ *Tuck Everlasting Production Meetings*. Production Meeting #1.

² Halstead, Marilyn. “Southern Illinois Sees Snow Totals of 10 Inches in Some Areas.” *The Southern Illinoisan*, 16 Feb. 2021, https://thesouthern.com/news/local/southern-illinois-sees-snow-totals-of-10-inches-in-some-areas/article_ef28d654-028f-5fc1-a00a-bb3a958cddcf.html.

³ Southern Illinois University at Carbondale Department of Theater. *Performance & Production Guidelines*. https://cola.siu.edu/theater/_common/documents/handbook/production-handbook.pdf. 3.

⁴ Riordan, Rick. *The Last Olympian*. (New York: Hyperion Books, 2009) 73.

POST-PRODUCTION

CHAPTER 8

ROWING, GROWING, CHANGING, AND MOVING ON:

PERFORMANCES AND REFLECTION

The palpable energy conjured by the excitement of the opening night of a show is incomparable to anything else. Whatever woes may have befallen the cast, crew, and creative/production teams during tech week are washed away as the final member of the production is welcomed into the fold: the audience. The audience completes the quartet of performer, space, and idea, which Dr. Anne Fletcher suggests comprise theatre.¹ They are the missing scene partner, present yet protected by the fourth wall,⁵⁸ and they ignite the fuse that feeds the energy that has built up to create the conflagration of human experience that is live theatre.

At least, they are supposed to do that.

Performances

All Tuckered Out

Because of the pandemic, we faced obvious restrictions to the seating capacity of the McLeod Theater. We were limited to fifty people or fewer in the space, and this included the cast and crew. Although we knew this well in advance, it did not soften the blow that comes from seeing a theater designed to seat nearly five hundred spectators sparsely filled with barely twenty-five. The cast had long since suffered burnout from such a drawn-out production process. They were disheartened that their friends and families would be unable to see their hard work,

⁵⁸ The *fourth wall* refers to the imaginary barrier between the performers on stage and the audience. The audience appears to be viewing the action of the play through the missing or “fourth wall” of the set.

and as they entered dress rehearsals, they were further demoralized from the announcement that there would be no archival recording.⁵⁹ As many students put it, “What are we even doing it for?”. We did it because we are artists and because we are practicing the skills that are pertinent to our craft and will one day again be viable to our industry.

There were no opening night speeches. There were few, if any opening night gifts. One might liken the arrival of opening night to a wet firework, weakly sputtering but not a Disney-fied incendiary extravaganza. Personally, I can only compare it to what I imagine it is to give birth – after thirteen months of incubation. There is joy, there is pride, but mostly there is an exhale of relief. You have done all you can; now go and live, child.

Sporting a Spectator Hat

What a terribly trying yet useful experience it is to set aside the director’s impulse to shape the life onstage! If ever there were a mark of relinquishing control, it is to be a spectator of one’s own production. Professionally-speaking, once a show opens it becomes the stage manager’s show. She is responsible for maintaining it according to the integrity of the director’s vision. But it is also the actors’ show; it is the crew’s show; and it is the audience’s show, as each night is unique by the work of those three. So, as a spectator, I sat back and played my part, which is to say, I critiqued the production just as I would any other show I would attend.

How odd that I could hear the Spring but not see it. Lo and behold, the fountain pump that operated the Spring in the Tree was not working at all; though, thankfully, it was supplemented by a sound effect of gentle trickling water. The overall preshow ambience evoked a muted version of what I had envisioned, but it sufficed. And by golly! They finally covered the “T” on the Tree! Oh, dear – they covered the “T” on the Tree. Scenic had made some final

⁵⁹ Due to concerns of licensing, and potential leaked footage, the administration elected to forgo a recording of *Tuck Everlasting* for the department archives.

cosmetic adjustments, but no one thought to tell the director, stage management, or the actors. How did that knot covering the “T” come off? Did Jesse know how remove it, or when? I stirred with the first chord of the overture. Too late now. It had begun.

I attended both performances of our production of *Tuck Everlasting*. I enjoyed myself both times. But that is not to say any flaws escaped my eye. I was acutely aware of line changes and pitch problems. I celebrated both renditions of “Top of the World,” but I cringed during the performance that a paper leaf fluttered off the Tree Branch and remained clearly visible downstage left for three scenes! I kept waiting for someone – anyone – to discretely pick it up and pocket it. Or even not so discretely. I silently begged Hugo, tracking clues with his magnifying glass during “Hugo’s First Case” to acknowledge the leaf and stick it in his bag. No. not even during the reprise. Not until Act I, Scene 7 did Mae find a reason to grab and discard the scenic eyesore. And yes, Constable Joe did leave the Foster Manor door wide open so that the cyclorama⁶⁰ shone brightly through the doorway during “You Can’t Trust A Man.” But “The Story of Winnie Foster” still made me misty, and I applauded as loudly as the best of them when the actors came out for their bows.

No, I have to say that throughout everything, what I noticed most during the performances was the lighting, or more accurately, the darkness. I remain deeply troubled by how the lighting seemed to not quite grasp the essence of the drama in this play and consequently did not support it. Of course, as I mentioned during tech week, it was difficult to separate out what was the lighting design and what was the stage manager’s cue-calling. My frustrations point back to my observations in Chapter 5 that the designers rarely took an opportunity to come to rehearsals and understand the story we were telling. Moreover, given that

⁶⁰ The *cyclorama* is the hard wall or curtain that creates a background for the stage and is often used in lighting design as a surface for projecting colors.

rehearsal recordings of both acts were available on the production's shared cloud drive, I question how such crucial moments could have been missed. I account for the inclement weather, of course, but it seems to me there were an abundance of missed opportunities to elevate the production through lighting.

I concede a major point. In Chapter 5, I also note how our need to add the apron for staging was accepted by Crowder but would still have ramifications. As seen in Figure 8-1,



Figure 8-1. Cool Front Lighting for Tuck Everlasting (Rendered by Henry Crowder)

Crowder's original zone lighting plan was designed to provide maximum coverage to the stage areas upstage of the proscenium with just a hint of coverage, supplemented with spotlights for action downstage of the proscenium. The decision to add the apron was made in mid-November, allowing Crowder adequate time to scheme how he could address the change but an inadequate amount of time (and resources) to do much more than cannibalize his initial design and reallocate instruments to expand coverage. I accept the fault of being short-sighted and

disregarding the apron until late in the production process; nevertheless, I wish Crowder had given more thought to the mood, focus, and drama of the story being told onstage.

Closing night felt much like its brother Opening: anticlimactic. Yes, there was pride, but even more than a sense of accomplishment, of achievement, there was an exhale of relief. *Tuck* truly did feel everlasting, but ended, and it was time to start rowing, growing, and moving on.

Reflection and Self-Evaluation

There was no litmus test for this production. One of the reasons I had desired to direct a mainstage production was so I could gauge my directing skills accumulated throughout graduate school alongside the added variables of designer collaboration and proscenium staging. The unprecedented additional variable of directing a musical amidst a global pandemic completely skewed my experiment. Although my heightened language project, *Glory Days*, had been executed at the beginning of COVID-19, no one at our university had ever directed a staged theatrical production under the restrictions and complications of an epidemic. Nevertheless, having passed through the fire, I take with me some observations of my growth and shortcomings from this production.

It took me some time to recognize my fingerprints on *Tuck Everlasting*. I did not often enough take time to stop and appreciate my hand in the mounting of this musical. The Nymphs, for example, were purely a device of my own imagination, and yet I now cannot imagine *Tuck Everlasting* without them. The Nymphs added a dynamic to the storytelling by justifying the subtle magic in the world of the play. I recall sitting in Professor Ojewuyi's office and nervously pitching the idea of adding nature spirits to this play, seeking some affirmation that I was not crazy for considering such a radical idea. He did, indeed, affirm the creative choice, although he

cautioned me to use them sparingly, and I confess that I incorporated them beyond that, but I think to a greater effect.

I acknowledge the clever artistry in using the various Connectors, born purely from the joking image of actors measuring their six-foot social distance with a length of rope. And this, over the course of the rehearsal process, snowballed into a myriad of manifestations for Connectors: Winnie and Jesse's Rope, Mae's shawl, Angus' fishing pole, Hugo's Winnie Ribbon, Constable Joe's billy club, Nana's fan, MIYS's cane, Mae's engagement sash, and many more subtle props. I believe the actors learned how to endow these objects so they became extensions of their characters that allowed the actors moments of intimacy with their scene partners. They enabled socially distanced staging with artistry and tied everything together, quite literally, into a cohesive world. I wish I had spent more time helping the actors understand how to imbue their energy into the objects – what it means for an object to hold tension or lack it; however, overall, I strongly believe they were effective instruments for my production.

I stand by my casting. Every actor in our cast fulfilled their role in our production excellently. Despite the hardships of bringing in a guest artist, I remain adamant that Graham Luker was the best choice for Man in the Yellow Suit, and I believe the student performers benefited from seeing a professional actor flourish on stage. I regret that my inclination for understudies became a moot point, both for the students who received said status and for the health of the production. I do still firmly believe that understudies are a useful policy and necessary training for students aiming to enter the theatre industry. They are a humbling opportunity to learn and develop a role while observing other actors at work and prepare an actor to be ready a moment's notice to jump in for a rehearsal or performance. That being said, academic theatre is often so congested with too many projects and too few students that

instituting understudies in the best of circumstances is challenging. I had foolishly assumed that the lack of performance opportunities resulting from the pandemic would allow more students to be involved with *Tuck*, if only as understudies, but I neglected to account for the limitations implemented by rehearsal capacity restrictions and the overlap of actors in one role understudying for another. In short, my intentions for utilizing understudies was good, but the execution of those intentions was poor.

Concerning casting in another vein, I cannot dismiss an unsettling feeling regarding my Nymphs. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, I cast our auditioning students according to their talents, and our three best dancers found themselves portraying these unscripted nature spirits, per my concept. And yet, our Nymph casting yielded a Black woman, an Asian woman, and White woman – the trifecta of cliché “inclusive” casting. These Nymphs were not intended to be objects, and yet I wrestled with how they might be received – by both the actors and audience – as insensitive stereotypes, thoughtlessly confined to primal tropes while supporting the heroic narrative of characters played by White actors. The Nymphs were devised to be movement-driven characters whose actions, unseen by the corporeal world, influenced the plot through the subtle manipulation of items (Toad and Ribbons) and events (“Top of the World” Branch Unit and “Story of Winnie Foster”). I believe, because of my focus on other aspects of the play, coupled with a long production process, that my Nymph actors came to feel dehumanized and depicted as scenery shifters, set pieces, and props, rather than their intended active status, and I regret how failing on my part may have contributed to the oppression of these marginalized students. Looking back, I see no other way casting might have played out, although I had hoped to include a male actor as a Nymph, rather than stigmatize women as objects of nature. However, I do now see where I could have done a better job as a director acknowledging the pain my

casting might bring and taking actions to mitigate those concerns throughout the process to help the Nymphs believe their roles as active participants in the storytelling and not just stagnant objects.

I was incredibly proud of the “Top of the World” sequence; possibly, it was my favorite part of the production. This pride stems from how hard I fought to obtain a climbable tree that would promote the dramatic action of the scene and song. As I argued, the music of the song supports a driving action of moving forward or upward, and it was necessary for the actors to manifest that in some capacity. I feel that finally adding the climbing apparatuses to the back of the tree allowed the characters to undertake a journey. Furthermore, the Branch Unit enabled the journey to surpass the mundane realm of concrete action and sweep the audience into a suspension of disbelief, allowing the characters to continue the action of climbing and exploring on a singular, albeit moving, unit. I believe my orchestration of musical staging, utilizing the Nymphs to manipulate the Branch Unit, facilitated a clear dramatic arc for the characters that wisely climaxed into a down centerstage picture of Winnie and Jesse hoisting their Rope Connector high to signify their platonic bond forged from the climb. And, frankly, the actors’ singing sounded amazing, to boot.

Conversely, a scene that never quite met my expectations was the top of Act II, “Ev’rything’s Golden.” I had envisioned this scene and number as a bawdy rags-to-riches fantasy, in which the Man in the Yellow Suit stirs the Fair folk up into a frenzied reverie of luxury and leisure. The largest reason this aspiration did not come to pass was due to my lack of vision, although I am unsure whether I mean my lack of a clearly imagined vision or a clearly articulated vision; perhaps a mixture of the two. I knew roughly what I wanted, but too often I found myself more focused on what I considered to be more crucial components of the

production – the Treegap set design, the principals’ acting, the choreography for “The Story of Winnie Foster,” the management of the play as a whole – to give as much attention to what was happening for that first scene in Act II. Contributing to what became a cyclical problem was an uncertainty of what design elements were at my disposal for that scene. Reagan and I both agreed that the setting was the breakdown of the Fair as it prepared to move on to its next town; however, with a depleted budget and time/labor reallocated to more urgent areas, this scene was put on the back burner. I was unsure which pieces were onstage, which pieces could be onstage, and which pieces needed to be onstage.

Complicit to this issue, I encouraged Towery to choreograph and set the piece while I tackled staging for other scenes, in the interest of efficient working but at the cost of a cohesive storyline. I was, therefore, not present to guide Towery through my intention for the scene, and he, understandably, crafted the number as he saw fit. The result was a well-choreographed and well-rehearsed, but otherwise bland and uninteresting number that lacked the dramatic build necessary to catapult MIYS out of the Fair and into his blackmailing shenaniganry at the Fosters’.

Conclusion

From this thesis production I learned that I possess immense imagination that I can use to breathe life into fossilized text. What I have continued to doubt and question, even long before graduate school, “Am I enough? Am I creative enough? Can I do this? Can I make this good?” was answered and refuted by my production of *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. My question is now, “What if?” and I let it play out from there. I know that I will continue to negotiate my artistic brain with my management brain, but I am convinced that is not such a bad thing, and in time, the two may even learn to coexist. And, of course, I can now take pride in the claim that as

of this writing, I am the only person at Southern Illinois University Carbondale who has directed not one, but two musical productions during a global pandemic. And if the need ever arises, I can do it again.

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APPENDIX A

DIRECTORIAL BREAKDOWN OF BEATS

Beat	Page	Scene	Name	Beginning Line/Action
1	7	I.1a	Where There's Water There's Life	<i>Top of Show</i>
2	7	I.1b	Live Like This Forever	WINNIE: Today is the day.
3	13	I.2-3a	Good Girl Winnie Foster	WINNIE: Okay, Mother, you can open your eyes.
4	16	I.3b	The Carnival Man (It's Not Fair)	NANA: Well, dear, I guess that's enough excitement...
5	18	I.3c	Getting Out	WINNIE: Toad, you're back!
6	20	I.4a	Jesse Gets Caught	ENSEMBLE: Day Na Day Na Na
7	21	I.4b	Top of the World	JESSE: Come with me!
8	25	I.5	The Kidnapping!	MILES: Ma! Are you're trying to get us caught out here?
9	28	I.6	Hugo's First Case	HUGO: Big day, first case...
10	31	I.7a	A Child Changes Everything	MAE: Angus, where are you?
11	33	I.7b	The Story of the Tucks	WINNIE: You've been gone ten years?
12	38	I.7c	Guess She'll Stay	ANGUS: Well, I guess I need Winnie's great-grandfather...
13	41	I.8a	My Most Beautiful Day	MAE: Oh, this attic is an embarrassment.
14	44	I.8b	More Than I Bargained For	WINNIE: A night in a house that's clearly haunted...
15	46	I.9	Bring Me a Funnel Cake	ANGUS: Going somewhere?
16	48	I.10a	Join the Parade	ENSEMBLE: Join the parade...
17	48	I.10b	Partner in Crime	WINNIE: It's even better than I remembered!
18	51	I.10c	Guess Your Age	JESSE: Okay, "partner," what's next...?

19	55	I.11	Do You Want to Live Forever?	WINNIE: I was so afraid you wouldn't get away.
20	59	II.1	Everything's Golden	MIYS: It's water!
21	63	II.3a	I Messed Up	WINNIE: Six years from now...
22	66	II.3b	The Story of Thomas	WINNIE: Miles, who's Thomas?
23	69	II.4	Envy and Regret	ANGUS: You going to be okay?
24	72	II.5	Yellowmail	MIYS: In all my travels...
25	75	II.6	You Can't Trust A Man"	HUGO: Look at him go.
26	78	II.7a	The Wheel	WINNIE: I think I got another one.
27	80	II.7b	What Jesse Did	MILES: Pa, hurry!
28	82	II.8a	The Story of the Man in the Yellow Suit	MIYS: Hold it right there, seventeen.
29	84	II.8b	Goodbyes	ANGUS: Don't look.
30	88	II.9	Everlasting	WINNIE: There are two ways home...
31	89	II.10a	Water on the Toad	HUGO: Well, here we are.
32	89	II.10b	The Story of Winnie Foster	<i>WINNIE begins dancing in her yard...</i>
33	92	II.11	The Life We Never Could	MAE: Winnie Foster Jackson.

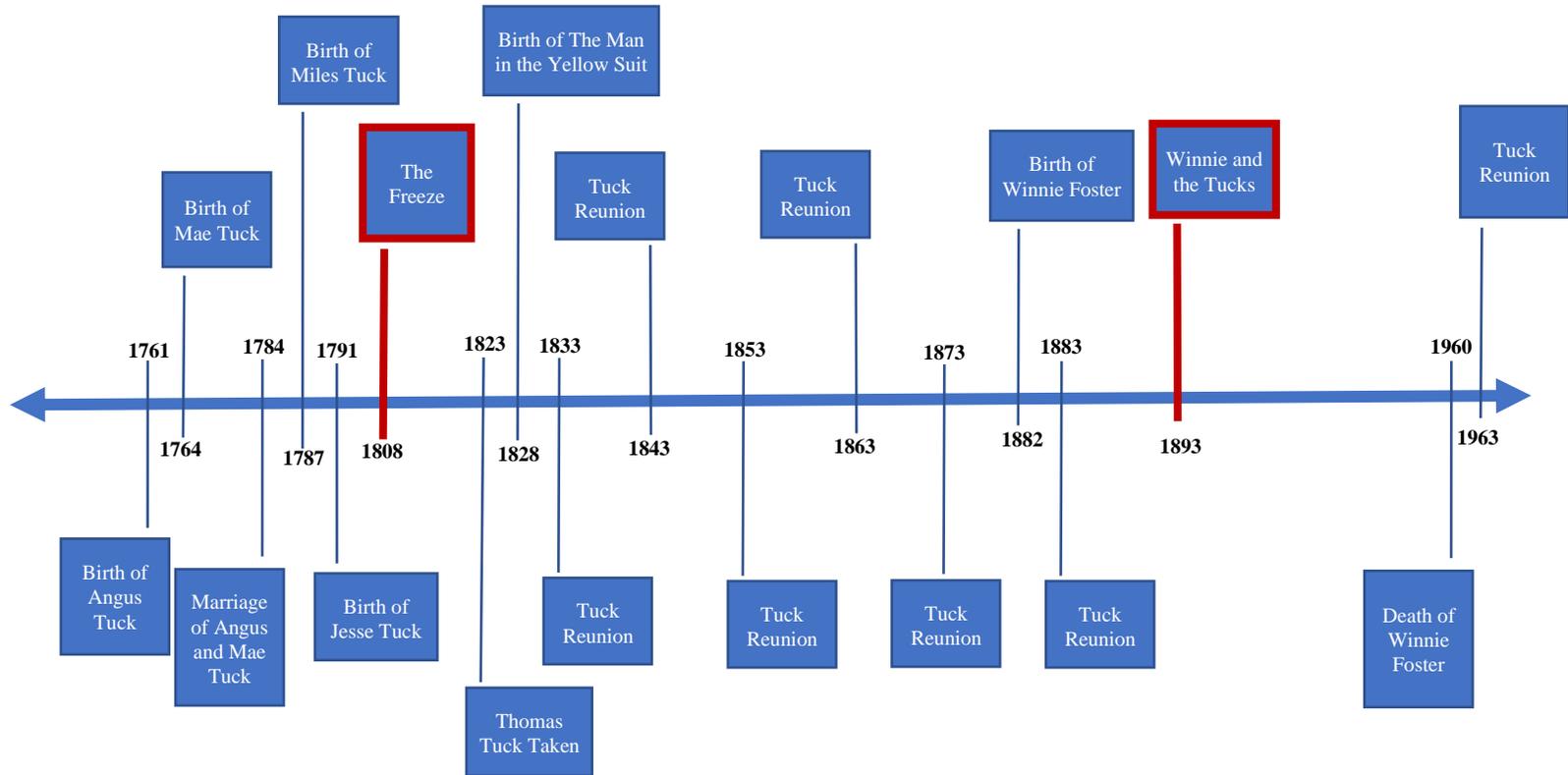
APPENDIX B

DRAMATIC FUNCTION OF SONGS

Song Title	Characters	Function of Song
“Live Like This”	Winnie, Mae, Miles, Jesse, Man in the Yellow Suit, Ensemble	To Illuminate the Given Circumstances
“Good Girl, Winnie Foster”	Winnie	To Build Winnie’s Courage (“I Am/I Want” Song)
“Top of the World”	Jesse, Winnie	To Distract Winnie from Spring
“Hugo’s First Case”	Hugo	“I Want” Song
“Story of the Tucks”	Mae, Jesse, Miles	To Give Exposition to Winnie
“My Most Beautiful Day”	Mae, Angus, Ensemble	To Encourage Winnie
“Join the Parade”	Man in the Yellow Suit, Ensemble	To Entice Patrons to Spend Money
“Partner in Crime”	Jesse, Winnie, Ensemble	To Enamor Jesse-Winnie
“Seventeen”	Jesse	To Propose to Winnie
“Everything’s Golden”	Man in the Yellow Suit, Ensemble	To Celebrate Victory
“Seventeen (Reprise)”	Winnie	To Excite Winnie
“Time”	Miles	To Caution Winnie
“You Can’t Trust A Man”	Constable Joe and Hugo	To Provide Comedic Relief
“The Wheel”	Angus, Winnie	To Advise Winnie
“The Story of the Man in the Yellow Suit”	Man in the Yellow Suit	To Taunt the Tucks
“Everlasting”	Winnie	To Decide Winnie’s Future
“The Story of Winnie Foster”	Ensemble	To Memorialize Winnie’s Life
“The Wheel (Reprise)”	Tucks, Ensemble	To Honor Winnie’s Choice

APPENDIX C

THEORIZED TIMELINE FOR *TUCK EVERLASTING*



APPENDIX D

DIRECTOR'S DESIGN PRESENTATION

Tuck Everlasting: The Musical

Stephen G. Tabor

Design Meeting Presentation



The Vision



“You don't need to live forever, you just need to live.”

~ Angus Tuck

**This musical is a reminder that it is not how much time
you have, but what you do with it that matters.**

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⁶¹ Photo Credits (L-R): Nathan Dumlao, Mohamed Mahmoud Hassan, Howard Brian Klaaste © 123RF.com (See Appendix H)



The Concept

- “Earthbound Fantasy”

We will tell this story by highlighting its contrasts.

Mortality vs. Immortality Free vs. Bound Man vs. Magic

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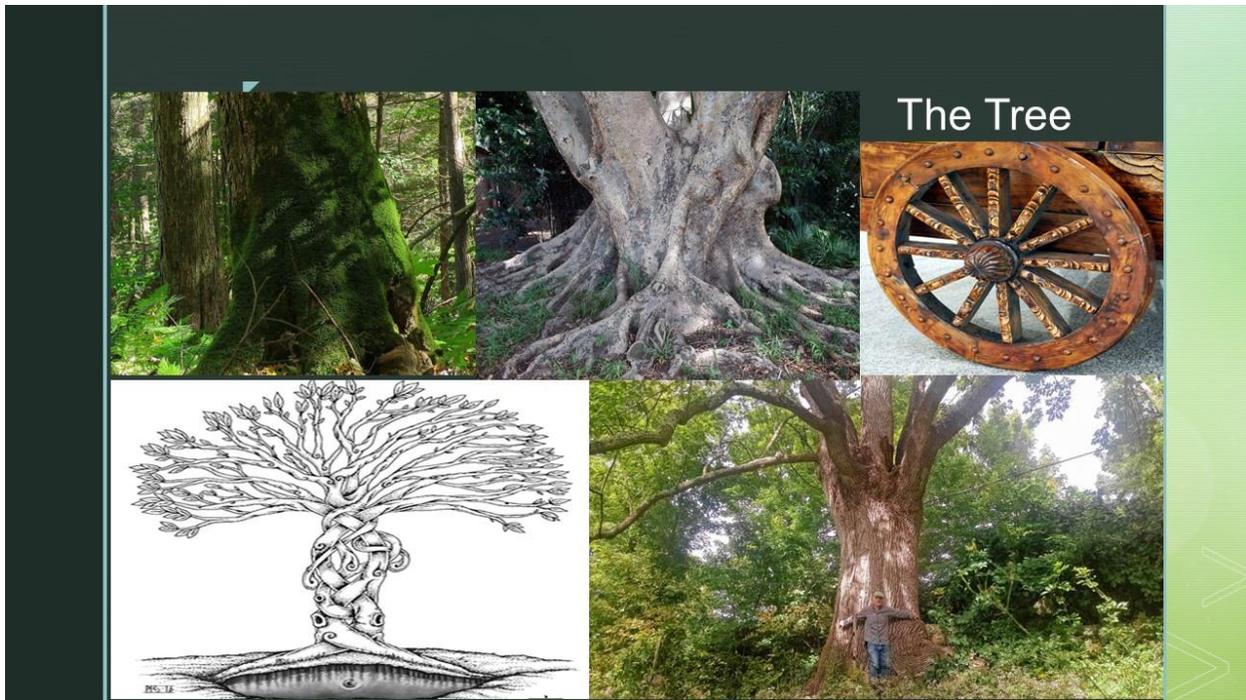


Treegap Wood

63

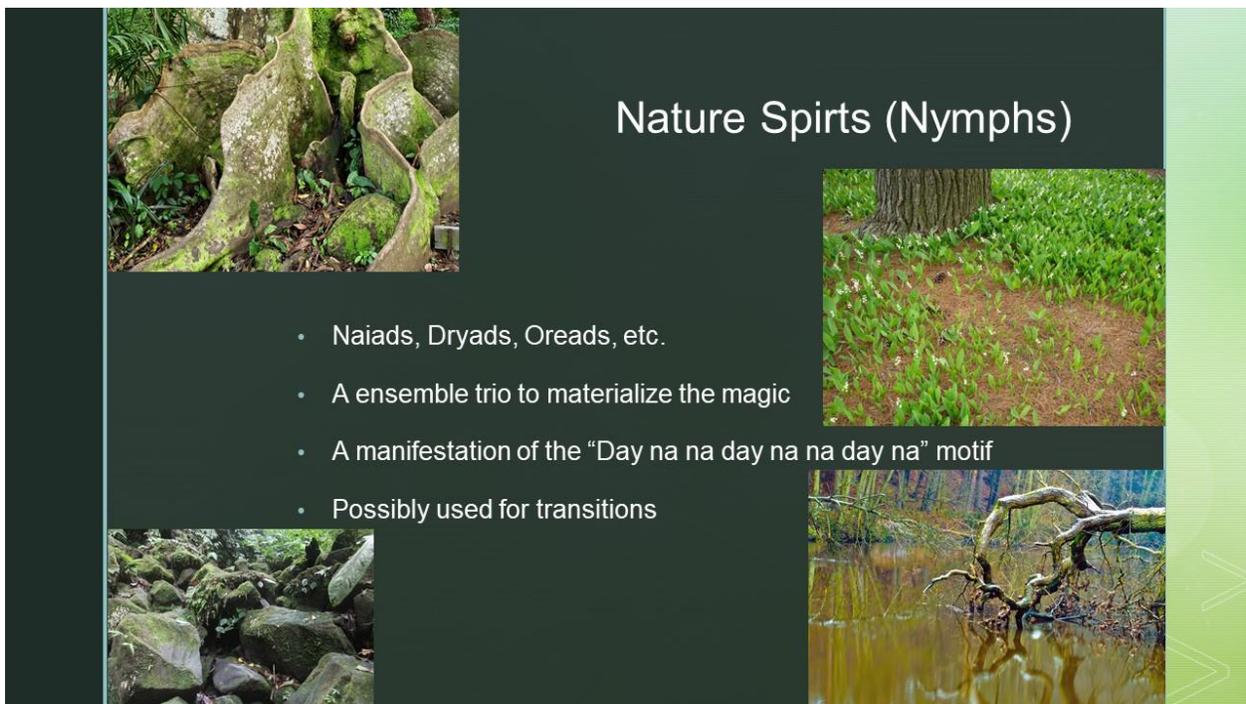
⁶² Photo Credits (L-R): Ben Lockett, Flash Alexander (See Appendix H)

⁶³ Photo Credits (L-R): Sheila Brown, Paul Brennan;
Noah Berndes, Krailas Yothayath, Alejandro Lizardo (See Appendix H)



The Tree

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Nature Spirits (Nymphs)

- Naiads, Dryads, Oreads, etc.
- A ensemble trio to materialize the magic
- A manifestation of the “Day na na day na na day na” motif
- Possibly used for transitions

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⁶⁴ Photo Credits (L-R): Ray Asselin © New England Forests, Lynn Greyling, Peter Griffin; Norhalla, Shelley Brooks © Concord, NH Monitor (See Appendix H)

⁶⁵ Photo Credits (L-R): Linnaea Mallette, Bobby Mikul; Kevin Casper, George Hoden (See Appendix H)

Locations

Treemap Wood

- Warm and Inviting
- Fertile and Growing
- Untouched by Man
- Alive and Breathing

The Foster House and Yard

- Cold and Closed
- Sterile and Preserved
- Crafted and Constrained
- Tomb or Mausoleum

Locations

The Tuck Cottage

- Rustic Cozy Home
- Stagnation
- Indifference and Neglect
- Messy but Not Dirty - Authentic
- Hanging Sheet

The Fair

- Artificial and Commercial
- Buzzing and Energetic
- Distracting Consumerism
- Clean but Only Surface - Disingenuous
- Lots of "stage business"

Characters

Winnie Foster

- A caged bird that longs to take off
- Reserved
- Mortal (11)
- No father to guide her

Jesse Tuck

- A wild bird that can never land
- Reckless
- Immortal (17 or 102)
- Ignores his father's guidance

Characters

Jesse Tuck

- Immortality is a Blessing
- "One-Man Operation"
- 17 (despite being 102)
- Prankster
- Cheerful and Carefree
- Proud to Stick Out
- Welcomes Treegap

Miles Tuck

- Immortality is a Curse
- Had and Lost a Family
- 107 (despite being 22)
- Parental
- Bitter and Burdened
- Tries to Blend In
- Wary of Treegap

Characters

Miles Tuck

- Never Settles
- Hides in the Present
- Pragmatic
- Divorced/Widowed, Alone

Mae Tuck

- Never Steps Out
- Hides in the Past
- Passionate
- Married, Partnered

Characters

Mae Tuck

- Sentimental
- Attentive to Her Appearance
- Lives Cyclically
- Emotional
- Maternal

Angus Tuck

- Stagnant
- Indifferent to His Image
- Lives Vicariously
- Intellectual
- Paternal

Characters

Angus Tuck

- Apathetic
- Sedentary
- Has a Family
- Seeks to Accept Death
- Simple but Wise

The Man in the Yellow Suit

- Ambitious
- Spirited
- Has No Immediate Family
- Seeks to Avoid Death
- Smart but Foolish

Characters

The Man in the Yellow Suit

- Squanders his life chasing immortality
- Cunning and Conniving
- Old Man (60s)
- Greedy (Water for Sell)
- Fallen and Forgotten

Winnie Foster

- Gives up mortality to live her life
- Curious and Compassionate
- Young Girl (11)
- Generous (Water for Toad)
- Leaves a Legacy



66

Why This Show for This Audience at This Time?

COVID-19

- “I’m left with nothing / nothing but time” ~ Miles Tuck
- “Time we’ve been granted so much time / but what if all this time / did more than pass us by? / Life even infinite / still must have life in it...” ~ Mae Tuck
- “We’ll stay / more / connected / we’ll do / what we / can / we’ll / stop sitting / wondering / why...” ~ Angus Tuck

⁶⁶ Photo Credits (L-R): Circe Denyer;
Linnaea Mallette, Carl Tremblay (See Appendix H)

APPENDIX E

TUCK EVERLASTING: THE MUSICAL AUDITION NOTICE

SIU Department of Theater

Auditions for *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*

Music by Chris Miller Lyrics by Nathan Tysen Book by Claudia Shear & Tim Federle



Photo Credit: Uriel Achilleus

How to Audition

Please submit the following:

- A video recording of a 32-bar cut form a contemporary musical theatre song, preferably in the folky style of the show (i.e., *Bright Star*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, *The Spitfire Grill*, etc.) You may choose to use accompaniment or sing a cappella.
- A headshot/resume PDF (if you have one). Please include any special skills.
- A list of any evening or weekend conflicts between now and March 15th, 2021. Examples of these may include Concert Choir, UPTAs, SETC, SIDC, MidWest, etc. You may list these in the body of the e-mail.

All materials should be submitted to tuckeverlastingsiu@gmail.com by no later than 11:59pm of Saturday, August 22. Callbacks will be held via Zoom on Monday and Tuesday evening (8/24-25).

For an example of how to video audition, please see the following links:

[Mock Video Audition \(Accompaniment\)](#)

[Mock Video Audition \(a cappella\)](#)

A breakdown of the show may be found below:

Tuck Everlasting: The Musical

Music by Chris Miller Lyrics by Nathan Tysen Book by Claudia Shear & Tim Federle

Directed by Stephen G. Tabor

Music Directed by Andrew Abrams

Choreographed by Rion Towery

Synopsis

Based on the children's book of the same name by Natalie Babbitt, *Tuck Everlasting* is about a young girl who meets a family of immortals. When Winnie Foster ventures into her backyard wood, she stumbles upon Jesse Tuck drinking from a spring of water. Winnie is swept into a whirlwind adventure with the Tuck family and learns how immortality isn't all it's dreamt to be. An evening of revelry, some sage advice on a pond, and a deadly confrontation with the Man in the Yellow Suit, who has been searching for the Tucks, all lead Winnie to face a difficult decision: Will she live and die a mortal life or drink the water and become everlasting?

Casting Breakdown

Winnie Foster

Female, 11, Any Ethnicity, Soprano.

A self-ascribed "good girl" with a naïve wonder for the world and a desire for adventure and companionship.

Jesse Tuck

Male, 17, Any Ethnicity, Tenor.

An immortal boy who roams the world in search of adventures like a bird that never lands.

Miles Tuck

Male, 22, Any Ethnicity, Baritenor.

A young man embittered by the familial consequences of his immortality. Also doubles as a Carnival Performer.

Mae Tuck

Female, 40s, Any Ethnicity, Mezzo-Soprano

A loving and maternal immortal woman entrenched in sentimentality. Also doubles as Townsperson.

Angus Tuck

Male, 40s, Any Ethnicity, Tenor

A simple but wise patriarch who has grown sedentary from immortal life. Also doubles as Townsperson.

Man in the Yellow Suit

Male, 60s, Caucasian, Tenor

An alluring carnival barker in search of immortality. Should move well.

Hugo Jackson

Male, 15, Any Ethnicity, Tenor.

A bright, aspiring deputy with a loyal heart and determination for his father's approval.

Constable Joe Jackson

Male, 60s, Caucasian, Tenor

An out-of-shape policeman with good intentions but a bit of a buffoon. Should play comedy well. Also doubles as Young Suitor.

Betsy Foster

Female, 30s, Any Ethnicity, Mezzo-Soprano

A recently widowed and thus overprotective mother charged with caring for both her daughter and mother-in-law, as well as the family estate. Also doubles as Townsperson

Nana Foster

Female, 80s, Any Ethnicity, Alto

A candid but kind old woman. Also doubles as Carnival Performer. Should play dry comedy well.

Man #1

Male, Any Ethnicity, Unspecified Vocal Range

Plays Nature Spirit, Memory Dancer, and Townsperson. Strong dancer preferred.

Man #2

Male, Any Ethnicity, Unspecified Vocal Range

Plays Carnival Performer, Memory Dancer, and Middle-Aged Hugo. Strong physique preferred.

Man #3

Male, Any Ethnicity, Unspecified Vocal Range

Plays Carnival Worker, Memory Dancer, Thomas, and Old Hugo.

Woman #1

Female, Any Ethnicity, Unspecified Vocal Range

Plays Nature Spirit, Memory Dancer, Townsperson, and Winnie's Daughter. Strong dancer preferred.

Woman #2

Female, Any Ethnicity, Unspecified Vocal Range

Plays Nature Spirit, Carnival Performer, Memory Dancer, and Middle-Aged Winnie. Strong dancer preferred.

Woman #3

Female, Any Ethnicity, Unspecified Vocal Range

Plays Fortune Teller, Memory Dancer, Miles' Wife, and Old Winnie.

Vocalists As Needed

APPENDIX F

PRODUCTION PHOTOS OF CONNECTORS



67

⁶⁷ Broom and Fishing Pole Connectors (Photos by Jon Lambert)



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⁶⁸ Shawl and Sash Connectors (Photos by Jon Lambert)



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⁶⁹ Billy Club and Cane Connectors (Photos by Jon Lambert)



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⁷⁰ Winnie-Jesse Rope Connector (Photos by Jon Lambert)



71

⁷¹ Winnie-Hugo Ribbon and Good Girl Winnie Foster Ribbon Connectors (Photos by Jon Lambert)



72

⁷² Cane and Winnie's Daughter Connectors (Photos by Jon Lambert)



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⁷³ Nymph Branch Staff, Fan, and Winnie-Jesse Rope Connectors (Photos by Rion Towery and Jon Lambert)

APPENDIX G

“THE STORY OF WINNIE FOSTER” BREAKDOWN

Measures	Event	Available Characters	Add. Notes
7-22	Winnie Reconciles with Family	Winnie, Betsy, Nana	Family is healing
23-30	Winnie Matures	Winnie, Betsy, Nana	Grieving has passed; gate is removed from fence
31-34	Winnie Transforms into Teen Winnie	Teen Winnie, Betsy, Nana	Be mindful of fence - sightlines
35-50	Winnie Matures	Teen Winnie	
51-59	Jesse Sees Teen Winnie	Teen Winnie, Betsy, Nana, Jesse, Tree Nymph	*Hugo’s entrance causes/coincides with Jesse’s retreat
60-63	Teen Hugo Attempts to Court Teen Winnie	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Nana	
64-72	Teen Hugo Successfully Courts Teen Winnie	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Nana	
73-80	Teen Winnie Reciprocates; Court Together	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Nana; (poss. Con. Joe)	
80-91	Con. Joe Marries Teen Winnie and Teen Hugo	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Nana, Con. Joe	
92-116	Teen Winnie and Teen Hugo Wedding Dance	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Nana, Con. Joe	
117–120	Nana Dies; Tree Nymph Leads Nana Away	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Nana, Con. Joe, Tree Nymph	Deaths should always be signified with the Tree Nymph Staff pulling the character back
121-124	Tree Nymph with New “Thread” for New Baby	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Con. Joe, Tree Nymph	Baby prop; Possibly when house walls contract
125-132	Teen Winnie and Teen Hugo with New Baby	Teen Winnie, Teen Hugo, Betsy, Con. Joe	Con. Joe may need to leave before for costume change
133-140	Mid-Winnie with Daughter	Mid-Winnie, Daughter	Some kind of mother/daughter activity?

141-151	Daughter's Teenage Angst	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Betsy, Daughter	Betsy might have Nana's fan; a la "She'll come in when she's ready"
152-157	Suitor Courts Daughter	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Betsy, Daughter, Suitor	
158-164	Daughter Reciprocates and Mutual Courtship	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Betsy, Daughter, Suitor	
165-168	Betsy Dies; Tree Nymph Leads Betsy Away	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Betsy, Daughter, Suitor, Tree Nymph	
169-174	Mid-Hugo Marries Daughter and Suitor	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Daughter, Suitor	
179-182	Daughter and Suitor Depart	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Daughter, Suitor	
183-190	Empty Nest: Mid-Winnie and Mid-Hugo Recall Wedding Dance	Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo	
191-211	Old Winnie and Old Hugo Replace Mid-Versions	Old Winnie, Old Hugo	Would love a Hugo Booty reference
212	Old Hugo Dies; Tree Nymph Leads Old Hugo Away	Old Winnie, Old Hugo, Tree Nymph	
220-223	Winnie Dying	Old Winnie, Tree Nymph	
224-237	The Life of Winnie Foster	Old Winnie, Old Hugo, Mid-Winnie, Mid-Hugo, Daughter, Suitor, Betsy, Con. Joe, Nana, Teen Winnie*, Teen Hugo	*Teen Winnie should be able to quickly remove added skirt to revert to Winnie; Foster Manor should be stricken
238-257	Winnie Dances with Old Winnie	Winnie, Old Winnie	Tree should start to move forward near end of this
258-270	Old Winnie Ascends Tree	Old Winnie, Tree Nymph	Old Winnie is welcomed by Tree Nymph

APPENDIX H

PERMISSIONS

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Ray Asselin, Photographer

RE: New England Forests Photo Permissions

ray@bowlwood.com <ray@bowlwood.com>

Fri 3/26/2021 4:59 PM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL ALERT]: Verify sender before opening links or attachments.

Hi Stephen,

Thanks for first asking permission to use the photo, I appreciate that. Sure, you may use the photo... it's an old-growth sugar maple tree. Please credit the photo to "© Ray Asselin - New England Forests" if possible.

Best of luck with your thesis,

Ray

----- Original Message -----

Subject: New England Forests Photo Permissions

From: "Tabor, Stephen G" <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Date: 3/26/21 4:44 pm

To: "ray@bowlwood.com" <ray@bowlwood.com>

Dear Mr. Asselin,

I'm a directing graduate student at Southern Illinois University, and I came across some of your photography while browsing research images for my thesis project, *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*.

A centerpiece of this musical is a large ash tree, and I was hoping for your permission to use a photo of a mossy tree published under your "A Call for Old Growth Forest" posting of your *New England Forests* blog to inspire my designers and publish in my final thesis.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to hear from you.

Shelley Brooks, Photographer

From: David Brooks <dbrooks@cmonitor.com>
Sent: Monday, March 30, 2020 1:58 PM
To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>
Subject: Re: Concord Monitor Photo Permissions Request (WITH image)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL ALERT]: Verify sender before opening links or attachments.

Sure, you can use it - I'll be going back out when the leaves show up to see if the tree is still alive. (it's an ash, if you read the story with it)

credit should be something like: "photo by Shelley Brooks, Concord (NH) Monitor. Used with permission" - whatever fits your style

David Brooks
reporter, [Concord \(NH\) Monitor](#)
dbrooks@cmonitor.com

Granite Geek weekly column in the Monitor: [Granite Geek](#)
Granite Geek blog - "Sci/tech tidbits around NH" www.granitegeek.org
Science Cafe Concord monthly discussions - www.sciencecafenh.org

From: Tabor, Stephen G
Sent: Friday, March 27, 2020 11:11:28 PM
To: dbrooks@cmonitor.com <dbrooks@cmonitor.com>
Subject: Concord Monitor Photo Permissions Request

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I am a graduate directing student at Southern Illinois University and came across the attached ash tree photo from your article while researching New England tree images for my thesis, *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*. I am seeking your permission (or the contact information of the photographer) in order to use the image to inspire my designers and publish in my thesis. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Stephen G. Tabor
MFA Directing Graduate Student
Department of Theater
College of Liberal Arts
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Henry Crowder, Lighting Designer

Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Crowder, Henry S <henry.crowder@siu.edu>

Thu 3/25/2021 9:57 PM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

I am more than agreeable to this.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Sent: Thursday, March 25, 2021 9:55:46 PM

Subject: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Hi Folks,

I'm reaching out because I would like to use either a rendering or a photo of your work with *Tuck Everlasting* for my thesis paper, and I need your permission documented.

If you are agreeable, please respond and let me know.

If you need more information, I'm happy to chat.

Thank you in advance!

Sincerely,

Stephen G. Tabor (He/Him/His)

MFA Directing Graduate Student

Department of Theater

College of Liberal Arts

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

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Jon Lambert, Photographer

Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Jon Lambert <jonlambert@caughtashot.com>

Thu 3/25/2021 9:59 PM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL ALERT]: Verify sender before opening links or attachments.

Yes, that is okay with me. You have my permission.

Jon Lambert

On Mar 25, 2021, at 9:55 PM, "Tabor, Stephen G" <stephen.tabor@siu.edu> wrote:

Hi Folks,

I'm reaching out because I would like to use either a rendering or a photo of your work with *Tuck Everlasting* for my thesis paper, and I need your permission documented.

If you are agreeable, please respond and let me know.
If you need more information, I'm happy to chat.

Thank you in advance!

Sincerely,
Stephen G. Tabor (He/Him/His)
MFA Directing Graduate Student
Department of Theater
College of Liberal Arts
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Ben Lockett, Photographer

Re: Permission to Use "Touch the Stars" Photograph in Graduate Thesis

Ben Lockett [REDACTED]

Tue 3/30/2021 4:09 PM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL ALERT]: Verify sender before opening links or attachments.

Hi Stephen,

You're quite welcome to use the image if you want to for academic purposes.

Here's a copy of the image, best of luck with your project!

Thanks.

Ben Lockett
[REDACTED]

On 30 Mar 2021, at 20:17, Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu> wrote:

Hi Ben,

I'm a directing graduate student at Southern Illinois University in America, and I came across some of your photography while browsing research images for my thesis project, *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical*.

A central theme of this musical is "earthbound fantasy," and I was hoping for your permission to use "Touch the Stars" from Flickr to inspire my designers and publish in my final thesis.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to hear from you.



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Logan Reagan, Scenic Designer

Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

logan reagan [REDACTED]

Fri 3/26/2021 7:30 AM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL ALERT]: Verify sender before opening links or attachments.

You have my permission.

Logan Reagan

On Thu, Mar 25, 2021 at 10:55 PM Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu> wrote:

Hi Folks,

I'm reaching out because I would like to use either a rendering or a photo of your work with *Tuck Everlasting* for my thesis paper, and I need your permission documented.

If you are agreeable, please respond and let me know.
If you need more information, I'm happy to chat.

Thank you in advance!

Sincerely,
Stephen G. Tabor (He/Him/His)
MFA Directing Graduate Student
Department of Theater
College of Liberal Arts
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

Jessica Rigdon, Costume Designer

Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Rigdon, Jessica I <jessica.rigdon@siu.edu>

Tue 3/30/2021 9:47 AM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Thanks. You're welcome to use those!

Jessica Rigdon

She/Her

Graduate Assistant

SIU Dept. of Theater

jessica.rigdon@siu.edu

From: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Sent: Tuesday, March 30, 2021 9:41 AM

To: Rigdon, Jessica I <jessica.rigdon@siu.edu>

Subject: Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Nymphs Rendering

Jesse sketch, rough, and rendering

From: Rigdon, Jessica I <jessica.rigdon@siu.edu>

Sent: Tuesday, March 30, 2021 9:36 AM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Subject: Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Hello Stephen,

Would it be possible to get a specific list of which Images you would like to use?

Best Regards,

Jessica Rigdon

She/Her

Graduate Assistant

SIU Dept. of Theater

jessica.rigdon@siu.edu

Rion Towery, Choreographer and Photographer

Re: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Towery, Claude R <claude.towery@siu.edu>

Tue 3/30/2021 12:03 PM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Its cool with me Stephen

Best,

C. Rion Towery

MFA Directing Graduate Student

Department of Theatre

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

From: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

Sent: Tuesday, March 30, 2021 9:42:54 AM

To: Towery, Claude R <claude.towery@siu.edu>

Subject: Tuck Everlasting Thesis Permissions

Hi Folks,

I'm reaching out because I would like to use either a rendering or a photo of your work with *Tuck Everlasting* for my thesis paper, and I need your permission documented.

If you are agreeable, please respond and let me know.

If you need more information, I'm happy to chat.

Thank you in advance!

Carl Tremblay, Photographer

Carl Tremblay [REDACTED]

Mon 3/30/2020 9:26 AM

To: Tabor, Stephen G <stephen.tabor@siu.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL ALERT]: Verify sender before opening links or attachments.

Hello Stephen,

Thank you for inquiring about the usage of the photo.
Yes I grant you permission to use the photo in your thesis project.
If possible give credit.

Good luck with your thesis.

Carl

On Sat, Mar 28, 2020 at 12:05 AM Stephen Tabor <postmaster@mg.photofolio.com> wrote:

A contact form was submitted:

title: contact

subject: undefined

name: Stephen Tabor

email: stephen.tabor@siu.edu



message:

Dear Mr. Tremblay, I'm a directing graduate student at Southern Illinois University and I came across some of your photography while browsing research images for my thesis project, Tuck Everlasting: The Musical. A centerpiece of this musical is a large ash tree, and I was hoping for your permission to use a photo of a cut ash tree published in the March/April 2016 edition of Yankee to inspire my designers and publish in my final thesis. Thank you for your time, and I hope to hear from you.
Sincerely, Stephen G. Tabor MFA Directing Candidate, SIU-C

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VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Stephen G. Tabor

stephengtabor@gmail.com

Western Kentucky University
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Performing Arts, May 2011

Special Honors and Awards:

Anne Fletcher and Scott R. Irelan Theater Department Graduate Travel Endowment
Southern Illinois University, May 2019

Jerry Baker Theatre Scholarship
Western Kentucky University, Fall 2010

O.V. Clark Musical Theatre Scholarship
Western Kentucky University, Fall 2009

Thesis Paper Title:

“COVID-Everlasting: Directing a University Production of *Tuck Everlasting: The Musical* during the COVID-19 Pandemic”

Major Professor: Olusegun Ojewuyi

Publications:

“Performing Masculinity in Musical Theatre: One Approach.” *Musical Theatre Educators’ Alliance*. vol. 3, Jan. 2020, pp.20-27.

"Lessons from Gilead: Producing a Student-Directed Musical at Western Kentucky University" (2011). *Mahurin Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects*. Paper 300. https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/300.