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An Evaluation of the Lighting Design Process and Composition for "A New Brain" by William Finn

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AN EVALUATION OF THE LIGHTING DESIGN PROCESS AND
COMPOSITION FOR A NEW BRAIN BY WILLIAM FINN

A Thesis Presented

By

JAMES HORBAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Theater

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ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF THE LIGHTING DESIGN PROCESS AND
COMPOSITION FOR A NEW BRAIN BY WILLIAM FINN

MAY 2015

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Directed by: Glenn Proud

The following pages will explore and evaluate the process and composition of my lighting design for the musical *A New Brain* produced by the UMass Amherst Theater Department in November 2014. This analysis will begin with an overall assessment of my lighting-design work and working methods throughout my career up to this production in order to identify the areas of personal growth that were focal points for this production. A reflection upon the design, collaborative, and technical processes, and how the lessons learned from these processes apply to my career goal as an educator of theatrical design, will round out this study.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Brief Biography

Lighting has been in my life in one form or another from a very early age. I was always screaming for mom and dad to stop the car so I could stare at Christmas lights, and often planted myself in front of my Lite Brite instead of the television. I spent my high school years immersed in technical theater, climaxing in a rock-concert style lighting design for the musical *Aida*. That production set my future in stone, and I actively pursued a higher education in the profession. At the time, I was much more interested in concert lighting technology, which was the chief factor in my choosing the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati to pursue my undergraduate degree as they offered a well-formulated moving-light programming and technology class in their curriculum.

Throughout my time at UC-CCM, my technical skills continued to become highly-developed. However, I was a little cog in a large theater machine, which prohibited me from flexing my design muscles because securing a design role on a mainstage show as an undergraduate student was a rarity and extremely competitive. It was while I was taking a mandatory Theater Sound Technology class that I met my fiancé, Hunter. After graduation, Hunter had one more year in the graduate sound design program, and I filled my time

designing scenery and lighting at local high schools and a children's theater company in Dayton, OH. It was during this year out in the real world when I realized that, while I was extremely well-trained technically, my design skills were still lacking. My work was missing something, but I was unsure as to what that missing component was. As my flash-and-trash design aesthetic yearned to mature towards theatrical lighting design, I knew that pursuing a higher education would help break the plateau in my work and best allow me to further develop as a designer.

The graduate program at UMass Amherst was not initially my first choice. I was enticed by the massive, state-of-the-art lighting inventory at Purdue University, and equally seduced by the possibility of moving southwest to attend the University of Texas Austin. However, that all changed upon meeting my future advisors, Penny Remsen and Margo Caddell. These strong ladies would not hold my hand and tell me everything that I produced was simply "nice" or "pretty". An honest and critical evaluation and development of my design aesthetic was what I needed, and these wonderful women seemed more than able to help me find that missing element in my work.

My Time at UMass

Upon entering graduate school, I quickly discovered that it was not one single component that was missing in my design work, but rather a deeper understanding of the

entire design process. One of the first lessons learned was the significance of discussing and understanding the text, and being able, in the beginning phase of the process, to cast aside any direct thought about lighting the piece and rather spend time with the piece itself. The crucial first step to a collaborative process entailed having conversations about the story, as it created within the production team a unified concept of the experience being created for the audience. My first show as the lighting designer, *Suitors & The Moldy Graces* by Ana Caro & Feliciano Enriquez, was an example of the importance of this step, as the team was on the same page about the story, but not the experience we were producing for the audience. It wasn't until during the tech process that I realized the show's gaiety relied chiefly on absurdities and gags. Had I known this from the beginning, I would have been able to better support the notion of entertainment in the form of spectacle. The same misstep occurred in my second design for J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. The team latched onto the darkness and danger in the original text that we were summoning our production from, but as the process continued the direction of the piece was slowly redirected for a younger audience through elaborate, playful fight choreography and once dark, dangerous moments were made safe through the humor and gimmicks of the actors. This shift in direction became apparent during the design runs, at which point it was too late for all of the collaborative areas to completely shift direction as well. After both of these experiences, I was determined to focus

in the future on the experience being created for the audience in addition to maintaining open communication between my collaborators.

As studio projects began calling for a realistic approach to the lighting design, it became apparent that because my design background was comprised mostly of dance and concerts, replicating light from everyday life was challenging, uncharted territory. As I began to gain a better understanding of how to create this type of lighting environment, I started applying this knowledge in small doses on the shows that I was designing. Even though both *Suitors* and *Peter Pan* were stories steeped in magic and mystery, there were moments of reality needed to contrast with the worlds of fantasy. So although I had not yet had the opportunity to design a production necessitating a true-to-life lighting environment throughout, I was able to practice and obtain a better understanding of the theory through my designs.

The process of tech had never been nerve-racking for me in the past because I was allowed time beforehand to write cues. This luxury would not exist in the real world, and at UMass we were held to the same standard of writing the show during the tech weekend. In order to achieve this, I spent a lot of time defining all of my cues on paper beforehand so that tech became chiefly about execution. While this process seemed to be effective, I found myself almost paralyzed whenever we reached a point in tech that had either not been

thought through beforehand or for which circumstances had changed during the tech process. Also, I spent a lot of time after the tech weekend tweaking the looks I had built as they were not quite right the first time through since they were built from technical notes instead of an artistic eye. Going into my final year of graduate school, I knew that finding a more effective tech process was critical to my success as a designer in the future.

A Journey Begins

As I prepared to enter my final year, I knew that one of my main focuses for my thesis project would be to create a better collaborative spirit between my director, my fellow designers, and me. My past shows had felt as though the team was on the same page in meetings, but not in the physical creation of the world we were generating to support and enhance the story; we were all creating our own puzzle pieces without a true understanding of what the whole puzzle looked like. I also wanted to concentrate on the tech process being more artistic and enjoyable. The techs I had experienced up until this point had been very stressful and lacked an artistic energy in the sense that they were not about creating an environment onstage as an artist in the moment, but rather about implementing what I had prescribed in my notes weeks before without responding to what was being conjured onstage with all of the design areas together for the first time. I was also attracted to the idea of this final project being in the black-box Curtain Theater, as there were limitations in terms of

inventory and dimmer capacity in that space that I was destined to encounter as I ventured out to design in the real world.

When the time came to discuss my thesis project with my advisors, I chose to design *A New Brain* based on the director, performance space, design team, and the fact that the show was a musical. I had not yet had the opportunity to work with my fellow third-year graduate directing student Glenn Proud on a production, and was chomping at the bit to do so. We had shared many a microbrew over invigorating conversations ranging from reviewing shows to investigating the pros and cons of different types of director-designer relationships, but we had not yet had to opportunity to work with each other on a project. As stated before, I was also eager to design in the Curtain Theater with all of its challenges, plus undergraduates are usually slated into the design slots on Curtain shows. Being potentially the only graduate student on the design team would give me greater leadership within the team to create a more collaborative spirit. Designing a musical would also give me a huge opportunity to work on my timing, as there are usually many more cues within musicals verses straight plays. Once it was announced that Glenn would be directing *A New Brain* in the Curtain, I knew that I wanted this show to represent the fruits of my education.

CHAPTER 2

THE PLAY

Gordon's Story

William Finn's *A New Brain* is an autobiographical tale of Finn's own experiences told through the character of Gordon Schwinn. It is the story of a composer stuck in a creative, emotional, psychological, and spiritual stasis that he must face and overcome through a life-threatening event in order to melt away the obstructions that are keeping him from living life with artistic flow, gratitude, and joy. We first see Gordon struggling to write a song for a children's television show starring Mr. Bungee, a life-sized frog. He takes a break to meet up with his best friend Rhoda for lunch, during which he passes out and is rushed to the hospital. There he is comforted by his mother, Rhoda, and boyfriend Roger, but an MRI reveals the severity of his condition and the necessity for a risky operation. After the procedure, Gordon falls into a coma and hallucinates a surrealistic musical-within-a-musical in which his friends, family, and even Mr. Bungee help him evaluate his life. Gordon's greatest fear is dying with his greatest songs still inside him, but he awakens from this near-death experience with a better appreciation for the people and relationships in his life. With his soul at last in balance, he is able to write again.

Initial Responses

As I began listening to the soundtrack during every spare moment throughout my day, it did not take long to identify what about the story I was latching onto so strongly. I was able to empathize with Gordon's creative rut as that is exactly how I felt after my first year out of my undergraduate program. All of my work was missing something, and I had so much that I wanted to accomplish but no clue as to how. Gordon's story is one that people could relate to on some personal level regardless of age or life experience as many people have experienced a road-block in their lives where they've felt as though nothing is going the way they desire and every effort to turn things around is futile. It is a story heard again and again as we all brave the difficult balance of pursuing our passions versus working to pay the bills. What this show had the power to do was hold a mirror up to our experiences and ask, "Are you really going to allow yourself to stay stagnant in the murky water of hopelessness and despair, or are you going to fight against it and realize that it's up to you to create the life that you want to live?"

Early Meetings

The director, scenic designer, and I began meeting sporadically throughout the summer to begin exploring the story and each song's contribution to that story. Knowing how important it was to involve the entire team in the process to help foster a collaborative

spirit, I made sure that we stayed focused on the story, and any production ideas were kept loose and open for commentary when the entire team did meet at the beginning of the semester. During these preliminary meetings, I discovered that the director and I were on the exact same page with our gut reactions to this play. As we moved forward towards our first full-team meeting, I knew that it was crucial to maintain a strong connection with Gordon's story to create an empathetic atmosphere to best allow the show's message to emerge to the audience.

At our first design meeting, we began going through the director's scene breakdown while everyone threw out ideas and talked about potential concerns in telling the story. This was the first time at UMass that I had been a part of a design meeting where everyone was contributing and offering ideas for other areas of design. My past experiences had conditioned me to show up to a meeting, listen to what the other departments had to say about their area, state what I had in mind for mine, and then get on with my own work. But this was different; we were all sitting around a table and coming up with ideas and solutions as a team. I believe a contributing factor to this was the fact that we broke out of the typical production meeting mold of going around area-by-area. Many of us were still latched onto that old mentality as design and production meetings were only recently split and distinguished within the department. Once we discussed and established the goals of the

show, we were able to better talk openly as a team about how to achieve those goals. This experience confirmed the importance of starting a dialogue about the story and its message for the audience before entering the stage of designing the world that the story is told in.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Scenic Design

One of the first components established was the three-quarter thrust seating arrangement in the Curtain, which was set in stone even before the whole design team was selected. This arrangement was favored because of the greater intimacy it creates between performers and the audience, which would aid in the empathizing of Gordon's experience as the audience can enter his story in a very personal way as opposed to simply sitting back and watching his tale unfold as in a traditional proscenium configuration. I was also excited to design in this configuration as I had chiefly designed in proscenium spaces in the past, and this opportunity would be a substantial exercise for designing in thrust spaces.

In this arrangement, the stage floor became a major scenic element because the steep audience rake caused it to be the most constant, prominent component that the actors played against. The scenic designer was intrigued by an image of a spiral to signify the tension in Gordon's story as his life spirals out of his control. This spiral originated from center stage, and graduated from white to black as it moved offstage. Portions of the spiral flowed into the steps of the audience seating to further connect them to the story. The negative space of the

spiral was originally designed to contain bars of music, but this did not make it to the final version of the design due to a false sense of the time that this paint treatment would require.

The use of the mezzanine soon became necessary as a place to house the band on one side and an additional acting level on the other. A spiral staircase was the most space-efficient way to allow movement between the floor and the mezzanine level, and it also fit within the spiral imagery of the floor treatment. This staircase was designed to have an extended swoosh to the handrail that extended to the ceiling to continue the spiral, but was later cut due to budget and time constrictions.

Additional scenic pieces needed to be very minimal to facilitate quick, fluid transitions and maintain the rapid-fire flow of the show. To help establish the hospital spaces, there were two white curtains that traveled on and off underneath the center section of the mezzanine in addition to a main hospital bed and multi-purpose stretcher. Other scenic pieces were utilized for specific scenes, such as a table and chairs in the café and a bookcase in Gordon's apartment.

Costume Design

With the spiral floor treatment being the dominate visual image, the costume designers chose modern-day period clothing to help the audience stay connected with the story as opposed to moving towards a more abstracted, distant world. In early design

meetings, we discovered an overarching palette that would start with light tints and neutrals, and then introduce more color and patterns as Gordon moved closer to his spiritual breakthrough. This color story applied not only to the costumes, but eventually to the lighting design as well.

Gordon donned a white hospital gown throughout most of the show, and the hospital staff was dressed in neutral clinical garb with purple and lavender accents. After some discussion, shades and tints of purple were chosen for these accents as that color had the capacity to read either warm or cool dependent on how the scene was lit; this would give me a greater ability to manipulate the mood onstage. In contrast to this palette, Mother, Rhoda, and Roger were dressed in various warm tints as they were trying to bring warmth and comfort to Gordon.

Sound Design

The focus of the sound design was vocal reinforcement because of the close proximity of the band and the audience, and the concern that the performers would not be able to be heard above them. Microphones on every performer was not ideal as it would make their sound more false and distant from the action onstage, however Gordon, Mr. Bungee, and Rhoda were mic'ed; Gordon so that he could be heard above the ensemble during big numbers and the actor was vocally timid, Rhoda because the actress had

developed vocal problems during rehearsals and needed some vocal insurance, and Mr. Bungee so that different effects could be applied to his voice as he appears chiefly during Gordon's dreams and hallucinations.

Lighting Design

One of my first over-arching observations was the lightning-fast pace of the show as there were not many moments of dialogue, and most songs began as soon as the one prior had ended. The story also quickly bounced back and forth between the real world and Gordon's hallucinations and out-of-body experiences, sometimes with both being present onstage at the same time, such as his hallucinations when Mr. Bungee berates and taunts him. While site-specific scenic pieces and the true-to-life aspect of the costume design would help establish location, I knew that the lighting design would be the chief vehicle to tell the audience whether we were in Gordon's everyday life or in his head at any given moment. This was in the same vein as my past two designs within the department, as *A New Brain* lived between reality and fantasy just as *Suitors* and *Peter Pan* did. The next step was for me was figuring out the main characteristics of these two contrasting lighting environments.

Gordon's Reality and the Physical World

Gordon's cynicism and pessimistic character, along with the costume designers' palette, guided me towards a world composed of pale, unsaturated washes and strong light

from behind for melancholy effect. He does not look upon the world with glee and optimism, and I wanted these cold tints and heavy shadows to help exhibit his personality. This quality would be most present when Gordon was by himself, but recede into the light of the world when in the company of others.

While *A New Brain* called for a variety of physical locations, the vast majority of scenes within reality occurred in Gordon's hospital room. Since the floor treatment would make strict realism an impossibility, I was intrigued by a real-world quality of light that also conveyed emotion and mood, but subtlety and within the context of the scene. I decided that representing time-of-day through an offstage window would not only help establish the hospital space, but also allow me to heighten the mood within the scene, such as in the song "An Invitation to Sleep in My Arms." During this number, Gordon was faced with the decision to spend what could be his last night alive with Roger, or complete a song for Mr. Bungee. Roger began his plea as the sun started to set, initiating a gradual shift from romantic sunlight to sterile hospital fluorescents as Gordon made a heartbreaking choice of his songwriting over his potential last evening with Roger. In this manner, I would be able to maintain a realistic atmosphere while being able to manipulate and intensify emotions occurring onstage and really engage the audience in the story.

This method sounded like an optimal path to follow, but I did have my hesitations. By relying on time-of-day in this fashion, I was concerned about potentially backing myself into a corner. What if I wanted a scene with morning sunlight to express a new dawn, but the scene before took place during the afternoon? If this technique was to be successful, I knew that I had to go through scene-by-scene and think about what point of the day would be optimal for each. I knew any potential trouble would be in the first act as it contained a vast, continuous flow of hospital scenes with Gordon always onstage, so I knew that the time-of-day had to be cohesive and flow as well. Luckily, the story was written in a way that the optimal quality of light coincided with the time that made sense with the story, and touching moments with family could be enhanced with a lovely sunset then slowly drain away into Gordon's night-time bouts of negativity under soulless fluorescent light. It had appeared that this would not be an issue, and I continued on to tackle the fantastical.

Whimsical, Wondrous, and Weird

Knowing that it was the lighting design's responsibility to break the audience out of reality into hallucinations, daydreams, and out-of-body experiences, I knew that these moments had to clearly contrast the established reality. The real and the fanciful exist side-by-side at some points, so it was critical that the two be noticeably distinguishable. With reality established, I merely reversed the characteristics of light for the whimsical.

Vibrant, vivid color was to be my main tool to establish these wondrous moments, as the real-world environment would be comprised of unsaturated tints and neutrals. Another element absent in the physical realm was texture, so implementing templates would aid in further distinguishing between these two planes of existence. The final element of this fictional world would be an increase in the quantity of lighting cues. Whereas changes in the natural lighting environment would primarily be slow shifts in time throughout the day, I would call upon my concert upbringing to produce fast, sensational light shifts. This choice was further supported by the fact that nearly all of the powerful, dramatic musical numbers necessitating more advanced cueing were within this world.

It's All in His Head

While the first half of the show lives predominately in the physical hospital, the second portion contains Gordon's outlandish coma sequence. Befitting a composer, he dreams in the structure of a mini-musical, and through songs featuring family, friends, hospital staff, and even Mr. Bungee, he examines his life and awakens having found the missing aspects of his being.

In this present state of reflection, I must admit that I had no idea how to successfully light this sequence for the longest time. I knew this series of delusional songs was the climax of Gordon's hallucinations, but it featured such a cacophony of what appeared to be

nonsense, and I was extremely concerned that the audience would not understand what was happening. It was critical that we knew he was dreaming from within his coma from the very beginning, so I needed yet another level of contrast to set these delusions apart. In time I made the choice to use haze throughout this sequence only, as seeing shards of light permeating through the air would stand apart from past hallucinations, but was still worried it wouldn't be enough.

The solution came through a flashback to a show I had seen the summer before in Texas. During the production, a farmer had a nightmare that was acted out onstage. To enter the sequence, the farmer's head was tightly followspotted as everything else receded into darkness, then the dreamscape was revealed and unfolded behind him. If Gordon's head was the only thing visible as he began singing about being brain dead, it would allow for a clear transition into the hazed, colorful, and textured world of the sequence.

No, Not Quite Kermit

Mr. Bungee was made manifest in Gordon's hallucinations when he was feeling his lowest, and was portrayed as Gordon's evil arch enemy during these delusions. It was important for the audience to realize that we were seeing this character as Gordon saw him, and not solely as an evil children's show host. He would be the first character we met as he merrily delivered the preshow announcement, and I wanted him to appear as he would by the

children watching his show by picking him up by warm, crisp-edged spotlights within an environment filled with gay colors. However, when he appeared as a hallucination, he needed to look completely different to help the audience know that this was not the real Mr. Bungee, hence the use of deep, intense colors in the followspots. By using the spotlights in this manner, I would be able to keep Mr. Bungee in a tight fantastical light within Gordon's reality, as the two often needed to play hand-in-hand. The deep turquoise and acidic yellow color choices for the spotlights were originated from his costume, which featured a long-tailed, green-sequined jacket with yellow vest and bow-tie. This sour yellow would also heighten the antagonism of the chiding, hallucinated Mr. Bungee. I was also intrigued by the notion of using large, brightly-colored Fresnels for Mr. Bungee, as large Fresnel lenses would be reminiscent of a television studio.

Finally, The Finales

There were virtually two finales in this show; "Time & Music" and "I Feel So Much Spring." The first was akin to the song "Heart & Music" in the first act, both being a celebration and fresh burst of artistic energy. This led into "I Feel So Much Spring," and as Gordon's roadblock had been removed, he was able to move forward in life and complete the "Spring Song."

It was a challenge to wrap my head around the finales, as they occur rather quickly after the flash-and-trash of the coma sequence, and I was wary of over-abusing the audience and being excessively theatrical. However, “Time & Music” was such a refreshing burst of energy for Gordon and all of the people in his life; a rowdy celebration of the journey he had made that necessitated the use of joyous colors, movement, and action within the lighting. On the other hand, “I Feel So Much Spring” was not a song with the same raucous happiness; its joy was deeper, harmonious, and profound. Gordon was at peace, and finally able to compose without restriction. The song also contained extremely powerful choral builds that give me chills to this day. This final finale needed power, but not flashy power; I decided that this transformation in Gordon would be depicted as blazing sunlight bursting through the cold, dim world he had been living in; a cathartic rebirth of soul and spirit.

CHAPTER 4

DRAFTING THE LIGHTING DESIGN

Developing the Key

With a concrete design concept in place, the next step became formulating a key; essentially a drawing that indicated the direction, angle, and color of the various sources that would illuminate each acting area of the stage (Gillette 192). This would serve as a roadmap for myself as I began drafting the light plot. Before moving forward, it needs to be noted that direction, angle, and other lighting attributes from this point on will be described from the perspective of the center seating section of the audience, understanding that these attributes would look differently from either side seating section of the audience.

Seeing the Actors

Since seeing the actors is the primary function of stage lighting, my first systems were chosen to fulfill this requirement. I decided first upon two diagonal front and two diagonal back systems at a 45-degree angle that would allow for dimensional modeling of the actors as well as an ample amount of light for faces for all three sides of the audience. These washes could be achieved with the older Altman ellipsoidals, so a slight color correction to blue was planned to push the light towards a neutral white. The next systems added were front fills for each audience section at a medium angle to further fill in facial shadows. I

decided to employ a darker blue color correction for these systems after testing them with the first four systems in the light lab, and discovered that a darker blue would allow me to add more light to fill in facial shadows while maintaining a dim and shadowy appearance because of the darker color. One more system, a cool back wash was added to help round-out and sculpt the actors. Since my design relied heavily on light from behind, especially within Gordon's reality, I knew that this system needed to be potentially very bright to overpower all of the other front light in order to have a strong, visual presence while keeping faces discernable. These systems were to be my bread and butter for not only Gordon's cold, ghostly reality, but also for the whole show.

Hospital Systems

With the main visibility and fill systems in place, I proceeded to think through any others that I would need within the physical world, specifically within the hospital scenes. The first addition was a system of steep front, almost down light in a chilling, light steel blue. This system's main purpose was to help source the light of night-time hospital scenes from overhead fluorescents. When used independently, this steep angle paired with the eerie, deadening color would create heavy shadows under the eyes to harrowing effect. Having the ability to create this distressing mood was crucial, as many times the hospital needed to be portrayed as a terrifying and uncomfortable place.

What was missing within the hospital was a way to portray time-of-day, which was the foundation of my plan to control mood within Gordon's hospital room. After testing a few different options, I settled upon a diagonal-back blast system from upstage left. I knew that I wanted the light through the window to come primarily from behind the actors to depict a foreboding atmosphere, and I also needed to save any bright diagonal front light for the sunburst in the finale. This system being a blast, essentially an array of tightly-clustered instruments, would help the light appear as if it was coming through a single window. Finally, I knew I would need a variety of color options, so I chose to utilize color scrollers for this system. Luckily, there was a color scroll available with the first six frames graduating through typical sunrise and sunset colors, so I would be able to rather smoothly fade from a warm amber through tints of rose and lavender, and land on a darker blue.

A few specials would be required within the hospital space, and the first few were to light the white curtains underneath the mezzanine. Two low side scrapes with scrollers could wash them with color, while two diagonal fronts featuring a frosted template and scrollers would add gentle texture and depth to them. I figured these would function best if the light was sourced from offstage in order to cut out excess spill onto the center staircase, meaning that the fixtures for the stage-left curtain were located offstage left and the fixtures for the stage-right curtain were located offstage right. Additional specials for the hospital were to

include a steep front light focused tightly on Gordon's hospital bed, another tight down special to represent the MRI machine, and a down light to create a small circle representing the shower stall for the song "You Boys Are Gunna Get Me in Such Trouble/Sailing Reprise."

Incorporating Color and Texture

With my bases covered for the real-world scenes, I then moved forward to the tools I would need to create the fantastical, hallucinatory environments. Since the floor treatment was to be almost white in the center, I needed an down system that would be able to add rich, deep colors to the floor yet not effect the actors' faces too much. As far as what type of instrument to use, the ideal choice would be an LED fixture as this systems primary goal was to add color to the space, and an LED fixture would allow the greatest flexibility. I also wanted more LED fixtures to act as front light for each audience section to give myself more vibrant color options on the actors themselves. This way, I could light mainly the floor with one color and the actors with another. A further color tool was the scroller blast from upstage left that was added for time-of-day sequences within the hospital. While the beginning of the color scroll would be used for this purpose, the remaining could punch in more color when needed within the fantasy world.

The bulk of the texture within this whimsical ambiance would be ideally sourced from two additional diagonal-front systems, thus effecting the performers from every audience perspective. Fitted with color scrollers and a frosted template, these two systems would add depth, dimension, and color, further heightening the mystification and intrigue of the fantasies. They could also operate well hand-in-hand with the front LED fixtures as the LEDs could provide vivid color on the actors while these texture systems could add a paler layer to highlight and create movement on the actors as they moved throughout the space. These two systems would also be able to support the realistic scenes that were set outdoors, adding a supple texture to suggest light shining through trees.

Brain-Dead Bits and Bobs

The coma sequence would come to require quite a few specials, mainly a large series of visual tricks and spectacles to help set the sequence apart from other hallucinations. Among these included two template washes that featured a hard-edged shatter gobo to be used during the tango within the first song of the sequence. This crisp template would create jarring shafts of light through the air, further setting the sequence apart and creating a strong introduction to the hazy atmosphere. Another need was a rotating spiral on the floor to be seen during the ventriloquist number. I ended up wishing for two of these, one larger with slower rotation, and the other tighter and spinning faster. Using these two spirals on top of

one another would create the feeling of an uncontrollable, exponential rise of pressure that the end of the song required.

“Eating Myself Up Alive” was hands down the show-stopper within the coma sequence, and the entire show for that matter, and needed a hefty amount of lighting support. The song is performed by Richard as if he was singing at a concert, and he was to don a purple, sequined jacket while sporting a white-sequined hat and wireless microphone. Once again I found myself recalling my experience working in a concert-production house. I wanted to implement lighting fixtures and effects that epitomized a classic, 1970’s concert atmosphere, as this number quickly became synonymous during design conversations with a James Brown vibe, especially with his fantastic hat and jacket.

The PAR64 was the staple of concerts, then-and-now, and I knew they had to be implemented in some fashion. I also knew that lights positioned in front of the audience shooting towards them best exploited a hazy atmosphere and would create the most distinct beams of light. Therefore, I added two booms stuffed with PAR64s to my wish list, located stage left and stage right underneath the mezzanine. They would be super-bright, punch in a lot of color into the air, and give me more options within chases and effects.

Another concert component added to the list were as many ACLs as possible. ACLs, standing for aircraft landing lights, were originally designed for airplanes, but found their

way into the concert world in the 1970's as they produce a very bright, tight beam of light (Schoenfeld.) Used in clusters of three or four, flashing these fixtures would produce the look of fingers of light reaching out through the haze towards the audience, and pulling them more and more into the concert atmosphere of the song.

The final piece, although not exactly from the 1970's era, were two ellipsoidals equipped with gobo rotators and moving-mirror I-Cue units located near the base of the two PAR64 booms. Essentially, their aim was to produce a cone of thin, sharp, rotating beams of light that could move and swing through the audience akin to moving lights at modern-day concerts. I knew the song needed a lot of action, and these units would provide a layer of smooth, continuous movement on top of the jarring chases of the PARs and ACLs. One of these fixtures would also be utilized in the following song, "The Music Still Plays On," in which Gordon was going to mimic playing an onstage piano for Mother's ballad as she enters through an ethereal burst of fog. Having these slowly-rotating beams of light shoot out from behind Gordon at the piano would add a celestial tone separating him from Mother, and leave the audience wondering if he was indeed still alive.

Stairs, Mezzanine, and Other Acting Areas

After constructing my main plan for lighting the stage, there were other acting areas that needed to be considered. The spiral staircase was undoubtedly going to see heavy use, so

I planned for an extra fixture for most of the main systems already discussed to cover this area. While using another LED fixture as down light would be ideal, I knew that the number of these lights in stock were very low, so I planned instead for two instruments with color scrollers. Having two of these would not only allow more freedom to fade between colors, but I could also use one of them to wash the general staircase area, and the other to tightly enclose only the staircase itself. Another challenge with the staircase would be backlight, as there were few lighting positions upstage of it. As a result, I planned to use only one backlight outfitted with another color scroller for greatest flexibility.

The mezzanine was the next area that needed consideration. The full length of the mezzanine from the upstage edge of the side seating risers was to be opened up, with the band living on the stage right side, and the stage left side open as an acting space. This area would be incredibly challenging to light, as any front light on an actor up there would bleed heavily on the black wall behind them. Before moving forward, I talked with the director about what exactly he foresaw that area being used for, and we established that it was chiefly for Mr. Bungee's entrances and exits. I was relieved by this decision, as Mr. Bungee appeared mainly within dark hallucinations and front light could be supplied by followspots. The other uses of the mezzanine were to include Roger's song "Sailing" and Gordon's entrance for "Brain Dead," and followspots could also be used to cover the actors for those

numbers. However, I did need more support than just the followspots. It would be ideal to have some side light cut tightly to the walkway and off the walls, one shooting from stage right with color scrollers and another from stage left with a foreboding, steel blue. These would be able to support and add some dimensionality to Roger's number and Mr. Bungee's sneering entrances. I then realized that although back light would be a crucial component, it would be a nightmare of practicality because of the narrow walkway and the lack of any ideal lighting positions. Never-the-less, the image of Mr. Bungee creeping out in a chilling silhouette gave me goose bumps, and I knew it was needed. It was added to the wish list with a star to discuss how to make it happen with the lighting shop manager. The final addition was a row of warm down lights across the entrance path of Mr. Bungee to make it seem as if he was walking through a hallway. These were for the beginning of the "Yes" song when we see Mr. Bungee reading Gordon's lyrics before bursting into the song with his typical followspots and gay color washes. For the other half of the mezzanine where the band was to reside, I reasoned that if an LED fixture could cover most of them, this would be the best and most versatile choice. Once it was discovered that they would be wearing T-shirts for Mr. Bungee's Lily Pad, essentially making them Mr. Bungee's band, I continued the notion of large Fresnels to add in more light for them within a TV studio feeling.

Audience aisles were the final area for me to tackle, and after a brief dialogue with the director and choreographer, no one could really pinpoint exactly what they were going to be used for at that point in time. Their function would be tinkered with and discovered during the rehearsal process, but I was able to secure the knowledge that the main, central aisle would be the one seeing the most use. With that information, I knew that I had to cover any possibility, and started with the basics of a front and back light for the main, center aisle and also the two, smaller side aisles. I then added a down scroller and two replicas of the diagonal front system with a frosted template and color scroller for the main aisle; however, they would technically be a diagonal back from a center audience member's perspective, but would light the front of an actor walking down the steps facing the stage.

Final Odds and Ends

After taking a break to let my brain settle, I went back and looked at what I would have at my disposal, trying to spot any holes, missing components, or anything else that I could foresee needing. The first possible gap lied within the backlight systems, as I had one back wash in a medium blue, and the upstage left diagonal scroller blast from the hospital scenes. Since backlight was important for Gordon's world and also the hallucinations, I chose to add another diagonal back blast system from upstage right as insurance, planning to discover its ideal uses during design runs. Knowing that the end of the show called for an

intense burst of sunlight, I added in a tight cluster of high-intensity fixtures as a diagonal front to bathe the entire stage with warm daylight, hence removing all of the darkness and shadows from Gordon's world for the finale. The final components to account for were houselights, since they would have to be relocated to suite the seating arrangement, and added more Fresnels to light the audience sections during preshow as we were shooting to mimic an atmosphere before one of Mr. Bungee's TV shows.

Drafting the Plot

Before moving on to converting the key into a full light plot, I took a moment to consider the department's lighting inventory. There was a great challenge looming because of the rapid changeover between *Merchant of Venice* and *A New Brain*, as strike for the first was scheduled for the day before the first focus day for *A New Brain*, and a whole ten days after our load-in. Therefore, I kept in mind moving forward that it would be best to use alternative types of fixtures not used in *Merchant of Venice* unless absolutely necessary.

Another consideration I had to acknowledge was the limited number of circuits in the Curtain Theater. All-in-all, moving forward I needed to make sure that every single instrument on the plot was vital to the design.

When I began working on the plot, I was soon met with one of the challenges of designing within this particular theater space. Low lighting positions were limited, and the

situation was only exacerbated by the three-quarter thrust arrangement as any light at a low angle, in order to fully cover actors, would undoubtedly spill onto the audience. At this point I decided to pursue drafting the plot in 3D. This was an area within Vectorworks that I was not fully familiar with, and while working drawings were still done by hand, this 3D representation would allow me to tweak the location of fixtures to obtain the most stage coverage with the least amount of spill on the audience.

Visibility Systems

I began drafting instruments in the order that they were added to the key, starting with the first four visibility systems. The stage was broken up into eight primary acting areas: down-left, down-center, down-right, center-left, center-center, center-right, up-left, and up-right. Upstage center was omitted because that was the area where the spiral staircase was located, and those instruments would be added in separately. For the two diagonal-front systems, I decided to add two more areas, up-up-left and up-up-right, in order to cover actors standing close to the hospital curtains since the standard up-left and up-right areas would be focused off of the curtains. As I began drafting these up, I discovered that in order to achieve an ideal angle for face light, the lighting positions granting me the lowest possible angle in the space would be equipped near capacity. Deciding that I didn't want my low-angle systems to lose their unique aesthetic, I increased the angle of these four visibility systems

to a steep thirty degrees. This decision was justified dramaturgically since the added facial shadows created by the steep angle would only aid me within Gordon's grim world, and I could always fill in those shadows with the front fills. Consequently, this choice would be the most sizeable flaw of the design, and will be discussed further in Chapter 6. Altman ellipsoidals were the best choice for these systems as they would allow me to make shutter cuts off of the audience, and none of these fixtures were used in *Merchant of Venice* and therefore would be able to be hung during the scheduled load-in.

As I moved forward to the front fills, I lowered their angle in order to better fill in the now more-prominent facial shadows, and also selected Altman ellipsoidals for the same reasons as before. The final system within the visibility systems was the back wash, for which I selected Source Four PARs. These fixtures would create an even wash while being capable of producing the high-intensity light that I desired. The instruments covering the two upstage areas had to be steeper than the rest of the system in order to keep light off of the handrail of the mezzanine. Upon discovering this, I decided to add two more instruments further back to maintain the angle of the system knowing that they would be shooting through the handrail; however, I would have both options at my disposal.

Hospital Systems

The first hospital-specific system was the chilling, steep front light. The visibility systems had already consumed a vast amount of the Altman inventory, so it was necessary for this system to be Source Four ellipsoidals as I was out of the Altmans needed to obtain proper coverage. Within this system, I added another instrument to cover the area between center-center and the staircase as that area was frequently utilized during hospital scenes because of the hospital bed's location.

Available hanging positions for my time-of-day blast were rather constricted. I knew the angle desired for these would be low to set them apart from the visibility systems, and there was only one low position upstage-right. The number of instruments that could fit on this position was very low, so I decided to simplify the areas down to five: down-left, down-right, center-center, up-left, and up-right. Five, larger areas required more coverage, so Source Four PARNELs were selected as the diameter of their beam is adjustable akin to Fresnels and would give me greater flexibility to achieve the desired focus. I also added one Source Four ellipsoidal to this system to create a hard-edged outline of the light coming through the window on the floor, and while this light would not light much of the actors, it would tell the audience that the light from the blast hailed from a window.

Specials for the hospital were added next, and after researching the options in the space with the light-shop supervisor, we found that the two lights to scrape the curtains from the side could be I-beam clamped onto the bottom of the mezzanine. This would allow the instruments to hug the railing of the seating risers without necessitating a vertical pipe interfering with the actor path.

Color and Texture Systems

Moving on to the systems for the hallucinations, I knew I would be extremely limited in terms of LED fixtures as the department only owned eight LED PARs. I decided to use five of these for down light, using the same four-corner-and-center areas as the hospital blast. The remaining three were dispersed as front light for each audience seating section, and while I knew full coverage with one fixture was impossible, I field-tested them to discover the optimum lens for each that would fill as much of the space as possible.

The remaining systems for the world of fantasy were added without much difficulty. The two templated diagonal-front systems needed to be Source Four ellipsoidals as there were not enough Altmans left in the inventory at this point to achieve a consistent system, and Source Fours would allow for more complicated shutter cuts during focus. Specials, mostly those described prior for the coma sequence, were drafted in while ganging as much as possible. For example, one of the template washes for the tango number could be achieved

with four Source Fours, and as there was no need to control each individually, they could all be plugged into the same circuit.

Completing the Plot

The rest of the plot fell into place, and I continued working through challenges with the light-shop supervisor, such as rigging a new pipe to allow for backlight on the mezzanine. There were a variety of potential positions for the followspots, so an instrument was hung in each to see which location would yield the best angle, minimal spill onto the audience, most comfort for operators, and the ability to make a clear shot to the mezzanine level. Catwalk positions were chosen as they fulfilled these requirements and allowed for the operators to remain out-of-sight from the audience.

On top of drafting in 3D within Vectorworks, I was also required to venture into the unknown world of viewports and sheet layers. Since multiple hanging positions would appear on top of each other in a groundplan view, and I could not simply move them to an open area within the drafting as this would compromise their true position within the 3D environment, I had to create viewports for these positions. In essence, these allowed me to capture certain layers and move them around on a sheet layer to produce a coherent final plot.

Once the preliminary plot was printed, it was reviewed with the shop supervisor and the show's master electricians. There were a few rounds of revisions to gang together as many instruments as possible to keep the plot feasible within the circuit restraints of the space. All-in-all, we were able to adjust accordingly so that we were able to mount the plot without adding any additional dimmer packs, and we even had a few spares in case any additions were required in the future.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DESIGN

Focus

As most of the lights needed for the show were tied up in production in the other performance space, I had more time than normal to twiddle my thumbs and prepare for focus than I had had in the past. We did have to plan the equipment changeover very carefully, and even then it inevitably turned into a day of controlled chaos trying to keep track of what had and had-not been done. That said, we were able to start focus on-time, and once we started we trucked along at an excellent pace; I believe most of the pipe grid was focused after the first evening call.

By having drafted and checked the focus in 3D within Vectorworks, there was not an unacceptable amount of light spill on the audience. Lower angles required a little, but all of the lights were able to be cut below the neck line of the first row so that no light would ever be in the eyes of the audience. I had a lot of fun focusing this plot as it gave me a chance to see what these positions and colors could do in the space.

Design Runs

The design runs were utilized to roughly document blocking for future use, spotting any potential snafus, and discovering the true timing of the play. After the first design run, I

discovered that all of the entrances and exits within Gordon's hospital room were from upstage left, which was the same location where the light through a window was planned. Knowing that a window right next to a door is a rarity, in a hospital or otherwise, I decided to flip the two diagonal-back blast systems so that the hospital window was upstage right and my to-be-determined blast was upstage left. Luckily this was caught the evening before load-in, and my assistant and I were able to draft and reprint an updated plot and paperwork for the next day's load-in.

Highlights from design run number two included working on transitions and finding any final specials that needed to be added. I met with director afterwards, and worked with him onstage to discover the most efficient way to move between songs and locations quickly. Reflecting on it now, it seems that as lighting designers we often conjure ways to tighten transitions that others don't think of. Every suggestion I had for the director to potentially correct a clunky transition was met with excitement and, "Oh! I would have never thought of that! Let's try it!" I did discover two specials that had to be added immediately during this second run through. Countless times actors landed themselves extremely downstage right, almost perfectly between the gap between the seating risers. Since this area was outside of standard acting areas, I decided to add one front and one back special to cover this dark spot. The main purpose of my to-be-determined diagonal-back blast from upstage left was

discovered during Mother's song "Throw It Out." It was a song steeped in dread and loneliness as she is trying to cope with the fact that her son may die the next day. The image of her having a strong, single shadow entered my mind as she sang with passion, and I knew that I could achieve this with the proper focus of that system. A light lavender color was chosen from stock so that it could read either warm or cool dependent on the rest of the light in the scene, and would also be an ideal, flexible color for other uses as they were discovered.

The final design run was used to absorb the show one more time before going into tech. The few notes that I did jot down were miniscule ones dealing with actor placement, cue timings, and checking the focus of a few instruments. There were a few more transitions and staging moments that needed more work, so I chatted with the director afterwards to find solutions to try when we reached those points during tech. After the third design run, I found myself falling into old habits. Being extremely technically-minded from my undergrad and reverting back to my old tech process, I had started going through my scene breakdown and writing out how I was going to light each and every scene. Once I realized how much time I was wasting, I talked with my assistant as we seemed to be left-brain, right-brain opposites of each other, and he suggested giving myself a only starting point for each moment. If I provided a rough roadmap for myself of where to start and what system or angle was the most visually important, I could create the rest in the space. Looking back, I had temporarily

lost sight of my goal to find a better tech process for myself, and it is actually ridiculous to try to completely dictate it all beforehand without seeing a darn thing! I was trying to once again to prescribe the design, and tech would have been much more frustrating had I continued down that road as I would have deprived myself of a creative tech.

Building the Show

As we began working from the top of the show, it took a while to get everyone on the same page and into an efficient tech mode. We dawdled on the opening sequence too long to get it called and run perfectly, even though the cues were built within the first ten minutes. Time was also expended figuring out the most efficient way to get cue information to both my team and stage management. In order to spend less time communicating cue placement to stage management, my assistant and I wanted to try a system where I would relate cue information to him, and he would relay that information to the stage manager as I continued building cues. While a good idea, we quickly discovered that it was more effective for me to impart cues to both of them at the same time so that I could answer any questions up front. I felt that we were able to move forward at a quicker pace once we got past first break.

Freedom of Expression

Moving on through the show, I was quite pleased with what I was able to create utilizing the tools I had given myself within the plot. Scenes were coming together almost

naturally, and the distinction between reality and fantasy was successfully contrasted. I quickly found myself not even consulting the roadmap I had made the night before, and it was extremely liberating not to build cues based strictly on paperwork; I knew the show, I knew the plot, and I knew the story that light had to tell. The rest was experimenting and responding to what I was seeing. This process was much closer to the tech process I had been searching for, as I felt a freedom to paint and play with light that I had never quite experienced before.

Working in this manner, there were many moments in the show that ended up looking completely different than what I had anticipated. The strongest example of this was the Mr. Bungee hallucination at the end of “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat,” during which nurse Richard spun a tale of woe about how his life had turned out. This slowly triggered a self-deprecating moment within Gordon as he tried to comfort Richard, saying that “he is not so damn successful.” My original intent was for Mr. Bungee’s spotlights to pop on as he began taunting Gordon from the mezzanine level. However, these emotions were slowly percolating within Gordon, not rising to the surface immediately. I decided to try gently adding the cold backlight on the mezzanine and asked the director to communicate a slow, sinister lurking entrance with the actor playing Mr. Bungee. Once he would begin taunting Gordon, Mr. Bungee’s spotlights would be added gently, and the cold backlight in addition to an

aggressive lime-green color would gradually permeate and surround Gordon's hospital room as Mr. Bungee encircled his bed. Once recorded into the board and relayed to stage management, we ran the sequence to much success. Seeing the threatening silhouette of Mr. Bungee loom over Gordon as his insecurities rose within himself was a powerful image, and also clearly linked the hallucination to Gordon's heightened emotions.

Transitions and Cue Timing

A large part of the tech process was finding out precisely how we moved from all of these different locations and hallucinations. Transitions had been in the front of my mind from the first design run, and each run through provided the opportunity to meet with Glenn and really hash out most of these shifts before tech. In terms of cue timing, many cues leading into a scene were bumped in, such as when Nancy D jarringly smacks the hospital bed with her chart to begin a new day, or Mr. Bungee jumping into view on the mezzanine to trigger a hallucination. As most all of the musical numbers flowed seamlessly into the next, shifts between them also needed to be quick. Slower, subtle cue times were assigned mainly within time-of-day shifts, and tracking light to follow actors from the mezzanine to stage level. Slower times were often utilized on the downtime of snap cues in order to prevent the need for follow cues after many of the bumps. Slow times were also applied within scenes where the shift of focus needed to change subtly, such as when Roger crossed the hospital

space to sit on the bed with Gordon. By removing most of the face light from where Roger was no longer located, it allowed the emotive sunlight have a bigger impact on the space while the focal point, Gordon and Roger at the bed, was highlighted.

Time Management

Even though I had embraced the process of creating cues in the moment during tech, songs that necessitated a large amount of cues were roughed in during the morning dark time. These rough cues were also given to stage management so that we were able to run the song when we reached it during tech, then go back to make the necessary adjustments. I knew that it would be best to program all of the show-stopping number “Eating Myself Up Alive” beforehand, and when the moment of glory approached, we ran what we had so everyone could see and respond to it without spending hours looking at bits and pieces.

Nonetheless, that particular number ended up consuming quite a bit of tech time. There was a disagreement between the choreographer and myself on how the song began. I had envisioned a followspotted Richard entering across the mezzanine and landing on the top of the stairs by the first bump in the music. This hit in the music would bump us into the concert environment full-force as the song had a strong presence from the very beginning and did not call for a fade of any sort. The choreographer wanted his entrance to be slower and ‘groovier,’ and did not share my opinion about the quick-momentum going into the song. I

explained that the high-energy of the song before had to be interrupted with intensity, but she was sticking to her guns. To be a team player, I quickly built the best option I could for the bump occurring on the corner of the mezzanine, but I had very minimal options that could not produce the concert impact the song required. We ran the revised entrance and ended up changing it back, but we had lost almost a full hour and efficient work flow at that point.

Overall the weekend was productive but slow, although in the moment it was almost impossible to pinpoint any way to move through the show more quickly. I was building all of my cues within the timeframe I gave myself, and we were not running things over and over. The undergraduate stage manager was proving extremely talented for it being his first show, and rarely missed cues or misunderstood the desired calling of them. I truly believe we made good time throughout the tech weekend, even though we were not able to completely finish. We reset to top-of-show Sunday evening and ran through the whole show to the point where we left off, and then reverted back into a tech pattern for the rest of the evening to complete building the show.

Evaluating and Refining the Production

Singing the Front Light Blues

As I kept noting cues where actors' faces were dark, I slowly realized that the steep angle of my visibility systems was working against rather than for me. It was impossible to

add more visibility from these systems because their steepness only added more shadow on the performers' faces. So although I had told myself the angle would be beneficial dramaturgically within Gordon's grim world, I did not think about how this would compromise their ability to do what they needed to do, see actors!

I started really punching up the front fills and this appeared to rectify the situation, but their dark blue color had burned out to a light blue after the weekend of tech. I spent the day cueing these in to fill-in faces, but then the master electricians give me a fresh batch of gel to replace the burnt color for tech that evening. Just like that, every cue I had tweaked now took on a dark, cold, somber tone, and faces were still steeped in shadow! I quickly realized that I had to do something to fix this. Most of the scenes where I needed more face light were in the hospital, where the intense upstage-right window blast caused faces to be dark from stage left. I ended up replacing the color of the front fill from stage left to a much lighter blue tint that would read as neutral in order to light faces on that side. It was a small patch on a much larger problem, but it held together enough to carry the show, and taught me a valuable lesson.

Something Just Doesn't Feel Quite Right

One scene that developed after the tech weekend was the shower scene where nurse Richard allows Gordon and Roger to take a shower together rather than forcing another

sponge bath on him. The director's intent with this song was to use it as an opportunity to highlight the intimacy that we otherwise do not get the chance to see between Gordon and Roger. Initially the shower was a tight pool of down light upstage right, but no matter what direction was given, the end result was always two straight guys struggling to play a gay couple. While the actors had made huge strides throughout rehearsals, the intimate action of shampooing and washing each other was proving beyond their comfort level. The fun, lighthearted nature of the song was being lost to this distraction. We ended up making the shower number much more farcical, and the boys went behind the curtains to take their shower, leaving the audience to wonder what was really going on behind. For their lines within the song, the boys popped their heads out from behind the curtains with their heads picked up by the followspots. This change also gave Richard more freedom to use the space. There was a reprise of "I'd Rather Be Sailing" immediately after the shower scene, so we decided to use this moment to showcase their relationship by setting them on the staircase in a light recalled from Roger's "I'd Rather Be Sailing" from act one. By setting this moment apart, it was able to have more of an impact and become the sweet rediscovery of their relationship that needed to be portrayed.

The transition out of "Eating Myself Up Alive" grew out of a response to the run on Tuesday night. That song was such a huge show-stopper with sustained applause after it, and

going straight into Mother's piano-bar ballad felt too rushed and didn't give us the time to settle down after "Eating...". I suggested to the director that we use this opportunity to isolate Gordon with a single spotlight as he is left alone wondering what is coming next within a dark, silent void. This choice provided the necessary breath, and also served as a reminder that we were still in his head within his coma. As Gordon tried to regain his bearings, piercing rays of light slowly crept in from behind a piano, beckoning Gordon towards it to begin playing Mother's song. This change ended up being one of the most powerful moments in the production, and helped support the flow, energy, and story-telling within the coma sequence.

Followspots for All

Even though the followspots were initially planned only for Mr. Bungee and a select few other moments on the mezzanine, I ended up utilizing them much more than anticipated. The change in the shower scene tested the moxie of the operators, as they had to snap on and off actors' heads popping out from behind a curtain. Luckily, the operators quickly accepted the challenge and, after some practice, were able to accomplish this task. Other added uses were within musical numbers where one character needed to be highlighted from the ensemble. The spots were the ideal choice for these instances as they provided the smallest, most-controllable brush stroke of light.

Final Additions and Edits

Additions to the plot during the tech process were minimal. While building the end of the show, I discovered that I needed even more punch from the sunlight blast to have the impact required for this final moment. To accomplish this, I had the master electricians increase the wattage of the units' lamps from 575-watts to 750-watts. The other addition necessitated was for the end of "Eating Myself Up Alive." A strobe cue had been built for the final, sustained note before the bump at the end of the number. The strobing was sourced from the LED fixtures, but did not have the iconic strobe-light look that I was after. Therefore, three additional strobe lights were added above the stage to increase the power of this moment.

An unanticipated learning opportunity presented itself during this final stage of evaluation and adjustment. The lighting cuelist had been built in tracking mode, meaning that information from one cue would "track" into the next unless told not to. While building the show, I had made certain cues blocks in order to reset the tracking and prevent changes from bleeding into future cues. However, there were other cues that should have been built as blocks and were not, the most noticeable being blackouts. As adjustments were made in cues before a blackout, those changes tracked through to the blackouts so that they were no longer

true blackouts. The valuable take-away from this was to always think about tracking throughout the tech process in order to make adjustments easier in the future.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS

I went into this journey knowing that I was seeking to improve upon my collaboration skills and tech process, all the while tackling the challenges of designing for three-quarter thrust and the Curtain Theater. I was able to actively grow and develop in these areas by focusing on them from the beginning, and the lessons learned are applicable for not only my future career as a lighting designer, but also as an instructor within academic theatre.

As with any creative endeavor, I believe it is important to be able to reflect on and learn from the pitfalls and potentials. I learned a valuable lesson from my greatest pitfall of compromising the angles of main visibility systems. They were too steep to the point of being unusable for face light, and my color choice for the facial fills was too dark and cold to do its job without shifting the scene in a different direction. Another take-away from this experience was to always consider how tracking effects future cues, and the best use of block cues to facilitate easier editing after cue creation.

The greatest potential was that by not prescribing the design word-for-word, I was able to unlock a fun, creative flow during the tech process. For the first time, I truly felt that I was able to paint with light and create cues with the freedom to change, and sometimes completely abandon, pre-conceived specifics in response to how the production was coming

together. My tech process will continue to change and evolve in the future as I now need to tackle being an artist in a timely manner, but unlocking that inner artist was an essential and wonderful experience. I was able to empathize with Gordon's need for an artistic rebirth at the beginning of this process, and experienced my own cathartic journey right along side him. Before this project I was stuck in my past creative process, and after I felt refreshed, with my passions re-energized and ready for the next endeavor. Being able to work freely and creatively in tech was an important lesson, and I believe not letting the stress involved in the tech process overpower that creativity is an important guiding principle for mentoring my future students through their own designs.

Working with the director, Glenn Proud, was an absolute joy. Our dialogue was uninhibited, fervent, and free-flowing, and we developed a strong trust and confidence between ourselves that allowed for a freeing and fruitful collaboration. I felt that this show exemplified the success of unhindered, unpolitical teamwork, and not just between the director and me. I now know that establishing trust and mutual respect amongst the creative team is a critical first-step for collaboration on any production, and a pleasant disposition is just as important to being a successful designer as the work produced. The addition of the transitional segment between "Eating Myself Up Alive" and "The Music Still Plays On" would not have been possible if the director and me were unable to have an open

conversation responding to the blocking, lighting, and energy of the moment. This experience reinforced the importance of building strong connections with both design staff and future students and colleagues to allow for pleasant and fruitful learning and production experiences. Every moment working on this show was fueled by the fact that everyone was working together and having a really great time.

Closing Words

A New Brain was a defining moment for me as a designer. Did I make mistakes? You bet. Would I do things differently if I could? Of course, but that is the nature of the artist; constantly striving towards perfection while never being able to achieve it. Every design is cram-packed with learning what to take into the future and what things just do not work. I can walk away completely satisfied with this production, having learned valuable lessons in collaboration, my own design process, and lighting design as a whole. While I still have a great deal to learn, I feel enormous pride when I think of where I started and to see all that I have accomplished since then.

APPENDIX A

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

A New Brain

Music and Lyrics by: William Finn

Book by: William Finn & James Lapine

University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater

Production Dates: November 15th - 22nd, 2014

Venue: The Curtain Theater

Production Staff:

Director Glenn Proud

Dramaturg Conor Dennin

Musical Director Luke Flood

Choreographer Melissa Cleary

Stage Managers Peter Vaiknoras
Michael Smith

Scenic Designer Stacie St. Louis

Costume Designers Chris Hynds
Erin Mabee

Lighting Designer James Horban

Sound Designer Amy Altadonna

Properties Master Lily Filippatos
Kyle Hartmann

Assistant Director Kathryn McNall

Assistant Lighting Designer C. Webster Marsh

Assistant Sound Designer Matthew Dews

Assistant Stage Managers Bailey Lathrop
Melissa Magaliff

Directing Advisor Gina Kaufmann

Dramaturgy Advisor Megan Lewis

Scenic Design Advisor Miguel Romero

Costume Design Advisor Andrea Lauer
Lighting Design Advisor Margo Caddell

Production Manager Julie Fife
Technical Director Michael Cottom
Costume Shop Manager Kristin Jensen
Lighting Supervisor Michael Dubin
Sound Supervisor Amy Altadonna

The Company:

Gordon Michael Schwinn Ben Finn
Homeless Woman/Lisa Jordan Reed
Rhoda Meghan Ryan
Mr. Bungee Alexander Stravinski
Richard, the nice nurse Joseph Kain
Nancy D, the thin nurse Emily Tanch
Dr. Jafar Berensteiner Kyle Arrington
The Minister Nathan Hall
Roger Delli-Bovi Eryn Newton
Mimi Schwinn, the mother Meaghan Morris
Understudy for Rhoda Lily Filippatos

The Band:

Conductor/Keyboard 1 Luke Flood
Keyboard 2 Sarah Tyler
Cello Kate Robarge
Woodwinds Zach Robarge
French Horn Peter Guidi
Drums Caleb Davis

Lighting Crew:

Lighting Designer James Horban
Assistant Lighting Designer C. Webster Marsh
Production Master Electricians Michael W. Seavey
Slava Tchoul
Lighting Console Programmer Miranda Anne Tremblay

Lighting Console Operator Savannah Van Leuvan-Smith

Follow Spot Operators Zachary Molin
Sevan Dulgarian

Lighting Supervisor Michael Dubin

Electrics Shop Graduate Assistants . Michael Blagys
James Horban
C. Webster Marsh

Electrics Shop Assistants Jessica Gill
Michael Seavey
Michael Smith
Slava Tchoul
Miranda Anne Tremblay
Katherine McNall
Zach Molin

APPENDIX B

DOCUMENT LIST

Contents:	Location:
Light Plot	See Supplemental Content
Channel Hookup	See Supplemental Content
Magic Sheets	See Supplemental Content
Cue Sheet	See Supplemental Content
Spotlight Cue Sheet	See Supplemental Content
Scene Breakdown	See Supplemental Content
Shop Order	See Supplemental Content

APPENDIX C

PHOTO LIST

Contents:

Location:

PHOTOS:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 01. “Prologue: Frogs Have So Much Spring” | See Supplemental Content |
| 02. “Prologue: Calamari” | See Supplemental Content |
| 03. “Trouble in His Brain” | See Supplemental Content |
| 04. “Mother’s Gonna Make Things Fine” | See Supplemental Content |
| 05. “Sailing” | See Supplemental Content |
| 06. “And They’re Off” | See Supplemental Content |
| 07. “An Invitation to Sleep in My Arms” | See Supplemental Content |
| 08. “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat” | See Supplemental Content |
| 09. “Eating Myself Up Alive” | See Supplemental Content |
| 10. “The Music Still Plays On” | See Supplemental Content |
| 11. “The Homeless Lady’s Revenge” | See Supplemental Content |
| 12. “I Feel So Much Spring” | See Supplemental Content |

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