

ABSTRACT

From Christmas Lights to Candlelight:
A Director's Approach to Alfred Uhry's *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*

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In 1996 playwright Alfred Uhry was commissioned to write a play for the Cultural Olympiad in honor of the upcoming Summer Olympic Games that were to be held in his hometown of Atlanta, Georgia. The resulting play, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, is the story of a Southern Jewish family in Atlanta in 1939 grappling with their own opposing and overlapping social, cultural, and familial identities. It is Uhry's second play in a series of works that would come to be known as his "Atlanta Trilogy," which explores the complex cultural identity of Jews in the American South in the mid-twentieth century. In September of 2021, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was produced on the Baylor University Theatre stage. This thesis examines the directorial process of that production from research on the life and works of playwright Alfred Uhry and a directorial script analysis through the development of the director's artistic concept, the collaborative design and rehearsal processes to the final performances.

From Christmas Lights to Candlelight: A Director's Approach to
Alfred Uhry's *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Alfred Uhry and His Works

Introduction

Playwright Alfred Uhry is most known for authoring three plays that depict the lives of Jewish families in the American South, specifically Atlanta, Georgia, in the early to mid-twentieth century: *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, and *Parade*. Together they are sometimes referred to as his “Atlanta Trilogy,” but Uhry says they were conceived independently from one another and that creating a trilogy was never his intention. When asked about it in a 2014 interview at the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame celebration Uhry said, “I think it’s just that in my heart I go back to Atlanta and my childhood when I want to dig deep. That’s just the way it is.”¹

Uhry was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia and his Southern roots grow deep. He is also ethnically Jewish. His family is of German-Jewish descent, but most of his ancestors emigrated to the United States in the 1840s and some even served in the Civil War. In a 1998 interview with *Back Stage* he said, "My great-great uncle was a blockade runner for the Confederates! And there were many Southern Jews in the Civil War, which we called 'The War Between the States.' Southerners find nothing civil about it."²

¹ Alfred Uhry, interview by Hugh Ruppersburg, Nov. 10, 2014, “Interview with Alfred Uhry, Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014,” YouTube video, uploaded on March 24, 2015, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4LHaXU8nr0&t=5s>

² Simi Horwitz, "After the 'Ballyhoo'- Comes the 'Parade,'" *Back Stage*, December 18, 1998, 51. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed July 15, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A53491936/AONE?u=txshracd2488&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=328ce845>.

Explorations of this distinctive Southern Jewish heritage are a hallmark of his work. He explained further saying, "If you're a Southerner you're a Southerner for the rest of your life, whether or not you're living in the South anymore. In fact, Southern Jews define themselves as Southern first, American second, and Jewish third. ...Yet to be a true Southerner, to be part of the 'in' group, you have to be Christian."³ It is this conflict of overlapping and opposing identities that lies at the heart of Uhry's most well-known works.

The Atlanta Trilogy

Uhry's "Atlanta trilogy" of plays share a geographical setting and the fact that the characters are Jewish Southerners, but more than that, these plays are linked by the thematic exploration of the intersections of societal, cultural, familial, and individual identity. Uhry does not refute the thematic similarities between the three "Atlanta trilogy" plays but when asked about it in an interview he said, "I don't think I write themes; I think I write characters." He further clarified saying,

...I don't think about themes. I think about how people behave and what really happens ...for instance I don't think most people say what they mean. I think people often don't even know what they mean. They just say things. But way under what they say we can tell how they feel. And I like the space between what you say and how you feel. ...I don't set out to explore a theme. I ...explore how people feel. That's what I really am interested in.⁴

These characters and explorations of their feelings are often inspired by people in his own life. Many of the characters he writes are based on his family members. For example, one of the characters in *Driving Miss Daisy* is based on his grandmother, and another is a combination of his mother, and himself. Various characters in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*

³ Horwitz, "After the 'Ballyhoo.'"

⁴ Uhry, "Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014."

are based on his mother, father, great aunt, and other relatives, and the love story is loosely based on that of his parents.⁵ Many of the experiences of his characters are also based on his own personal experiences and those of his family members, specifically those relating to the complex relationship between being a Southerner and being a Jew.

Born in 1936 to a middle-class Jewish family, Alfred Uhry describes his childhood as “very Southern” and “very middle class, suburban.”⁶ His father, Ralph Uhry, was a furniture designer with roots in Louisiana, and his mother, Alene (Fox) Uhry, was a social worker and an Atlanta native. He had one sister, Ann, who was two years his senior. His family, though ethnically Jewish, did not practice Judaism. In 1997 interviewer Steve Cohen wrote:

Though Uhry regrets his lack of Jewish upbringing, he's thankful he was taught good values. ‘My mom and dad urged us to help less fortunate Jews, and we collected money for refugees and orphanages.’ They taught him that the most important thing in life is family. His parents also gave him an appreciation for literature, art, theater, and opera, sometimes taking him to see shows in New York. ‘My father was a Sunday painter,’ he says, ‘and both he and my mother encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do with my life.’⁷

Uhry has been very candid about his complicated relationship with his own Jewish heritage. “We were pretty entrenched in being Southern,” says Uhry, “So, I grew up wishing I was not Jewish. Because I wanted to be like everybody else.”⁸ He described

⁵ Alfred Uhry, interview by Paul Rudd, “Alfred Uhry by Paul Rudd,” *BOMB*, 60 (July 1, 1997), accessed July 15, 2021, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/alfred-uhry/>.

⁶ Uhry, “Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014.”

⁷ Steve Cohen, “Much Ado About 'Ballyhoo': Alfred Uhry's ‘non-Jewish’ boyhood in Atlanta has helped garner the triple crown of writing awards,” *Inside* 18, no. 3 (September 30, 1997).

⁸ Alfred Uhry, interview, “What’s Driving Mr. Uhry,” *CNN Time*, 1999, YouTube video, uploaded on Feb. 11, 2010, accessed July 17, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUpH-W8SU2A>.

himself as "...a Jewish boy that never saw lox or bagels, who never had a Seder, who had a Christmas tree and attended many Easter egg hunts as a child..." He continued, "Those were the holidays for us. It was...confusing."⁹ Although his childhood was generally a happy one, he also says that discrimination "was always there. There was always the shadow. Always something would come out and somebody would say, 'dirty Jew' or 'kike' or something. It was there."¹⁰

In his works of his "Atlanta trilogy" Uhry explores, both directly and indirectly, the "otherness" of being a Jew in the South and the multi-generational struggle of Southern Jews with ethnic identity, faith, and cultural assimilation. There are two primary components of Jewish identity: ethnicity and religion. Jewish ethnic identity refers to the social, cultural, and historical aspects of Judaism. The Jewish religion refers to the core ideological and spiritual beliefs of Judaism. Either or both of these elements can define a Jew as "the other" in the South and separate them from the dominant Protestant Christian culture. This conflict between ethnic and religious Jewish identity can be intercommunal, however it can also be intracommunal and Uhry examines both in his work as he explores the tension between authenticity, identity, and cultural assimilation that characterize life for Jews in the South. While present in all the "Atlanta Trilogy" works, this exploration of Jewish identity is especially central to the second work in the trilogy, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. This thesis document will examine the process of directing Alfred Uhry's *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* at Baylor University in September of 2021, and how its themes and ideas of identity as revealed through the exploration of Uhry's life and works and an

⁹ Uhry, "What's Driving Mr. Uhry," *CNN Time*.

¹⁰ Uhry, "Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014."

analysis of the play led to the directorial artistic concept that informed and shaped the design and rehearsal process of the production.

Early Writing and Career

From his early youth Uhry had an interest in writing. He described himself as a very observant child who liked to listen to the “grown people talk” and share their stories.

He said,

I loved it all and I loved the stories that were told. ...Southern people tell a lot of stories and ...Jewish people seem to tell a lot of stories. So there were a lot of stories told about a lot of people. And people would get very worked up about which person was married to that person and who saw who at the party and who looked terrible and who looked good. And I found it just very sort of ‘dishy’ and juicy to hear all that stuff. And I was very aware of who got their feelings hurt. And I just liked watching people and listening and I always had an interest in thinking about that. When [did] it turned into writing? I’m not sure. It was very early.¹¹

He also credits one of his middle school teachers, Ms. Harrison, with cultivating his interest in more formal writing. She helped her students create a school newspaper called “The Harrison Herald” of which Uhry was the editor. He said, “[Ms. Harrison] encouraged us to write. She particularly encouraged me to write. And she saved my stuff. And she really... helped me to want to be a writer.”¹²

Although he was a longtime fan of the theatre, especially of musicals, it was not until he was a student at Brown University that Uhry developed a particular interest in writing for the theatre. As a student, he took a theatre course that explored various classical works from the Greeks to the Elizabethan era that “awakened [his] interest in the

¹¹ Uhry, “Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014.”

¹² Ibid.

theatre.” He jokingly added “And also I fell in love with a girl in the class and that awakened my interest in theatre too, so I became very involved.”¹³ That girl, Joanna Kellogg, eventually became his wife.

Alfred Uhry began his theatrical career as a lyricist for musical theatre. Upon graduating from Brown University in 1958 with a degree in English Literature, Uhry moved to New York City with his friend and classmate Bob Waldman. He and Waldman, a composer, had worked together on extra-curricular musical theatre projects while at Brown. Once in New York, Uhry and Waldman both worked for Frank Loesser, the celebrated composer and lyricist of hundreds of songs for theatre and film, including the scores for the Broadway musicals *Guys and Dolls*, *The Most Happy Fella*, and *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*. Uhry called his time working for Loesser, “...a master class.”¹⁴ Through Loesser, Uhry and Waldman were able to meet and forge connections with other artists and theatre professionals including the novelist John Steinbeck and aspiring playwright Terrence McNally. Uhry and Waldman’s first Broadway musical attempt was a 1967 collaboration with McNally on a musical version of Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* entitled *Here’s Where I Belong!* In an interview in 1998 Uhry laughingly said, “It opened and closed on Broadway in one night...and none of us mentions it in our bios.”¹⁵

In the meantime, while continuing to write on the side, Uhry worked as a drama teacher at a private school in New York City. He has fond memories of his time as a

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Horwitz, “After the ‘Ballyhoo.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

teacher saying, “I loved teaching. I love kids. ... I could have lived a life as a teacher happily, but [playwriting] came in and it was more exciting. ... I have always kept my hand in teaching; I’ve done masterclasses. I love working with young people.”¹⁶ This love of teaching is something that he shared with his wife, Dr. Joanna Kellogg Uhry, who began her career as a teacher as well. She went on to earn two master’s degrees and an Ed.D. from Columbia University where she eventually joined the faculty of the Teachers College. In 1994 she joined the faculty at Fordham University where she worked until her retirement in 2015. After marrying in 1959, Alfred and Joanna Uhry lived their entire married life together in New York City and raised four daughters. Dr. Joanna Uhry passed away in 2019.

After many years and many attempts, Uhry and Waldman finally achieved modest success with their 1975 musical, *The Robber Bridegroom* based on Eudora Welty’s 1942 novella of the same name. Welty, a charter member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers, an organization which Uhry would find himself part of many years later, was a celebrated and award-winning novelist and short story writer from Mississippi. Uhry said the idea came when he ran across a copy of *The Robber Bridegroom* in a bookstore. Although he was a fan of Welty’s work, this was not one that he had come across before and in his first reading of it he decided he would like to adapt it into a musical. He wrote to Welty who gave him her blessing to try.¹⁷ Based on the Brothers’ Grimm Fairy Tale, Welty’s version of *The Robber Bridegroom* is a Southern folktale set in rural Mississippi. Uhry and Waldman stayed true to their source material in their stage adaptation which

¹⁶ Uhry, “Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

New York Times reviewer Clive Barnes called “...a bright and lively musical, a sort of country and western fairytale,” and “an ingenious mixture of square-dance and folk play.”¹⁸

Though not commercially successful, *The Robber Bridegroom* was well-received by critics, and the production received two Tony nominations. Uhry received a Tony nomination for “Best Book of a Musical” and original Broadway cast member, Patti LuPone, received her first Tony nomination for “Best Performance by a Featured Actress in a Musical.” The production also received seven Drama Desk Award nominations, including one for Uhry for “Outstanding Book of a Musical.” Notably, *The Robber Bridegroom* had a short run in 1975 and then was reworked and revived only a year later in 1976 for another short run. The 1976 production also received award nominations: one Tony nomination and win (for Barry Botswick for “Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Musical”) and eight Drama Desk Award nominations, including a nomination for “Outstanding Lyrics” for Uhry. More recently *The Robber Bridegroom* enjoyed an award-winning Off-Broadway revival in 2016. Interestingly, in addition to being his first critical success, *The Robber Bridegroom* also marked the first time Uhry created a work takes place in the American South, a connection to his own Southern heritage that became the trademark of his later, more well-known works.

¹⁸ Clive Barnes, “‘Robber Bridegroom’ Sparkles at Biltmore,” *The New York Times* (October 11, 1976), accessed July 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/11/archives/robber-bridegroom-sparkles-at-biltmore.html>.

Driving Miss Daisy

Despite continued setbacks, Uhry never gave up writing. He said, “Eventually it occurred to me after some years of writing these musicals, that I should try to focus on something I knew. And also, I liked writing the libretto part of a musicals more than the lyrics, so I decided to write my first play. About my family.”¹⁹ That play, *Driving Miss Daisy*, became a huge success and is a sort of playwriting Cinderella-story. Uhry continued, “...it changed my life. I was already over fifty, but it changed everything.”²⁰

His first ever non-musical play, *Driving Miss Daisy* opened off-Broadway at Playwright’s Horizons in 1987 to great acclaim and ran for three years. *New York Times* critic Mel Gussow described the play as “sweet without being mawkish, ameliorative without being sanctimonious.” His review complimented the acting performances and direction and said, “...at times it seems more like an extended character sketch or family memoir than an actual drama, but it would be difficult to deny its homespun appeal.”²¹ The production was nominated for and won many prestigious off-Broadway awards, and Uhry was awarded the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. This sudden success necessitated and enabled him to step down from his teaching position and focus on writing full-time. When movie studios came calling for the rights to make *Driving Miss Daisy* into a motion picture, Uhry wisely insisted that he be allowed to adapt the script himself. He remembers, “They wanted the property and I said I wouldn’t sell it unless I did the

¹⁹ Uhry, “Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mel Gussow, “The Stage: Driving Miss Daisy,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1987 (accessed March 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/16/theater/the-stage-driving-miss-daisy.html>.

script."²² The film version, written by Uhry and starring Jessica Tandy, Morgan Freeman, Dan Aykroyd, and Patti LuPone, was released in 1989, also to great acclaim. The film received many awards and nominations including nine Academy Award nominations, ultimately winning four of them. All three leading actors received nominations; Tandy won for her performance, Uhry won the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay, and the film won Best Picture.

Surprisingly, the play did not debut on Broadway until 2010. Uhry wrote that he was asked about it "...many times over the ensuing years ...with all sorts of odd casting ideas, none of which I will tell you about because I still try to be a Southern gentleman," but, he continued, "Nothing seemed exactly right to me and I wanted to protect my memory of that wonderful Off-Broadway experience, so I said no (politely, I hope) over and over again."²³ Producers Jed Bernstein and Adam Zlotovich finally won him over. Uhry had always felt that having just the right director and cast for the project was paramount and when they suggested David Esbjornson to direct Uhry said, "I admired his intelligent and unsentimental approach—just what I thought my play needed."²⁴ He was equally pleased with the cast they were able to secure: James Earl Jones, Vanessa Redgrave, and Boyd Gaines. In his review of the 2010 production, Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* was tepid in his praise of the play calling it, "...little more than a series of sketches with the gentle, laugh-a-little-cry-a-little rhythms of a sentimental sitcom."

²² Horwitz, "After the 'Ballyhoo.'"

²³ Alfred Uhry, "How Alfred Uhry Turned Family Memories into the Beloved Classic *Driving Miss Daisy*," *Broadway.com*, (October 12, 2010), accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.broadway.com/buzz/153875/how-alfred-uhry-turned-family-memories-into-the-beloved-classic-driving-miss-daisy/>.

²⁴ Alfred Uhry, "How Alfred Uhry Turned Family Memories..."

However, he also wrote, “Uhry...unfolds his story...with skilled restraint and a few surprises,” and commended the performances of James Earl Jones and Vanessa Redgrave, saying “[Jones and Redgrave] give responsible, intelligent performances that are infused with two old pros’ joy in the mastery of their craft. And they pull off the deft trick of registering as big as we want them to be without making the play in which they appear seem even smaller than it is.”²⁵

Driving Miss Daisy chronicles the twenty-five-year relationship of Daisy Werthan, an elderly Southern Jewish woman, and Hoke Coleburn, her African-American chauffeur, from 1948 to 1973 in Atlanta, Georgia. The play has a simple set, and there are only three characters: Daisy, Hoke, and Boolie, Daisy’s son who hires Hoke to drive his mother. Uhry described it saying,

...I wrote a play about my childhood in Atlanta, Georgia. Playwriting 101 tells you to write what you know, and that’s what I did. Two of the characters were composites of people in my family—my parents, my grandmother, my brother-in-law, my aunts, a few cousins and myself. The third character, Hoke Coleburn, was pretty much based on Will Coleman, my grandmother’s chauffeur. I wrote very specifically about time and place. All the events really happened, one way or another, though I moved things around a bit to serve my purposes. It was a family memoir, and I didn’t think it would have much appeal to anyone who wasn’t familiar with Atlanta in those days.²⁶

The time spanned in the play covers a fascinating era in history. It was a time of great social and cultural change. Significant historical events in Atlanta’s history (and that of the broader United States) are portrayed in the play, specifically the 1958 bombing of a Jewish Temple in Atlanta and the 1964 dinner in Atlanta honoring Dr. Martin Luther

²⁵ Ben Brantley, “Stooped and a Bit Slow, But Still Standing Tall,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 2010 (accessed March 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/26/theater/reviews/26driving.html>.

²⁶ Alfred Uhry, “How Alfred Uhry Turned Family Memories...”

King, Jr. on the occasion of him receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, but these events themselves are not at the center of the play. These events and others are viewed through the lens of the characters as they grow and adapt, or struggle to adapt, to the changing world around them. Both Hoke and Daisy are outsiders of mainstream society, in different ways, but also are very wary of each other. Throughout the play their prejudices and biases slowly evolve into a mutual understanding and respect and ultimately into a deep friendship. This unlikely and surprising friendship between Hoke and Daisy, despite their extreme differences, lies at the heart of the play.

On the surface, *Driving Miss Daisy* may not seem to be a play about cultural assimilation and otherness, but the friendship between Hoke and Daisy develops in large part because of their mutual understanding of what it means to be an outsider of the dominant white, Protestant culture. That theme is the strong undercurrent that drives the play forward. Their experiences as a working-class black man and a wealthy Jewish woman in Atlanta are very different from one another, but they each understand what it feels like to be “the other” and struggle to navigate living in a society that does not fully accept them. On the success of the play, Uhry modestly said, “With *Driving Miss Daisy* I was writing something that was out of my own heart and out of my own life and I just automatically and instinctively knew what was right for the play...and I think that kind of security in writing works for the director and the actors and everybody else.”²⁷ That writing from his “own heart” and “own life” marked the first time Uhry wrote characters and dialogue that addressed the Southern Jewish experience.

²⁷ Alfred Uhry, “Classic Clips: Alfred Uhry on his play ‘Driving Miss Daisy’ (1987)” (video), American Theatre Wing, posted on March 19, 2014, accessed on May 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWma6V0O8SE>.

Though it is perhaps more subtle than his two later works, Uhry introduces many references to the cultural assimilation and identity struggles of Southern Jews in *Driving Miss Daisy*. Even the proud and inflexible Daisy struggles with her sense of identity as the world around her shifts and changes. One of the hallmarks of cultural assimilation that Uhry includes is references to Christmas celebrations. Another is the sarcastic, self-deprecating humor of Daisy, especially on display in her comic disdain for her un-seen (in the play version) daughter-in-law, Florine. “If I had a nose like Florine, I wouldn’t go around saying ‘Merry Christmas’ to anybody,”²⁸ says Daisy in one of her many quips criticizing Florine for being over-assimilated and trying too hard to impress the Christians. The closest the play comes to directly addressing the feelings of otherness by Southern Jews and their ostracization by the dominant Christian culture is when the Temple bombing occurs. When Hoke is driving Daisy and they are stuck in a bad traffic jam, he leaves to investigate. When he comes back he tells her that the Temple has been bombed. In shock, Daisy says, “Well it’s a mistake. I’m sure they meant to bomb one of the conservative synagogues or the orthodox one. The temple is reform. Everybody knows that,” to which Hoke responds: “It doan’ matter to them people. A Jew is a Jew to them folks. Jes’ like light or dark we all the same nigger.”²⁹ Hoke proceeds to share a traumatic experience he had as a boy when he came upon his friend’s body hanging in a tree. He had been lynched. Daisy is upset by the comparison and in denial of the reality of the bombing. With this exchange Uhry highlights the underlying fear and anxiety that Southern Jews experienced living with this “shadow,” as he called it.

²⁸ Uhry, *Driving Miss Daisy*, 18.

²⁹ Ibid, 38.

After his achievement with the screenplay for *Driving Miss Daisy*, Uhry found success in screenwriting like some of his other playwriting predecessors and contemporaries. He said, "I was 'golden boy' in the movies for a while and I wrote a lot of films. Most of them didn't get made, but I got to travel around the world, I got paid well, and in fact, it really floated me so I could write more plays."³⁰ The most well-known film he wrote during this period was *Mystic Pizza*, a 1988 film starring Julia Roberts in one of her first major film roles. Of the subsequent years Uhry said, "I found that as glamorous as Hollywood was, as wonderful as those trips were, and as wonderful as the money was, I just didn't like it very much. I liked writing for the theatre," but it took almost ten years for Uhry to write another play.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo

In 1996, Uhry's hometown of Atlanta, Georgia was to host to the Summer Olympic Games and he was commissioned by Atlanta's Alliance Theatre Company to write a play for the Cultural Olympiad. Uhry recounts, "I said I would, but did it have to be about sports? They said, 'No it didn't'; it could be anything I wanted it to be about. So, I thought I would write a play about the last time Atlanta was in the international spotlight: the *Gone with the Wind* premiere, December 15, 1939."³¹ *Gone with the Wind* is a 1936 epic historical fiction novel set in and around Atlanta during the American Civil War and post-war Reconstruction Era. It was written by Atlanta native Margaret Mitchell who won a 1937 Pulitzer Prize for the work. The book was incredibly popular when it

³⁰ Uhry, "Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014."

³¹ Dave Hayward, "'Ballyhoo' and Brotherly Love: Alfred Uhry's Olympic Premiere," *Back Stage* 39, (August 23, 1996): 39.

was first published, topping bestseller lists for multiple years, and it was made into an equally popular film a few years later; the popularity of both the book and the film has endured. The 1939 film premiere was an unprecedented epic three-day extravaganza in Atlanta which included parades, parties, and a grand ball, among other festivities.³² The event brought thousands of visitors and the eyes of the world to Atlanta, much as the 1996 Summer Olympic Games would.

Uhry examined other world events that were happening at the time of the December 1939 premiere, which included Hitler's invasion of Poland. He jokingly said, "I thought, there's three disparate elements: Hitler. Christmas. And Scarlett O'Hara. This is a field that I can deal with!"³³ In 1996 Uhry spoke with Dave Hayward of *Back Stage* and described how *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* developed in his mind,

I realized that Hitler was busy invading Poland at the time; the premiere took place at Christmastime. And I'd wanted to write a play about disassociated Jews, trying to assimilate into the culture of being Southern and being Christian. ...Since it was for the Olympics, I thought it would be fitting to write about brotherly love in some way or other. And I thought probably the hardest brotherly love to deal with in a way would be taking one tiny step. You can embrace the Nigerian and the Dutch and say we're all brothers; that's easy, because they all go home! ...But I thought it would be nice to write a play about accepting your own ethnicity and who you are and making a step to people that may have been assumed to be socially inferior to you. That's one step--that's a teeny step, but it's a big one. And there's a lot of stuff you can write about.³⁴

The specific brotherly love and acceptance that Uhry is referring to is the prejudice that the well-established Southern German-Jews felt against Jews who had more recently

³² For further reading on *Gone with the Wind* and its Atlanta film premiere, see the works of film historian Herb Bridges, such as: Herb Bridges, *Gone with the Wind: The Three Day Premiere in Atlanta*, Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999.

³³ Hayward, "'Ballyhoo' and Brotherly Love"

³⁴ Ibid.

emigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe and Russia in the early to mid-twentieth century. The exploration of this very specific kind of prejudice is central in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. Uhry further explains,

I discovered in 'Driving Miss Daisy' --which is a very specific piece of work and refers to very specific Atlanta things all the time--that somehow the more specific you are, the more universal you are at the same time. So, my play is very specific. It deals with a prejudice that's impossible to detect, because a lot of these Jews had the same names, like Levy or Cohen. If you lined them up in a room, it'd be impossible to tell who was Eastern European and who was German.³⁵

Uhry believes this very specific kind of German versus Eastern European prejudice no longer exists in the Jewish community. In an interview he said "They all married the prejudice out. So [the play]'s about something that was conquered, which is particularly gratifying in the context of the Olympics."³⁶

The Last Night of Ballyhoo is a combination family drama and romantic comedy revolving around the Freitag/Levy family, a prosperous Jewish family of German descent in Atlanta. The family consists of head of household, Adolph Freitag, a bachelor businessman, his sister, Boo Levy, and his sister-in-law, Reba Freitag, both widows. Each of the women have young-adult daughters that are also members of the household: the high-strung and idealistic Lala, daughter of Boo, and her more serious-minded, Wellesley-attending cousin, Sunny, daughter of Reba. When a handsome young Jewish man from New York, Joe Farkas, arrives to work for Adolph's company, he is shocked to find the family so assimilated to the local culture and seemingly ashamed of being Jewish. Most of the Freitags, however, seem more concerned with the rapidly

³⁵ Hayward, "'Ballyhoo' and Brotherly Love"

³⁶ Ibid.

approaching social event of the season: the Ballyhoo dance. Lala, driven by her mother, Boo, manages to snag a date with Peachy Weil, a member of the “finest family in the South.”³⁷ Meanwhile, romance begins to blossom between Sunny and Joe forcing Sunny to face her own family’s deep-seated prejudices about their own religious and ethnic heritage. Uhry says, “The play is about falling in love, ripping a family apart and mending it back together again. It’s a play about facing where you come from and learning to accept it.”³⁸ The plot, themes, and characters of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* will be examined and analyzed in more detail in later chapters.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo debuted at the 1996 Olympic Games’ Olympic Arts Festival and played from July 27 to August 3, 1996. It then opened the fall season of the Alliance Theater, a professional theatre company in Atlanta, and finally was brought to Broadway in 1997 where it ran at the Helen Hayes Theatre from February 27, 1997 to June 28, 1998. The Broadway production won the 1997 Tony Award for “Best Play” making Uhry the first-ever writer to win a Tony Award, an Oscar, and a Pulitzer Prize. In his Tony Award acceptance speech, Uhry, visibly astounded, said “I don’t know what to say. This is amazing. My wife kept telling me to stop being such a chicken and sit down and write another play. And I did. Thank you, honey, you were right. And I do have to thank my mother because she always made me feel like I was a winner, and she even provided me with all those relatives that I write about.”³⁹ He was cracking a joke, but for him, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was very personal. Of the three “Atlanta trilogy” plays,

³⁷ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 10.

³⁸ Cohen, “Much Ado About ‘Ballyhoo.’”

³⁹ “The 41st Annual Tony Awards,” American Theatre Wing, aired June 7, 1987 on CBS, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYBo5eulYgA>.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo addresses the identity crises of Southern Jews the most directly. It is not simply an underlying theme in the play, but it is the central conflict.

When Uhry's hometown newspaper, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* reviewed the original Atlanta production that took place during the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, staff writer Dan Hulbert wrote that '*Ballyhoo*' presented "discomfiting truths in a wonderfully comfortable Southern romantic comedy" and said it was "a masterful mixture of mirth and maxim."⁴⁰ A few months later, when the production was in residency at the Alliance Theatre, Hulbert interviewed some Atlanta locals, specifically Uhry's Jewish friends and contemporaries from Atlanta (some of whom attended *Ballyhoo* themselves when they were young). When asked about how they felt about the play, the responses were overwhelmingly positive, but tinged with some chagrin because of the sensitive topics like intra-cultural prejudice and assimilation. Hulbert wrote, "Indeed, it would be hard to imagine a play that can stir up so many fond memories ---and so much controversy ---at the same time...'*Ballyhoo*' is making Jewish Atlantans both happy and uncomfortable to see themselves reflected." He quoted one woman who said, "[Uhry] captured the spirit of those days... and...he struck all kinds of nerves." Another interviewee said, "I laughed and cried, because the play's so true." While generally positive, Hulbert reported that. "Not everyone is laughing ---or misty-eyed ---about "Ballyhoo." He continued,

Sonia Freitag Kuniansky, director of the DeKalb Developmental Disabilities Council, saw the play recently and said, 'There were caricatures and exaggerations...Some of my friends were offended that Jewish women are

⁴⁰ Dan Hulbert, "Review: 'The Last Night of Ballyhoo'." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 21, 1996 (accessed on March 23, 2022), <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SD9-C4C0-009T-X126-00000-00&context=1516831>.

portrayed as either shrewish (the character Boo Levy) or stupid (Reba Freitag)...You'd never hear the word 'kike' in our homes.' When Uhry...was informed of the criticisms from Freitag ---who happens to have the same maiden name as the "stupid" character ---he said, 'Oh Lord ---I did that, too? I've also been informed that there's a real Sylvan Weil (the play's most obnoxious snob). Look, people have to understand that these are composites...But these are conversations that I really heard.'

Hulbert notes, however, that most responses from Atlantans have been positive as the play has brought on feelings of nostalgia and warmth and states that "Uhry succeeded in his main objective to write 'a really good, romantic story, that ends with a kiss that really means something.'"⁴¹

When the play moved to Broadway in early 1997, the production received generally positive reviews, though many critics simultaneously praised the writing, production design, and acting while grumbling about the plot's predictability and sentimentality. Most did not buy into its old-fashioned romance and nostalgia. David Sheward of *Back Stage* said the play had a "limited and overly familiar storyline," but conceded that "the author gets full marks for noble intention," though he felt that '*Ballyhoo*' lacked the subtleties of *Driving Miss Daisy*.⁴² Following *Ballyhoo*'s Tony win, Mark Harris of *Entertainment Weekly* wrote,

Tony voters bestowed a Best Play prize on Alfred Uhry's once-over-lightly drama about a Jewish (but not too Jewish) family preparing for a big dance in 1939 Atlanta—but don't expect greatness. Its tone is sitcom-snappy, and Uhry...eagerly spoon-feeds his audience homilies about the dangers of assimilation. But *Ballyhoo*'s strengths-- Uhry's ear for dialogue, the shapeliness of each scene, and

⁴¹ Dan Hulbert, "Much ado about 'Ballyhoo:' Alfred Uhry's play about Atlanta's Jewish society ball causes flood of merry memories, controversy about community's 'caste system'," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, September 22, 1996 (accessed on March 23, 2022), <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SD9-C4C0-009T-X126-00000-00&context=1516831>.

⁴² David Sheward, "The Last Night of Ballyhoo," *Back Stage*, March 14, 1997, 60. Gale OneFile: Fine Arts (accessed March 23, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A19242389/PPFA?u=txshracd2488&sid=bookmark-PPFA&xid=d7c3e7f0>.

the splendid acting of an ensemble led superbly by Off Broadway's original Miss Daisy, Dana Ivey--are rare on any stage.⁴³

Similarly, Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* summed up his review saying, "There's no doubting that '*Ballyhoo*' is a sincere, good-hearted work, but it almost never feels spontaneous. Despite its provocative subject, its form is the theatrical equivalent of comfort food, something for those who like their nostalgia repackaged in the guise of something new."⁴⁴ *Variety*'s Greg Evans was very complimentary, however, calling it a "winning new play...with its wonderfully crafted script, equally fine direction and an ensemble so good it holds its own in the towering presence of star Dana Ivey," and predicted a "slew of Tony Award nominations come springtime."⁴⁵ Reviewer Michael Kuchwara wrote, "the characters are so appealing -- and the actors equally delightful -- that their fights and feuds make for first-rate, often hilarious entertainment." He continues, "Sure, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is sentimental, but it's a sentiment that is honestly earned" and adds, "It has been a long time since Broadway has seen such a genial, audience-pleasing play...This comedy-drama is a throwback to the days when well-crafted plays, with a beginning, a middle and a satisfying conclusion, were regular fare."⁴⁶

⁴³ Mark Harris, "The Last Night of Ballyhoo," *Entertainment Weekly* (Issue 384), June 20, 1997.

⁴⁴ Ben Brantley, "Southern Jewish Angst as One-Liners," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1997 (accessed March 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/28/theater/southern-jewish-angst-as-one-liners.html>.

⁴⁵ Greg Evans, "The Last Night of Ballyhoo," *Variety*, March 8, 1997 (accessed March 23, 2022), <https://variety.com/1997/legit/reviews/the-last-night-of-ballyhoo-1117432529/>.

⁴⁶ Michael Kuchwara, "Making Hilarity Out of Family Discord in Alfred Uhry's 'Last Night of Ballyhoo,'" *Buffalo News*, March 4, 1997 (accessed on March 23, 2022), <https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/ga/default.aspx>

Most of the characters in '*Ballyhoo*' struggle with their identity as Jews which is a struggle that Uhry has known throughout his life. In the play, the Freitag/Levy family do not observe Jewish traditions. Instead, they put up a Christmas tree, and try not to draw attention to the fact that they are Jewish. In an interview with Steve Cohen for *Inside* Uhry said, "That was us. My parents told us to keep a low profile. ...We tried to appear as non-Jewish as possible, but our noses gave us away. My Jewish face was the cross, so to speak, I had to bear."⁴⁷ Even with their "low profile," Uhry and his family still experienced incidents of discrimination and anti-Semitism including one specific instance that Uhry used in '*Ballyhoo*.' In a conversation with Joe, Sunny describes a painful experience she had when she was swimming at a country club pool with some friends and she was asked to get out of the pool because "Jews weren't allowed to swim in the Venetian Club pool"⁴⁸ When asked about it in an interview Uhry said the incident "...exactly happened to my sister. And I kept the same name of the pool in the play: the Venetian swimming pool. Yes. It happened to my sister when she was about ten years old. Exactly that."⁴⁹

Despite his lack of Jewish upbringing Uhry says, "There is something about being Jewish, even as un-Jewish as I was brought up to be, that's in the marrow of your bones"⁵⁰ and that is one of the ideas he explores in *Ballyhoo*. He explains,

I think there's something in the characters of *Ballyhoo*, in Lala and in Sunny, that in spite of themselves is inherently Jewish, and that's why none of those people

⁴⁷ Cohen, "Much Ado About 'Ballyhoo.'"

⁴⁸ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 45.

⁴⁹ Uhry, "Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2014."

⁵⁰ Uhry, "Alfred Uhry by Paul Rudd."

tried to change their names or pass themselves off as something they weren't. They just didn't want to be very Jewish. And I guess what I've come to realize is, either you're Jewish or you're not Jewish. If you're Jewish, you're very Jewish to the rest of the world, so you might as well be. I was able to put in [Joe's] mouth all that good stuff that I wish I'd believed in, like, 'I guess being Jewish is being Jewish.' It took me a long time to come to that.⁵¹

Uhry admits that writing *Ballyhoo* "has been therapeutic in a nice way" and says, "For the last few years I've conducted my own Seders. I'd be embarrassed to have anybody who was a particularly good Jew come to it, but it's enough ... I am getting better about my Judaism..."⁵² He credits his wife, Joanna, who was not Jewish and was raised in a Christian family, with encouraging him to explore his roots. He says, "Truthfully, she was always more interested in celebrating the Jewish holidays than I was. I felt it wasn't honest and was somehow artificial for me when I wasn't a believer. I now wonder if my thinking on this may have been all wrong."⁵³

Uhry also regrets that he was not able to pass down a stronger Jewish legacy to his four daughters saying, "Joanna would have raised our children Jewish if I had felt strongly about it. But I wasn't proud of my Jewishness. I didn't give our daughters a spiritual identity because I had none to give." He continues, "Joanna pushes me. She always says, 'Realize that you're Jewish and do something about it.' So now I'm trying to work out my confusion."⁵⁴ By working out that confusion through playwriting Uhry has been able to rediscover and explore that part of his own identity. Cohen wrote, "What drives Alfred Uhry is his need to memorialize the Jewish heritage that he was denied:

⁵¹ Uhry, "Alfred Uhry by Paul Rudd."

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Horwitz, "After the 'Ballyhoo.'"

⁵⁴ Cohen, "Much Ado About 'Ballyhoo.'"

‘My parents didn't mean to deprive me,’ he says. ‘They simply were afraid. I want people to know how difficult it was to be Jewish just a short time ago.’”⁵⁵

The Last Night of Ballyhoo was important to his own identity as a playwright as well. Following the success of *Driving Miss Daisy* Uhry struggled with feelings of doubt and fear. After *Driving Miss Daisy*, he did not write another play until *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, almost ten years later. "I needed to work up the nerve to write ‘Ballyhoo.’ ...I felt I had to do it. ...And when I realized that the piece worked and that my ability wasn't a fluke... That's when I saw the art of playwriting in a new light.”⁵⁶ That newfound confidence inspired him to dive directly into his next theatrical project following *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, a musical called *Parade*.

Parade

Like *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, *Parade* centers on a Jewish family in twentieth century Atlanta, and features important historical events, however, unlike the previous two “Atlanta plays,” the historical events in *Parade* take a more central role in the plot. Making it further distinct: *Parade* is a musical and a tragedy. It is a dramatization of the trial of Leo Frank, a Jewish man accused of raping and murdering a young teen-aged girl in Atlanta in 1913.

On April 26, 1913, thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan was found murdered by strangulation in the basement of the National Pencil Company factory in Atlanta where she worked. Leo Frank, a Cornell-educated engineer from New York and a well-respected member of the Jewish community, was the manager at the pencil factory. He

⁵⁵ Cohen, “Much Ado About ‘Ballyhoo.’”

⁵⁶ Horwitz, “After the ‘Ballyhoo.’”

was the last person to see Mary Phagan alive before the murder occurred, and he emerged as a suspect, along with a few others, within a few days of the murder. It was a grisly and convoluted case that quickly became a media circus unlike any Atlanta had ever seen. Frank was ultimately convicted and sentenced to death based on circumstantial evidence and the testimony of a man whom many historians believe to be the actual murderer.⁵⁷ The case went through multiple unsuccessful state and federal appeals. Finally in June of 1915 after thoroughly reviewing the case, the Governor of Georgia, John Slaton, commuted Frank's death sentence to life in prison much to the dismay of many Georgia residents who were convinced of Frank's guilt. Two months later, on August 16, 1915, an organized group of armed men broke into the prison where Frank was being held in Milledgeville. They kidnapped him and drove with him through the night for 175 miles to Marietta, the hometown of Mary Phagan, where they lynched Leo Frank in front of a gathered crowd in a previously prepared place on the morning of August 17.

As with the other works in his "Atlanta Trilogy," *Parade* illuminated an impactful experience on the life of Jewish Southerners. Though he had heard Leo Frank's name occasionally while growing up, Uhry described first learning about exactly who he was and the tragic events of the case surrounding him when he was in high school. He said, "I became fascinated in reading about him because I knew in some way – and I didn't know how—that it had affected my own life."⁵⁸ Continuing, he said,

I figured out that the Jews in Atlanta – the German Jews that had been so socially prominent, and so socially acceptable before the Leo Frank case – realized, as a result of the Leo Frank Case, that they were just Jews. And

⁵⁷ Steve Oney, "And the Dead Shall Rise: An Overview," *Southern Cultures* 11, no. 4 (2005): 28-46, accessed July 17, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26390908>.

⁵⁸ Uhry, "What's Driving Mr. Uhry," *CNN Time*.

that the ‘real’ Southerners would never consider them Southern, no matter how Southern they looked and how Southern they talked. And I think that’s why nobody can talk about the Leo Frank case.⁵⁹

While the Leo Frank case is not mentioned in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* or *Driving Miss Daisy*, it is a historical event that would have impacted the characters in those worlds as it did Uhry’s own. Journalist Steve Oney described the cultural impact the Leo Frank case had on the Jewish community saying, “What it did to Southern Jews can’t be discounted. ...It drove them into a state of denial about their Judaism. They became even more assimilated, anti-Israel, Episcopalian. The Temple did away with chuppahs at weddings — anything that would draw attention.”⁶⁰ This denial and extreme assimilation are part of the worlds of ‘*Ballyhoo*’ and *Driving Miss Daisy*, the consequences of which are explored in depth in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

In a 2015 *Atlanta Jewish Times* article commemorating the one-hundred-year anniversary of the murder of Leo Frank, Uhry spoke again of the impact the case had on his own personal history and the Jewish community of Atlanta saying,

When I was growing up in Atlanta in the ’40s and ’50s, Leo Frank was mentioned only in hushed tones. I remember people getting up and walking out of the room if anyone talked about the case. Why? I think it was some sort of toxic combo of shock, horror, and embarrassment. ...Our particular strain of Judaism was German. The family came to Atlanta in the 1840s, when the town was still called Marthasville. They considered themselves Southern first, American second and Jewish third. So, when one of their own (albeit a New Yorker) married into one of the ‘good’ families, became the focus of rabid anti-Semitism, it was a brutal slap in the face. ...All those years of assimilation counted as nothing. German Jews were just Jews, no matter how long they’d been in Georgia. The case was a severe blow to their pride, as well as a personal tragedy. How did

⁵⁹ Uhry, “What’s Driving Mr. Uhry,” *CNN Time*.

⁶⁰ Allison Gaudet Yarrow, “The People Revisit Leo Frank,” *Forward* (May 13, 2009), accessed July 17, 2021, <https://forward.com/culture/105936/the-people-revisit-leo-frank/>.

they fit in to the Atlanta they loved? It took several generations to resolve the issue — if, indeed, it is resolved. I like to believe it mostly is.⁶¹

The Leo Frank case also held a familial connection for Uhry. Some of Uhry's relatives, including his great grandmother and his great uncle knew Leo Frank and his family. His great uncle was the owner of the National Pencil Company where Frank worked and where the murder took place. He also had two cousins who worked on the defense team for Frank.⁶²

Interestingly, *Parade* is the only work of the trilogy to feature characters who are members of the dominant Southern Christian culture and their thoughts and feelings about Jews. Some characters are allies to Leo Frank, but many are not and because of that, and the nature of the story, *Parade* contains the most extensive portrayal of anti-Semitic attitudes by non-Jews of any of Uhry's works. *Parade* vividly depicts multiple levels of anti-Semitism from the seemingly harmless and small off-hand comments that stem from ignorance and prejudice to the outright demonization of Jews by the local media and the hatred and violence of extremists. In *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* the characters' experiences of anti-Semitism and prejudice from non-Jews are talked about (or around), but never shown; they happen off-stage. In *Parade*, these events are played out onstage.

No one was ever arrested or convicted for the lynching of Leo Frank. Most historians agree that Leo Frank was wrongfully convicted; however, he has not been

⁶¹ Dave Schechter, "Struggling with Leo Frank's Lynching a Century Later," *Atlanta Jewish Times*, August 12, 2015, accessed July 17, 2021, <https://atlantajewishtimes.timesofisrael.com/struggling-with-leo-franks-lynching-a-century-later/>.

⁶² Uhry, "What's Driving Mr. Uhry," *CNN Time*.

exonerated for the crime. He was posthumously pardoned in 1986 by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles on which occasion they wrote:

Without attempting to address the question of guilt or innocence, and in recognition of the State's failure to protect the person of Leo M. Frank and thereby preserve his opportunity for continued legal appeal of his conviction, and in recognition of the State's failure to bring his killers to justice, and as an effort to heal old wounds, the State Board of Pardons and Paroles, in compliance with its Constitutional and statutory authority, hereby grants to Leo M. Frank a Pardon.⁶³

Parade is rooted in historical people and events, but, true to Uhry's style, it places emphasis on the characters and their personal relationships, with that of Leo Frank and his wife, Lucille, at the center. The musical juxtaposes public and private tragedy as the characters are caught up in the calamitous whirlwind of the investigation, trial, the fight to commute his sentence, and eventual murder of Leo Frank. The 1998 musical features a book by Uhry, music and lyrics by Jason Robert Brown, and was directed by Hal Prince. The Broadway production received nine Tony Award nominations and won two: one for Uhry for Best Book of a Musical (his second Tony) and one for Jason Robert Brown for Best Original Score. It also received thirteen Drama Desk nominations and won six of them, including Outstanding Book of a Musical for Uhry and Outstanding Musical.

Critics praised the work for its daring subject matter (for a musical) and razor-sharp focus, but many concluded that although it is an extremely tragic tale, the musical never quite gets to the true heart of the story for which its creators were aiming, and this is the show's downfall with audiences, not the tragic subject matter. Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* described *Parade* saying, "all of the actors...appear claustrophobically

⁶³ Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles quoted in Leonard Dinnerstein, "Leo Frank Case," New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified Aug. 11, 2020. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/leo-frank-case/>.

trapped in [a] mural,” and further wrote, “several people involved with the creation of *Parade*, which has been incubating for six years, have said that its real center is the love story of the Franks... Yet in the performance, the balance of the show is elsewhere.” He praises some of the design elements and acting performances, but concludes with saying, “...the odds are comparatively in favor of *Parade*. It arrives with an innately sympathetic hero, undoubtedly worthy of our tears. But for those tears to flow, we have to get to know Leo Frank as a man, not a symbol. The civics lesson that is *Parade* forbids our ever approaching such knowledge.”⁶⁴ Dan Hulbert of *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* who had lauded both *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was more even-handed in his review. He wrote, “*Parade*, then, may be the saddest musical ever, but it is no more ‘depressing’ than a finely composed funeral Mass. Its sadness is of the elegiac kind that awakens, not burdens, the heart” and drew parallels to Greek tragedy. Among its flaws, he says, are its “slow to ignite Act I,” lack of “melodic hooks,” and stereotyped characters. In spite of its weaknesses, Hulbert writes, “None of these glitches derails the story for long. It's simply too riveting in its authentic horrors and too intelligently told. Uhry's book has an uncanny ability to weave in and out of characters' heads, making fantasy co-exist with reality...” He also praises the work for “some aching beautiful songs” and calls it “a musical that never loses its nerve.”⁶⁵ Despite its numerous awards, generally positive reviews, and well-known creators, *Parade* did not perform well

⁶⁴ Ben Brantley, “Theater Review: Martyr's Requiem Invokes Justice,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 1998 (accessed March 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/18/movies/theater-review-martyr-s-requiem-invokes-justice.html>.

⁶⁵ Dan Hulbert, “Broadway Premiere; A Poignant, Powerful 'Parade'; Uhry's Take on Atlanta Lynching is a Musical With Nerve,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, December 18, 1998 (accessed March 23, 2022), <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3VBW-YT10-0026-G4VY-00000-00&context=1516831>.

commercially and ran for only eighty-four performances on Broadway from December 17, 1998 to February 28, 1999.

Conclusion

Alfred Uhry once described his writing process saying, “I know I’m OK when the characters start talking to me. Until they start talking to me, I don’t really have anything, but I try to pretend that I [do]. Once they start talking, I feel sort of like the secretary. I just sort of sit there and they talk to me, and I type.”⁶⁶ Through his “Atlanta trilogy” of plays, Uhry gave a voice to the niche community of Jews in the American South, illuminating their unique struggles, but also highlighting the universality of other conflicts within the realm of personal, familial, and cultural identity. In the process of writing characters who come to terms with their identity, Uhry helped discover his own. He said,

It took me a long time to realize, well, it’s all right to be who you are. A long time. In fact, I think, going backwards – *Miss Daisy* was from the 40s to the 70s, *Ballyhoo* was 1939, *Parade* is 1913 to 1915 – I’m dealing with an Atlanta that doesn’t exist anymore. And I think I use it as a paradigm for exploring how I feel about various things. But I have learned over the course of my life, particularly in the last ten years to pretty much embrace what I am. Hard journey.⁶⁷

That hard journey is one that Uhry paved through writing with humor and honesty the profile of Southern Jews, an othered people searching for and learning to embrace their own personal and cultural identity.

⁶⁶ Uhry, “Classic Clips: Alfred Uhry on his play ‘Driving Miss Daisy’ (1987).”

⁶⁷ Uhry, “What’s Driving Mr. Uhry,” *CNN Time*.

CHAPTER TWO

Script Analysis

Introduction

The Last Night of Ballyhoo is a play about identity that explores the intersections of societal and cultural identity, familial identity, and individual identity. It is about family, faith, and finding the courage to discover and embrace who you are. Through the Freitag/Levy family Uhry examines the realities of bigotry and prejudice and reveals how living in a fantasy of ignorance or denial of one's own identity to escape from reality actually perpetuates and intensifies the problems on a personal and, eventually, global level.

Hodge Analysis

This analysis for *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is primarily based on the method outlined in *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* by Francis Hodge, originally published in 1971 but most recently published in its Seventh Edition in 2010.¹ Hodge developed his system for script analysis with theatre directors specifically in mind, and it is a commonly used method known in the theatre community simply as a "Hodge Analysis." This Hodge style of analysis was chosen for this thesis because it works especially well for Modern realistic dramatic works like *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. This text-based approach focuses on three main areas: analyzing how the given

¹ Francis Hodge and Michael McLain, *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*, 7th Edition (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2010).

circumstances contribute to building the world of the play, analyzing the characters and how their attitudes, characterization, and relationships help tell the story, and analyzing how the dramatic form, content, and structure create meaning and can inform the direction of a play.

Synopsis of the Play

The Last Night of Ballyhoo tells the story of the Freitag/Levy family, a prosperous Southern Jewish family of German descent living in Atlanta, Georgia in 1939. The family consists of head of household, Adolph Freitag, a bachelor businessman, his two widowed sisters, Boo and Reba, and their young adult daughters: the high-strung and idealistic Lala, daughter of Boo, and her more serious-minded, Wellesley-attending cousin, Sunny, daughter of Reba. It is December of 1939 and Hitler is invading Poland on the other side of the world while the “cinematic event of the century,” *Gone with the Wind*, is premiering in their home city. Some members of the family, however, are more concerned about whether they should put a star on their Christmas tree and who does or does not have a date to Ballyhoo, the social event of the season for Southern Jewish high society.

When a handsome young Jewish man from New York, Joe Farkas, arrives in Atlanta to work for Adolph’s company, he is shocked to find the family so assimilated to the local culture and uninterested in celebrating, or even drawing attention to their Jewish heritage in any way. Meanwhile, Ballyhoo is rapidly approaching, and Lala does not have a date (much to her mother Boo’s chagrin), so she wastes no time in dropping hints to Joe, but he does not take the bait. Believing Joe to be socially inferior anyway because he is of Eastern European descent and comes from a northern working-class family, Boo has

her sights set on someone she thinks is better for Lala: Peachy Weil, a young man from the “finest family in the South.”²

Once Joe meets Sunny, who is home from college for the winter break, his desire to attend Ballyhoo suddenly increases, and he asks her to the dance which prompts Lala to confront Sunny and reveal her long-held resentment of her. Before long, however, Lala is assured of her date with Peachy and all seems well. When the night of the big dance arrives, however, Lala is faced with the possibility of confronting some of her old classmates from the semester of college that she attended before dropping out. Fearing their ridicule, she almost stays home, but she is pushed by Boo to face her fears and her bullies and go to the dance.

Later at the dance, the blossoming romance between Joe and Sunny hits a major roadblock when Joe discovers (thanks to Peachy) that he is considered one of “the other kind,” meaning Jews of Eastern European descent, that are not generally accepted at the Standard Club which is reserved for the elitist German Jews. Angry and hurt, he leaves Sunny at the dance. When he arrives at her home several hours later, Sunny is also angry and hurt that she was humiliated and abandoned by him at the dance, and they argue. Joe accuses Sunny of prejudice and using “Jew-hater talk.” The relationship seems over when he storms out of the house and Sunny retreats upstairs to her room. Suddenly Lala arrives home from the dance with big news – Peachy has proposed! Boo is ecstatic and Adolph is bemused, and it seems that a questionably happy ending is in sight for at least one pair of lovers.

² Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 10.

In the next scene, which takes place about two weeks later, Joe finds Sunny on the train and apologizes to her. She apologizes too and tells him that she realizes that she is ignorant when it comes to her own religious heritage: “I don’t know anything. There’s just a big hole where the Judaism is supposed to be.”³ They reconcile, share a passionate kiss, and look forward hopefully to a happy future. As the play ends, Sunny is seen back in her family home with Joe and all of her family members around the dinner table as she begins to lead them in a traditional shabbat candle lighting ritual.

Given Circumstances

Time and Place

The action of the play takes place over the course of about a month from mid-December 1939 to mid-January of 1940. There is a realistic progression of time in the play; each scene of the play takes place in chronological order on specific days and at specified times, although the time of day of each scene varies. The events follow a logical cause-to-effect pattern. The one exception to this is the final scene, act 2, scene 8 which takes place in an ambiguous future moment that is left to interpretation as to whether it is reality or imagined by Sunny.

The action of the play begins on Friday, December 15, 1939, which is the historical date of the premiere of the film *Gone with the Wind*, an event which is referenced in the play. It is one of two specific dates in the play, the other being Christmas Day, December 25. The fact that the first scene is on Friday evening is also significant because the Jewish sabbath begins at sundown on Friday. However, instead of preparing for the sabbath, the characters are decorating the family Christmas tree and

³ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 81.

talking about the movie premiere. The dates for the other scenes are only indicated in relation to previous scenes such as “the next morning” or “about two weeks later.”

The play is set primarily in Atlanta, Georgia with most of the scenes taking place in the main living area of the Freitag/Levy house on Habersham Road in Atlanta. One scene takes place in the Standard Club, a social club for Jews of German descent in Atlanta. Two scenes take place aboard the Crescent Limited, a passenger train. The train is stopped in Baltimore, Maryland for one scene, and Wilmington, Delaware for the other. While the story and characters are fictional, the setting is real. Habersham Road is a real residential street in Atlanta and the Standard Club is a social club in Atlanta that dates back to 1867 and is still operating in the present day. The Crescent Limited passenger train is an actual route that has undergone some minor changes over the decades but remains in operation with trains that travel between New York City and New Orleans daily. The final scene takes place in Sunny’s mind, so even though the family seems to be gathered around the dining room table of their home on Habersham Road, it could be happening around any dining room table in any family home of the future.

Historically, prior to the events of the play, Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany by first becoming the chancellor in 1933 and then a fully-fledged military dictator not long after. In 1935 two laws, which later became known as the Nuremberg Laws, were enacted by Hitler and the Nazi party which declared people of the Jewish religion to be of a separate race than non-Jewish Germans and made intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews illegal. Regardless of a person’s self-identification, the Nuremberg Laws declared that any person with three or four Jewish grandparents was a Jew and the laws stripped them of their citizenship and any rights or protections

associated with that citizenship. The Nuremberg Laws were followed by more antisemitic laws and decrees in Germany over the next few years. These laws ostracized Jews and made Jewish people easier to identify (and therefore easier to target) by government officials and others thereby laying the foundation for the coming Holocaust.⁴ While these laws are never specifically mentioned in the play, all of the characters would have been aware of their existence. In act 1, when Sunny says, “I don’t think what religion a person happens to be matters all that much in the modern world,” Joe counters with “Oh, I think it matters to some pretty important people... Like Hitler.”⁵ Sunny responds with, “No fair, Hitler’s an aberration. Let’s limit the discussion to human beings,” and the subject is changed.⁶

In September of 1939, just a few months prior to the beginning of the play, the German military, led by Hitler, invaded Poland and started what would become World War II. Days later, United States allies, Great Britain and France, declared war on Germany and by December all of Europe is embroiled in war. The United States, however, did not declare war until two years after the events in the play, in December of 1941 following the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces. The war in Europe is mentioned a couple of times by the characters in the play. They are aware, at least on a surface level, of what is happening and some characters, like Adolph and Joe are concerned about “this Hitler business in Poland.”⁷ While these historical events do not

⁴ For a brief overview of the Nuremberg Laws, see the online encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-race-laws>.

⁵ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 46.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 32.

directly impact the action of the play, they are thematically important (see “Idea: Title and Overall Meaning”).

Society

Some of the primary conflicts in the play revolve around the contrasting societies depicted in the play. The Freitag/Levy family live in a world governed first by the strict social customs and conventions of Southern (specifically Atlanta) Christian culture and society and secondarily by Jewish society (specifically Southern Jewish society which is dominated by German Jews). The Southern German Jews are a sub-group of the dominant culture, and they experience prejudice from the dominant Southern Christian society. In turn, the German Jews are prejudiced toward the Eastern European Jews who are a smaller sub-group of the Southern Jewish culture. In both cases, the smaller sub-groups must adapt or assimilate to the more dominant culture or remain at a social and economic disadvantage.

There are many references to people and places in the play that illustrate the connectedness of the Southern Jewish community, but that connectedness is reserved only for those of German-Jewish descent, who consider themselves socially superior to Jews of Eastern European descent, referred to by German Jews as “the other kind.” This prejudice against Jews of Eastern European descent stems from a variety of factors, primarily economic and cultural. In general, German Jewish families tended to be wealthier and more established families because, historically, they had been in the United States longer than their Eastern European neighbors (having arrived primarily in the 1840s and 50s) and had come from a wealthier home country. This wave of Jewish immigrants had settled in smaller communities in the South, West, and Mid-west as

skilled laborers, farmers, or entrepreneurs, and thus were generally more assimilated to the dominant Christian culture. For the most part, if they were practicing, they were associated with American Reform Judaism, a less conservative and more assimilated branch of Judaism. The wave of Jewish immigrants from the poorer Eastern European countries occurred much later (from the late 1880s to the mid-1920s), meaning those families were less established in the late 1930s. The majority were working-class laborers who settled in large urban areas. They also tend to be less culturally assimilated because they moved into neighborhoods with a higher concentration of other Jewish and Eastern European immigrants, and generally practice more conservative branches of Judaism.⁸

In the play, the Freitag/Levys are wealthy German-Jews with deep roots in Georgia which means they have a high place in their own Jewish social circles. However, because they are ethnic Jews they are still rejected from the highest Atlanta social circles. In the opening scene, Boo reminds Lala that her “place in society sits there waiting for [her]” to which Lala counters: “We’re Jews. We have no place in society.”⁹ Boo then protests: “We most certainly do! Maybe not right up there at the tip top with the best set of Christians, but we come mighty close. After all, your Great Grandma’s Cousin Clemmie was the first white child born in Atlanta!”¹⁰ While they do not talk about it much, and downplay it when they do, it is clear the family feels the effects of prejudicial attitudes toward Jews at times. The only direct, personal reference made to discrimination

⁸ For a brief overview of the history of Jewish immigration and assimilation in the United States, see “The American Jewish Experience in the Twentieth Century: Antisemitism and Assimilation” by Jonathan D. Sarna and Jonathan Golden for the National Humanities Center at <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexp.htm>.

⁹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

is when Sunny relates her experience of being asked to get out of a country club swimming pool where she had been swimming with one of her Christian friends because she was Jewish.

In contrast, Joe mentions that his family consists of a mix of Russian, Polish, and Hungarian ancestry. Joe is one of “the other kind” but has no idea because in his community in New York, that kind of prejudice does not exist. He feels that Jews are Jews. The idea of Jews being discriminatory against other Jews is completely foreign to him, so when he finds out about it at Ballyhoo, it really stuns him. Prior to that moment he understood that the Freitags were not connected to their own Jewish identity, but he did not fully understand the extent of the prejudice that existed – enough that they have their own country clubs where “the other kind” would not usually be welcome.

It is not stated directly and has no bearing on the action of the play, but it is worth noting that in this society at this time, there would have been extreme racial segregation and class disparity between African Americans and Caucasians. Boo and Reba make several references throughout the play to the family’s house maid, Louisa, who is likely a black woman. Louisa is “out sick” at the beginning of the play, and we find out later she has actually taken a new job with a neighboring Christian family, likely because of Boo’s suspicious and prejudicial behavior toward her.¹¹ These references to her help establish the wealth and social status of the family, but also the patterns of behavior and attitudes that Boo and Reba each exhibit toward people that are “socially inferior” to them. These patterns become more important as we see them interact with Joe later in the play.

¹¹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 30-31.

Economics

The events of the play take place ten years after the Wall Street stock market crash of 1929 that sent the world spiraling into the Great Depression for most of the 1930s. By 1939, however, the United States had seen quite a bit of economic growth and recovery from that event, and the Freitag family is an example of the economic prosperity of the time. They are an upper middle-class family whose wealth comes from the family-owned business, a bed manufacturing company called The Dixie Bedding Corporation, of which Adolph is the head. The name of the company is further evidence of how much they are trying to fit into Southern culture. The Freitags are financially stable, live in a beautiful home in a well-established and fashionable neighborhood, and enjoy other comforts of economic security and affluence. Adolph makes a brief reference to harder economic times of the past for the family when the business was still new and growing, but besides that, the other references to money by the Freitag/Levy family are made in a humorous way. For example, jokes about the expensive price of Lala's dress for Ballyhoo, or Boo's quip: "If I were running the Dixie Bedding Company, we'd all be rich by now," to which Reba responds, "We are rich, aren't we?" illustrate the high economic status of the family.¹² Though never stated directly, it is implied that Peachy comes from similar, if not greater, family wealth.

Joe, on the other hand, comes from a different economic background. His family is likely from a lower-middle class or working-class background. When his father died, Joe had to leave art school and go to work to support himself and help support his family. He has worked hard to climb the corporate ladder, working in several different jobs over

¹² Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 53.

the past few years and has just recently been hired by Adolph to work for Dixie Bedding. Joe is not wealthy because he is still young and establishing himself, but it is implied that he is conscientious and smart with his money. The only direct reference Joe makes to money is when he insists on paying Adolph for the tickets to Ballyhoo despite Adolph's protestations that the tickets were free.

Spirituality and Religion

Religion plays an important role in the play because of its noticeable absence from the lives of the ethnically Jewish Freitag family. As a family, they have fully assimilated to Southern Christian culture and do not practice any spiritual or cultural aspects of Judaism. One could even say that although ethnically Jewish, culturally, they are Christian. They have a large Christmas tree in their home and celebrate Christmas with gift-giving. Boo makes a reference to Lala's having attended an Easter Egg hunt when she was young, and Reba mentions having attended confirmation class with a fellow Jewish girl. In contrast, they do not celebrate any of the Jewish holidays or observe any holy days. This is quite a surprise to Joe who is proud of his Jewish heritage and comes from a family that practices the religion both spiritually and culturally.

When Boo asks him about going home for the holidays Joe mentions that he does not celebrate Christmas but is looking forward to going home to be with his family for Pesach, or Passover. Lala does not know what Pesach is and asks him about it. Boo reminds her, "You remember, Lala. That time we went to the Seder supper with one of Daddy's business acquaintances," and then says, "it was very interesting." Lala recalls the event and says, "I was in the fifth grade, and I spilled a glass of red wine all over the tablecloth." Joe jokes that "One of us does that almost every year. Part of the ritual." Lala

then exclaims, “You have to sit through one of those boring things every single year? One night of all that ish-kabibble was enough to last me the rest of my life.” The fact that Lala has only ever been to one Seder in her life many years ago would be quite surprising to Joe as this is clearly an important part of his religious and family identity. He declares that he attends two every year with his family and extended family and “I wouldn’t miss either one of ‘em for anything in the world.” Reba also asks him when Pesach is in the year before Lala changes the subject of the conversation to Ballyhoo.¹³ Pesach, or Passover is one of the most widely celebrated holidays in the Jewish community and is often observed even among the least practicing households. Their ignorance of such a religiously and culturally important Jewish holiday illustrates the deep cultural assimilation of the Freitags and their disconnection from Judaism. This conversation, among other things, prompts Joe’s later question to Sunny, “Are you people really Jewish?”¹⁴

Background Story

Prior to the beginning of the play, Simon Freitag, the father of Sunny, husband of Reba, and elder brother of Boo and Adolph, passed away from an unspecified health issue. A few months later, DeWald Levy, father of Lala and husband of Boo also passed away. His cause of death is also never mentioned. After their deaths, Reba, Sunny, Boo, and Lala all moved in with Adolph, who is unmarried and has no children of his own. He assumed the role of head of household for the entire family, and the five of them have

¹³ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 23-24.

¹⁴ Ibid, 44.

been living together in their home on Habersham Road in the approximately six to eight years since.

Adolph runs the family business, Dixie Bedding Corporation, and supports the family. Boo manages the household for Adolph, assisted by Reba. A couple of years ago Lala started attending the University of Michigan but dropped out in her first semester and has stayed at home since. Sunny is a junior at Wellesley College, an elite women's college in Massachusetts, originally founded by a Christian minister as a seminary for women, though it has no religious affiliation by the time Sunny is attending. At the start of the play she is about to come home for the winter holiday break.

Joe grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn in New York City. His father passed away when he was about eighteen or nineteen and he has been working to support himself and his family ever since. Recently he has been hired by Adolph to work for Dixie Bedding Corporation. He moved to Atlanta a few weeks ago, and has not met any of Adolph's family yet.

Peachy is home in Lake Charles, Louisiana where he is on winter break from Tulane University. He will be traveling with his family to Atlanta for the holidays. Peachy and Lala have met and socialized together on a few occasions including a party in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and a wedding of a mutual friend in Birmingham, Alabama. He has not met any of the other family members yet.

As the play begins, Adolph is on his way home from work, and he has invited Joe to come over for dinner. Boo is in the kitchen preparing dinner. Reba is in the living room knitting as Lala, dreaming of going downtown to the premiere of *Gone with the Wind* later, decorates the family Christmas tree.

Progression and Structure

The Last Night of Ballyhoo has a complex plot. The protagonist, Sunny, experiences a reversal of fortune when she and Joe argue after he leaves her at Ballyhoo when he discovers that he is considered to be the socially inferior “other kind” by most of the other people at the club. During the argument, Sunny says things that expose some of her own prejudices and biases and Joe accuses her of using “Jew-hater talk.”¹⁵ Following the argument Sunny experiences a recognition. She explains to Joe in the next scene saying, “I thought about it a lot, and it’s not true. How could it be? It would be like hating myself? ... No! Don’t you see? It’s only ignorance. I don’t know anything. There’s just a big hole where the Judaism is supposed to be.”¹⁶ Sunny recognizes that she is lacking a basic understanding and appreciation of an important part of her own identity — her Jewishness— and has allowed her own ignorance to turn into prejudice.

The play is composed of two Acts. There are five scenes in act 1 and eight scenes in act 2. The primary conflict in the play is between Sunny and Joe as Sunny attempts to excuse and persist in her bigoted attitudes and actions and Joe tries to show her that it is wrong and convince her to change. Sunny wants to deny the reality of who she is, and Joe helps her face that. The secondary conflict is between Lala and Boo as Lala struggles to ignore her mother and the realities of society and live in a fantasy world of her own creation while Boo fights to get Lala to change and face reality. Sunny and Lala represent two sides of the same coin, both living in denial of reality and living in a fantasy, pretending to be what they are not, though each in slightly different ways. These conflicts

¹⁵ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 78.

¹⁶ Ibid, 81.

and self-identity crises are fueled by the unhealthy and prejudicial attitudes that all members of the Freitag family exhibit to some extent as a result of their lack of connection to their Jewish identity and their assimilation to Southern Christian culture.

Sunny is denying the reality of who she is by pretending that her Jewishness does not exist or matter. She tries to live in an academic fantasy utopian world where society does not judge a person based on their ethnic or family background and that a person can shape his or her own identity without regard to those things. Like her cousin, Lala is also denying reality, but she is living in a romantic Southern belle dream fantasy where she can shed the parts of her identity that she does not want to claim, specifically her Jewishness, and live a life of glamour and romance like the lives of her favorite heroines in books and movies.

The primary climax of the play occurs in act 2, scene 7 when Joe and Sunny reunite and reconcile on the train. Sunny recognizes her own ignorance, admitting that “There’s just a big hole where the Judaism is supposed to be.”¹⁷ She apologizes to Joe for taking him to Ballyhoo, and Joe also apologizes to Sunny for his behavior. The climax of the secondary conflict between Boo and Lala occurs earlier, in act 2, scene 4 when Lala chooses to go out the door to attend Ballyhoo. There are preliminary climaxes that occur throughout the play including the argument between Sunny and Lala in act 1, scene 5, when Peachy asks Lala to the dance in act 2, scene 3, and the argument between Joe and Sunny in act 2, scene 6.

Playwright Alfred Uhry has created a world of dualities set in stark contrast – not necessarily in black and white, but of light and shadow. Simple contrasts between two

¹⁷ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 81.

opposing elements, characters, or identities – such as Joe vs. Peachy, Jew vs. Christian, and young vs. old – are repeated throughout the play to illustrate and intensify the central conflict of the play. For example, Boo represents reality and awareness while Reba represents detachment and a lack of awareness. Joe represents identity and self-acceptance while Peachy represents assimilation, self-loathing, and bigotry. The central representatives of this idea of duality are Sunny and Lala who are almost, but not quite dual protagonists of the story. The motif of duality is carried subtly throughout the play in its structure and visual imagery as well. For example. Joe and Sunny's love story in the play is bookended by two meetings on a train, the build up to the climax of the play includes the two pairs of lovers going off to Ballyhoo, and the play culminates with the image of the two shabbat candles shining side by side in the final scene of the play with the family gathered around them. All of these dual contrasts provide the given circumstances, but also reinforce the themes of the play.

Dramatic Theory

The style of the play, both in its writing and its themes as revealed through the plot and characters is Modern as is the conflict rooted in struggles with self-identity. However, the post-Modern ideas of the performativity of identity also come into play as Uhry explores, perhaps even subconsciously, the ideas of the performativity of Judaism versus Protestantism, the performativity of Southerner versus Northerner, and the performativity of men versus women, among other opposing identities through the characters in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. Post-Modernism has long been interested in the creation and expression of identity. Although her work is focused primarily on the study of gender identity, Judith Butler's concept of the performativity of gender identity, first

published in her 1990 work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, was built on some of the philosophical work of other post-Modern theorists such as Foucault and Derrida who were also concerned with the construction of identity. Butler's writings on performativity laid the groundwork for further exploration of discursive identity in other areas, besides gender. In their book, *Discourse and Identity*, Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe explain, "Butler's basic premise is that identity is a discursive practice, a discourse that we both inhabit and employ, but also a performance with all the connotations of non-essentialism, transience, versatility, and masquerade that this implies." They included a quote from Butler, "...identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results."¹⁸ There are countless examples of the characters in *'Ballyhoo'* engaging in expressions of identity, for example: Lala decorating the Christmas tree while singing a Christmas carol, Sunny reading a sociology book on the train, or Reba hand-knitting a sweater. Most importantly, the play is concerned with the performativity of religion, more specifically Judaism. To Joe, the Freitag family does not seem to be Jewish because they do not behave, or perform, in a way that he associates with Judaism. Conversely, some of the Frietags think that Joe is "too Jewish" not so much because of what he does, but more because of what he does not do, which is behave, or perform, in a manner that fits into the dominant Christian, Southern, culture.

¹⁸ Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, "Theorising Discourse and Identity," in *Discourse and Identity*, 17–47, Edinburgh University Press, 2006. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r2356.7>.

Dramatic Action and Language

The world of the play is realistic and thus requires realistic movement for the blocking, and realistic props which are used in a realistic manner. As stated previously, time and place are represented in a logical, chronological manner with one exception: act 2, scene 8, the final scene of the play. In this scene, the action of the play jumps to a future moment that is intentionally ambiguous as to whether it is reality or a fantasy in Sunny's mind. As scene 7 ends, Joe tells Sunny: "think of something really good and we'll just make it happen" after which "she stands c[enter] and thinks hard" as the lights fade.¹⁹ When the lights come up on the next scene, Sunny "walks into the scene" where Joe and the rest of her family are gathered around the dining table and "lights the Sabbath candles" and they begin the traditional Jewish sabbath ceremony.²⁰

The play is written in prose. Its vocabulary, sentence structure, and dialogue patterns are indicative of the setting of 1939 Atlanta and the socio-economic class of the majority of the characters. There is a mixture of long, medium, and short sentences, and the dialogue rarely overlaps which is consistent with the general decorum with which the characters conduct themselves, even when they are upset or hurt. In general, their vocabulary befits educated, upper middle-class individuals and very little profanity is used.

All of the members of the Freitag/Levy family and Peachy speak with an American Southern accent that is appropriate to the state in which they live: Georgia for Adolph, Boo, Reba, Lala, and Sunny, and Louisiana for Peachy. There is a rhythmic --

¹⁹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 82.

²⁰ Ibid.

almost musical -- quality to the words that help the dialogue “sound Southern” even without hearing it spoken.

There are many uses of Southern colloquialisms sprinkled throughout the dialogue that are indicative of the setting and culture of the play. These include words like “y’all” and “hidey.” There are also many contractions used, some of which are generally used such as “could’ve” or “aren’t,” but also some unique contractions such as “y’know.” Occasionally the first or last letters of words are dropped such as “fraid” instead of “afraid,” “smellin’” instead of “smelling,” and “tomorra” instead of “tomorrow.” Pet names like “Sugar,” “Sweetheart,” and “Honey” appear throughout, and “Mama” is used instead of “mother” or “mom,” and “daddy” instead of “dad” or “father.” They do not “make” coffee, they “fix” it. These colloquialisms are balanced with a wide vocabulary and sentences that exhibit an excellent command of the English language to illustrate that the characters speak this way not because they do not know how to speak correctly, but because this way of speaking is a part of their cultural vocabulary and dialect.

Joe Farkas speaks with a Brooklyn, New York dialect which includes some words and phrases in the script like “whaddaya” and “give ‘em.” He also uses some Yiddish words and phrases occasionally in the play which help illustrate his upbringing in a Jewish community and his closer connection to his Jewish roots. In the final scene of the play, Sunny speaks a sabbath prayer in Hebrew and all the other characters respond in Hebrew.

There are a few instances of Jewish slurs in the play. The word “kike” is used twice, once each by Boo and Joe. “Kike” is an offensive, derogatory term referring to a

Jewish person. Lala uses the word “yid” which is also an offensive, insulting word that refers to a Jewish person that comes from the word “Yiddish.”

In general, the sounds of the play are those of a family: joy, laughter, teasing, conversation, and the clinking of dishes at the dinner table. There are sounds of music when Lala sings a Christmas carol and when Boo and Reba hum while the others dance in the living room. There are sounds of a dance orchestra playing and people dancing when they are at Ballyhoo. In two scenes we also hear sounds of a busy train station: people walking by and talking, conductor shouts, and train whistles.

The overriding image in *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is that of the large, decorated, and lit Christmas tree that is onstage for the entire play until the final scene when it is replaced with another important image of the play: the family gathered around the shabbat candles. The Christmas tree represents family, warmth, and light, but also cultural assimilation and artifice. The final image of the family with the shabbat candles exudes a similar sense of warmth and light, but also a sense of peace and genuineness as the Freitag/Levy family are no longer suppressing their Jewish identity but learning to embrace it.

The American South is another prominent image that is painted through the characters’ accents and colloquialisms and their attention to identifying Southern cities where they have experiences and acquaintances. Lala’s large hoopskirt dress is also another image of Southern identity. There are also images of courtship and love such as the dance, the corsage, the lovers’ meeting, and the kiss between Sunny and Joe at the end.

Character Analysis

Sunny Freitag

Sunny Freitag, is twenty years old and described as “attractive” and “reserved.”²¹ She is the daughter of Reba, niece to Boo and Adolph, and cousin to Lala. Sunny is intelligent, self-assured, and practical, but warm. She is a successful student at Wellesley, very studious. Sunny is a primary character and the protagonist of the play. The action of the play centers on her journey of self-discovery in love and in learning to embrace her religious and ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

At the beginning of the play Sunny is disconnected from her Jewish heritage and any sense of spirituality associated with it. Furthermore, she is completely unbothered by that lack of relationship. Sunny wears her Jewish identity like a scar: a reality that she must live with, but one that she does not draw attention to, and at times works to actively deemphasize. It does not occupy a place of importance or significance in her personal life, and she does not believe that it should in society either. In one of her first conversations with Joe she speaks of a comparative religion class that she took and says, “Professor Brainard made so much sense. She believes that all faiths are basically the same with different window dressings. ...And I agree with her. I don’t think what religion a person happens to be matters all that much in the modern-day world.”²²

By the end of the play Sunny realizes that by ignoring her Jewishness she has denied herself connection with an important part of her identity. She recognizes that she

²¹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 26.

²² Ibid, 46.

knows so little about Judaism and that “there’s just a big hole where the Judaism is supposed to be.”²³ She has allowed society to define what being Jewish means, rather than choosing what it means for herself. At the end of the play, however, Sunny decides to start on the path of learning more about her Jewish heritage and integrating that into her personal identity and, presumably, her family’s identity. The final scene in the play is Sunny leading her family in a traditional Jewish Sabbath candle lighting ritual, which we see after Joe has asked her to “think of something really good and we’ll just make it happen.”²⁴

Sunny, like many young adults her age, desires to be sure of her own identity and her place in the world, but she does not see religion as a source of self-discovery, at least initially. It is a part of her identity she would rather downplay and forget. Instead, Sunny pours her energy into academic learning and achievement. Although she would likely not admit it, Sunny desires to be respected and admired and believes that the best way to achieve those things is through her identity as a successful Wellesley student. She calculates her own self-worth by those standards.

Sunny believes herself to be above caring about what “society” thinks because she does not concern herself with Southern society and culture in the same way that her Aunt Boo and cousin Lala do, and she looks down on them for it. However, unlike Lala, Sunny has never struggled to be accepted by those in her own social circles. She is smart, beautiful, and well-spoken. She does not necessarily ascribe great importance to it, but

²³ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 81.

²⁴ Ibid, 82.

she knows how to operate successfully in society. She was also left a good social legacy by her father who was a well-respected member of the community.

Sunny did have a significant experience of discrimination that greatly impacted her when she was about twelve years old, however, which she describes to Joe in act 1, scene 5. She says,

The summer between 6th and 7th grade my best friend was Vennie Alice Sizemore. And one day she took me swimming at the Venetian Club Pool. Her parents were members. So we were with a whole bunch of kids from our class and the boys were splashing us and we were all shrieking – you know – and pretending we hated it, when this man in a shirt and tie came over and squatted down by the side of the pool and he said, “Which one is Sunny Freitag?” and I said I was, and he said I had to get out of the water. And Vennie Alice asked him why and he said Jews weren't allowed to swim in the Venetian pool. And all the kids got very quiet and none of them would look at me.²⁵

Sunny relates this experience to Joe after he teases her about the family's Christmas tree and insists that she is “just like everybody else.” Sunny explains that while she and her family members may talk, look, and act like their Christian neighbors, “everybody around here would still know what I am” and she says, “it hurts sometimes.” It is clear this experience helped shape her feelings about her Jewish identity. Notably, Sunny chose to attend a college in the north, away from Southern society, where she could be free from at least some of the societal labels and expectations that she experiences at home.

Besides her own internal conflict, Sunny's primary conflict lies in her relationship with Joe to whom she feels drawn but who is unlike anyone she has ever met. He causes her to question her sense of identity when it comes to her own religion, which makes her uncomfortable, at first. She is used to being right, but Joe questions her and causes her to rethink some of her previously held opinions. Sunny also has a secondary conflict in her

²⁵ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 45.

relationship with Lala. She has always struggled to get along with Lala because they are very different, and Lala has always been jealous of Sunny. Sunny experiences a climactic moment at the end of act 1 when she has a fight with Lala and admits that she wants to go to Ballyhoo with Joe. She also has a revelation in act 2, scene 7, when she admits to Joe that she has realized that by excluding Judaism from her life she is missing out on an important part of herself.

Sunny is strong-willed and a moral character in the world of the play. Her prejudice comes out of ignorance, not moral failing. She is intelligent and thoughtful, values reason and logic, and comports herself with elegance, dignity, and self-control. She values her family, especially her mother and her uncle Adolph, and she treasures the memory of her father. She is a caring and respectful member of the family and a hard-working, diligent student who is driven to succeed.

Sunny is so used to being so good and perfect at everything that she gets flustered and defensive if she is questioned or doubted. She likes to be right, and likes to appear cool, calm, and collected at all times, so she has trouble expressing her emotions and admitting when she is wrong. She would not like to admit it, but she cares more about what people think of her than she lets on and she enjoys being praised and admired for her hard work and successes. She is a bit spoiled as most things come easily to her and she has not experienced a great deal of hardship aside from the loss of her father.

Sunny is logical, practical, and very matter-of-fact. She is observant, curious, and independent, but has a close relationship with her mother and uncle. She is reserved and can seem cold at first but is warm with people she cares for. She is attractive, confident, and self-assured most of the time. Things come easily to her: social interaction,

academics, beauty, etc. On the outside, she is everything her cousin Lala is not, which is one of the primary reasons for their strained relationship. During their fight at the end of act 1, Lala accuses Sunny of getting “all the attention. Even from God!” because “He didn’t give you one Jewish feature and look at me!”²⁶

The year is not stated specifically in the script, but it can be inferred that Sunny’s father, Simon, likely died when she was between twelve and sixteen years old. One of the few memories that Sunny shares about her father is her memory of when he came to pick her up from the Venetian Club after she was asked to get out of the pool. That incident happened in the “summer between sixth and seventh grade” which would make Sunny about twelve years old at the time.²⁷ All other references to Simon’s death by Sunny or other characters seem to indicate that it happened a long time ago, such as Lala asking Sunny in act 1, scene 5, “Remember your daddy’s funeral?”²⁸ In act 1, scene 5 Adolph shares a story with Sunny about her father collecting college catalogs for her when she was a baby and how proud he would be of her now, knowing that she is attending Wellesley. In this story it is implied that Simon died before his daughter applied for colleges or even started researching colleges.

It seems that Sunny had a close relationship with her father and that she takes after him in many ways. On the other hand, Sunny and her mother, Reba, are very different from one another, but they still have a loving relationship. Sunny is also very

²⁶ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 50.

²⁷ Ibid, 45.

²⁸ Ibid, 49.

close with her uncle Adolph, to whom she looks as a father figure, and Adolph, in turn, dotes on her. Adolph and Sunny share the most similar personalities in the family.

Lala Levy

Lala Levy, the daughter of Boo and niece to Adolph, is in her early twenties and is described as “an unsure, awkward young woman” with “a slightly desperate air about her.”²⁹ She is a primary character and an antagonist to Sunny. At the beginning of the play, Lala is uncertain of herself, lacks direction in her life, and, like her cousin, Sunny, desires to find herself and her place in the world. However, she manifests this desire for a stronger sense of identity in a very different way than Sunny. Instead of academics and outward success, Lala turns inward. She is a dreamer who lives in a fantasy world that is constantly changing and adapting to suit her latest obsessions and interests, or as pieces of her fantasy are exposed by others. Living in this way makes Lala a very anxious and high-strung person which manifests in awkwardness in social situations and the “air of desperation” that floats around her like a cloud. By the end of the play, Lala has abandoned the fantasy world she once occupied under the near constant nagging of her mother. With a lot of help from Boo, Lala recognizes the reality of her situation and chooses to attend Ballyhoo despite her fear of rejection and ridicule. In the end, she receives (and accepts) a proposal of marriage from Peachy, who is not the kind of person that would fit into her ideal romantic fantasy at the beginning of the play. Her dream-world has ended, and she is settling for the best version of reality that she thinks she can get: a future as Peachy’s wife. Her excitement and big dreams of becoming a novelist at

²⁹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 7.

the beginning change to being excited about Peachy wanting to come live and work in Atlanta with Adolph at the end.

Lala wants to be valued, understood, and loved. She struggles with her own sense of identity and desperately seeks acceptance from others, both in her own family and in society. She desires connection and a sense of purpose, but also does not know how to go about seeking those things in an effective or constructive way. Because she struggles with her identity, she tries others on, so to speak, or fantasizes about being something or someone that she is not. She experiments with different interests and pursuits in an effort to find herself, but her passion for things burns hot and fast and she does not stick with anything long enough or with enough focus to become proficient before she changes course. She also tries different personality traits on for size, mimicking people that she admires, whether they be fictional or real, which contributes to her coming across as artificial and awkward.

During the play Lala's current obsession is *Gone with the Wind*. She is a fan of both the novel and the film (which premieres on the day of the first scene of the play) and makes many references to them throughout the course of the play. The epic historical romance appeals to Lala's romantic nature and penchant for the dramatic, and the iconic heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, represents everything that Lala is not but wishes she was. In Lala's eyes Scarlett is confident, strong, charismatic, decisive, independent, courageous, and beautiful, and not Jewish – a true Southern belle. Scarlett's persona is one that Lala tries to adopt for herself. She also fancies herself a novelist like *Gone with the Wind* author, Margaret Mitchell by declaring that she is writing a novel set in Atlanta in the Reconstruction, for which she has written one sentence.

Lala's conflicts lie in the relationships with her mother, Boo, and her cousin, Sunny. Lala has a complex relationship with her mother, in that she wants to please her, but also desires to break free from her. No one in the family understands Lala's artistic soul, least of all her practical, no-nonsense mother. Boo contributes to Lala's poor self-esteem because she makes Lala feel like she is running out of time to make a good marriage and that making a good match and taking her place in society is the only way for her to be valued by society and achieve happiness in her life. Ultimately, Lala relents to the pressure from her mother and attends the dance with Peachy and then accepts his marriage proposal. There is a sense, despite her protestations of happiness, that Lala is settling – a mistake that perhaps Boo herself made when she married Lala's father.

Lala's relationship with her cousin Sunny is also tumultuous. They have lived together for many years, but do not share common interests or pursuits and do not particularly like one another. Lala feels a great deal of jealousy and resentment toward Sunny, who in her mind gets "all the attention."³⁰ She feels that Sunny thinks herself superior to Lala, and though Sunny does not want to admit it, she is not entirely wrong. Sunny does think Lala is ridiculous.

In act 1, a climactic moment occurs for Lala's character when she confronts her cousin, Sunny about the resentment she feels toward her from the time that Sunny wore a brand-new suit to Lala's father's funeral. Lala exclaims, "Nobody wears a whole new outfit unless they want to be looked at! That was supposed to be my tragedy! You already had yours and you had to have mine too!"³¹ Sunny balks at this assessment and the fight

³⁰ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 50.

³¹ Ibid.

continues to escalate as Lala pours out more of her resentment of Sunny due to her non-Jewish appearance and ability to get an invitation to Ballyhoo with so little effort. In the end, Lala challenges Sunny's stance on Ballyhoo saying, "You say you don't care about it. Stay home."³² At first, Sunny agrees but then confesses that she does want to go to the dance to which Lala responds, calling her a hypocrite. Sunny's retort, "You are the biggest wet blanket in the world. No wonder nobody wants to take you to Ballyhoo," provokes Lala to declare that she is going to Ballyhoo with Peachy. Up until this moment, Lala has not shown any interest in going with Peachy despite her mother's pressuring, but this fight prompts Lala to decide that she will go with Peachy just to prove Sunny wrong.

Another climactic moment for Lala occurs in act 2 when she and Peachy are about to head out the door to the Ballyhoo dance. He brings up the name of an old acquaintance, Dotty Wolf, with whom Lala had a bad experience when she rushed for a sorority at the University of Michigan and did not get in. At the mention of her name, Lala faints. Peachy is ushered out to the car by Boo and then Lala confesses her fears of being laughed at to Boo. Boo responds saying, "If they're gonna laugh at you, they'll do it whether you go or not. At least show a little backbone, for God's sake! We're not weak people! Now you get yourself up and go on out to that car!"³³ Lala still protests but Boo pushes harder, imitating what the gossips at the dance might say about Lala and then ending with:

...And pretty soon it'll be 'Lala Levy? I don't believe she's been out of that house on Habersham Road for— why it must be 20 years now.' Do you

³² Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 51

³³ Ibid, 72.

see any other possibilities daughter? Well, go on upstairs and work on that radio script. I'm sorry it's a novel this week, isn't it? Just leave the dress on my bed, sugar. I'll take it back to Rich's tomorrow.³⁴

With that scathing attack, “Lala hesitates a moment, then grabs her evening wrap and exits through the front door.”³⁵ Her mother shattered what was left of Lala’s fantasy world, but she musters the courage to face her fear and go to the dance. In the process, she abandons her dream-world to settle for reality. However, she is quick to dress her new reality in a new veneer of fantasy as she playfully repeats phrases like, “You’re terrible”³⁶ and “Isn’t he awful?”³⁷ in an effort to excuse or laugh away Peachy’s obnoxious behavior.

In the world of the play, Lala is a moral character who values creativity, romance, and big dreams, but Lala is a weak-willed character who pretends to be (and wishes she was) strong. Her will seems to grow stronger throughout the play as she confronts Sunny and gains social confidence from her budding relationship with Peachy, but in the end, she is really giving in to the wishes and strong will of her mother.

Lala is a dreamer with her head in the clouds. She romanticizes things in her mind and can be flighty, but can also be a frantic ball of energy. She is an artistic soul with no outlet in a family that does not value artistry and romance. She can be overly sensitive and take things very personally, getting defensive when provoked. She is insecure, immature for her age, and often overly dramatic, but can be funny and witty when she is not trying too hard. She is spunky and sassy, especially to her mother. She is also smart

³⁴ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 72.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 68.

³⁷ Ibid, 79.

but does not apply herself. She struggles in social situations and alternates between trying too hard and not trying hard enough. She has low self-esteem and is very self-conscious. She lacks confidence but tries to hide it by acting confident and then overcompensates, thereby coming across as “worked up” or over-bearing. She is self-centered because she lacks the emotional maturity to put others before herself. She gets very caught up in her own little dream world. She is unmoored, without a clear sense of who or what she wants to be in life. She carries a lot of tension and pressure and tries to hide it but is like a balloon that could pop at any moment.

Joe Farkas

Joe Farkas, is described as “a vigorous young man in his late twenties.”³⁸ He is an outsider in the world of the play: a Jewish “Yankee” from New York City who has recently moved to Atlanta to work for Adolph’s company. He is a primary character and antagonist, as well as love interest, to Sunny. When he and Sunny meet for the first time, there is an instant attraction on both sides but in their conversations, they quickly discover that they are from two very different worlds. Joe is the first person Sunny has met that causes her to question her lack of connection to her Jewish identity and it makes her uncomfortable. Joe is not only comfortable with his Jewishness, but proud of it and he does not understand why Sunny and her family are not.

At the beginning of the play, Joe has a very black-and-white view of the world. He does not understand Sunny’s point of view on religion or the Southern culture to which the Freitags have so clearly assimilated. It does not make sense to him why a Jewish family would try to hide their Jewish identity from the world and, in that process,

³⁸ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 16.

themselves. The Joe of the beginning of the play would never imagine himself in a relationship with such a person. Over the course of the play, however, he falls in love with Sunny and in doing so, his idealistic view begins to change. He slowly gains an understanding of how and why she feels the way she does about being Jewish and, by the end of the play, realizes that for many people, religion and identity is not black and white. He decides that he wants to be with her despite their differences.

Joe's primary conflict lies in his relationship with Sunny. He is falling for her but struggles to understand her negative thoughts and feelings about being Jewish. In addition, he is experiencing culture shock as he tries to adjust to life in the South and begins to see how different Sunny's life and background is from his own. Joe has a personal climax when he and Sunny argue in act 2, scene 6 after he leaves her at the Ballyhoo dance upon finding out from Peachy that he is considered one of "the other kind" of Jews that are not normally permitted to join the Standard Club. This revelation is completely shocking and foreign to Joe who has never experienced this kind of prejudice and discrimination coming from fellow Jews. Angry and hurt, Joe confronts Sunny about the incident and during their argument accuses her of using "Jew-hater talk" before storming out.³⁹

Joe is an intelligent, energetic, hard-working, go-getter with a romantic streak. He is a classic "fish-out-of-water" but remains confident, friendly, and optimistic. His laid-back attitude and good sense of humor serve him well, but he is also proud and not afraid to say what he thinks. Joe is a strong-willed and moral character in the world of the play.

³⁹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 78.

He values hard work, honesty, and loyalty. His religious identity is important to him, as is his family and his work.

Joe grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, New York City. While he does not give many details about his family, it seems that he grew up in a close-knit family with many members of his extended family nearby. He has a good relationship with his family, and they are important to him. Joe was in his first semester of art school when his father passed away. He mentions his mother, with whom he keeps in regular contact, and he mentions that he has brothers, but no further details are revealed about them.

After his father passed away, Joe left school and went to work. He gives Sunny a brief version of his work history in act 1, scene 5 saying,

I was selling mattresses at Macy's Herald Square and they offered me assistant bedding buyer at their store in D.C. and then the store across the street asked me to assistant manage and then that chain got taken over by Dixie Bedding and one day your Uncle Adolph came in to check us over and he hired me to work for him.⁴⁰

He does not give much detail or present it in a boastful way, but this work history helps establish that Joe is a hard worker and very good at what he does. With each successive job he has climbed higher on the corporate ladder, and in short order. He is sought after by employers. Adolph admires him and gives him a great deal of responsibility from early in his employment.

Joe also admires and respects Adolph and is pleased to be working for him. Their interactions are positive, and some even have a glimmer of a father/son relationship beginning to take root. Adolph clearly thinks the world of Joe and sees his potential not

⁴⁰ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 44.

only as a businessman but as a good match for his beloved niece, Sunny. Boo, on the other hand, only sees Joe through her prejudice. She is polite to him when she first meets him but grows colder to him the more often he comes to the house. Joe is always polite and respectful to her and thinks Boo's dislike of him is because he is "too Jewish"⁴¹ before he understands the full extent of the family's bigotry. Reba is kind and polite to Joe, as she is to everyone, but the two of them do not have much direct interaction. While Reba shares the family prejudice toward "the other kind," at least in word, she does not seem concerned about the budding relationship between Joe and her daughter, Sunny. She is happy to hear that Sunny is going to the dance, but rather indifferent about who her date is other than that he is "that good looking boy who works for Adolph."⁴²

Lala flirts with Joe when he first arrives. She is interested in him because he is a good-looking single young man and because he is an interesting stranger from a far-away place, both of which play perfectly into her romantic fantasy. Joe is polite to her but is clearly not interested. While Lala is slow to take the hint, when she finally does, her initial attraction quickly becomes distaste fueled by her embarrassment of being rejected by him and her jealousy of Sunny. After interacting quite a bit with her in act 1, Joe has less and less interaction with Lala as the play progresses and her attitude toward him becomes more similar to her mother's. They do not speak directly to one another in act 2.

⁴¹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 58.

⁴² Ibid, 55.

Adolph Freitag

Adolph Freitag is a prosperous businessman in his mid-forties described in the script as having a “soft body, hard mind” and as “a pillar of the business community.”⁴³ He is not married and has no children of his own, but he is the head of the household that includes his sister, Boo, his sister-in-law, Reba, and their daughters, his nieces, Lala and Sunny. He is the owner and Chief Executive Officer of Dixie Bedding Corporation, a family business that was started by his older brother over twenty years ago and has since grown into a large business with stores and manufacturing facilities in multiple locations along the eastern coast of the United States.

Adolph grew up as the youngest of three children. His father passed away when Adolph was a young man and the oldest brother, Simon helped support the family, including supporting Adolph through college. The two brothers worked together at the family business until Simon’s death at which time Adolph took over as the sole proprietor. When Simon died he left behind his wife Reba, and their daughter, Sunny whom Adolph now supports and cares for as his own.

Adolph has a deep sense of admiration and respect for his brother and feels indebted to Simon for the years of support which has translated into a strong sense of duty and obligation to the family and to the business. With his more reserved personality, there is a sense that he probably would have been content to stay in the background supporting Simon as the head of the company, but when Simon died he stepped in to fill his brother’s shoes as the head of the company, the head of the family, and a leader in the

⁴³ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 16.

community. Adolph shares a special connection with his niece, Sunny, in part because of his deep affection for her father.

The lone man in a household of women, Adolph is generally patient, a bit of a stoic, and has a dry sense of humor. He does not show it often, but he has a sentimental side as well, and an especially soft spot for his niece, Sunny to whom he serves as a father figure. He is wise, patient, reserved, observant, and many of the other characters look to him to be a voice of calm and reason. He is a sharp businessman, but there is a sense that he compartmentalizes business and domestic affairs, and he takes a more passive role at home. It is his house, and he is the head, but he allows his sister Boo to run the household as she sees fit and does not interfere much with domestic matters. He does love food, however, and frequently gets caught picking at the food before mealtimes or sneaking a late-night snack from the icebox in the kitchen. Although they form an odd arrangement, he and his sisters and nieces have carved out a relatively peaceful, comfortable existence.

His relationship with Boo and Lala is more strained, however. Adolph partially blames Boo's insistence on having a large, expensive trousseau for her wedding as a contributing factor to the stress and strain on their elder brother Simon. He feels that her obsession with high society is ridiculous. In turn, Boo harbors some resentment toward him because she felt that he and Simon forced her out of the family business when she married, and because of his obvious dislike of her late husband, Dewald. Boo also resents Adolph for his obvious favoritism of Sunny over Lala when "her daddy is every bit as dead and gone as Simon is."⁴⁴ Adolph knows this is true and likely feels some guilt about

⁴⁴ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 33.

it, but he struggles to relate to Lala. He does not understand her and finds her antics silly and exhausting. He likely agrees with Boo that Lala's fantasy world is a ridiculous waste of time, but he would probably not choose to take the same bullying approach that Boo does to strip that fantasy away from Lala. He does not intervene in the conflict between them, however.

Adolph is a secondary character who drives the action of the play by championing Joe and engineering the first meeting between Sunny and Joe. Adolph sees a confidence and self-assuredness in Joe that he admires. It is clear from the beginning that he sees great potential in him not only as a businessman, but also as a potential match for Sunny. Throughout the play he encourages and supports their burgeoning relationship, though passively.

Adolph seems not to share the same feelings of prejudice that his sisters and nieces do, or at least to the same extent, but he does not choose to speak up and contradict those attitudes either. Most of the time he actively avoids speaking about his Jewishness or the German-Jewish bigotry against "the other kind," even tangentially, by changing the subject or exiting the conversation. The few times he does speak of it are tinged with a deflecting humor. He encourages Sunny in her regard for Joe in act 2, scene 2 saying,

I probably shouldn't say this. In fact, I know I shouldn't say this, because you're very young and it's basically none of my business, and also it would send your Aunt Beulah to Piedmont Hospital, but I really think you should hold on to this boy. I don't think they come along any finer.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 61.

This is one of his most direct lines in the play regarding Sunny and Joe's relationship, but this acknowledgement that a relationship between them would cause Boo distress is also one of the only times he acknowledges Joe's status as one of "the other kind."

Boo Levy

Beulah Levy, or Boo, is Adolph's sister. She is older than him by a few years, and is described as "a serious woman."⁴⁶ She is an intelligent but generally unhappy woman who has extraordinarily little (if any) sense of humor and is overly concerned with social status. She is withering and sharp, especially in her communication with her family, but can turn on her sweet Southern charm like a light switch when it suits her, which is most often in her communication with those outside of the family.

Boo's unhappiness stems from disappointment and boredom, although she would probably never admit it. Her life has not turned out how she planned or expected. Before she married, she worked with her older brother, Simon, and younger brother, Adolph, in the family business, but she feels that she was forced out of the business when she got married and had a baby (her daughter, Lala) and harbors bitterness and resentment over that experience. She is intelligent, has a head for business, and is especially gifted in mathematics, but does not have an outlet for those gifts which has left her jaded. Her husband, DeWald Levy, was not her intellectual equal, and was given a position in the family business but struggled to find his niche and contribute. Boo also feels negatively toward Adolph about his treatment of her husband which she feels is unkind and hurtful. DeWald died relatively young, only a few months after the death of Simon, thus resulting in Boo and Lala moving in with Adolph, Reba, and Sunny.

⁴⁶ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 8.

Boo primarily occupies her time with managing the household for her brother and trying to manage Lala. She loves her daughter and wants to see her happy, but also feels the burden of having a daughter who cannot seem to get her life together. She does not understand Lala. Boo has very different ideas of what happiness looks like for Lala than Lala has for herself. They have very different personalities, but Boo pours a lot of time and energy into trying to “help” Lala. She is convinced that a relationship with Peachy Weil would solve all her daughter’s problems.

Boo is judgmental and over-bearing. She obsesses and fusses over small things and is concerned about doing things correctly according to societal standards but is also practical and has a no-nonsense approach to life. She is very anxious about social status and worries about how she and the family are perceived by others. She is also very smart, perceptive, resourceful, and bold. She is not afraid to say what she thinks and do whatever she deems necessary for her family’s well-being, especially her daughter, Lala.

Boo is the most outwardly bigoted character in the play. She generally treats Joe with politeness, but never warmth, and her behavior toward him gets colder as the play progresses. It is clear from the time that she meets him in the first scene that she sees him as socially inferior, though the reasons do not become clear until later. It is very telling that only minutes before Joe enters Boo is pestering Lala about getting a date to Ballyhoo and then when a handsome, eligible young man literally arrives on the doorstep she does not try to encourage Lala’s obvious interest in him. In fact, Boo helps usher Joe out the door when Lala is attempting to convince him to go out with her. Yet, Boo also seems slightly offended that he did not take an interest in Lala.

Boo is a secondary character who drives the action of the play by pushing Lala to pursue Peachy. She also pushes Lala, rather harshly, to attend Ballyhoo with Peachy the moment when Lala's courage fails her, and she almost refuses to go. She contributes to the conflict between Sunny and Joe by serving as the representative of the outward manifestation of the bigotry and prejudice that the German Jews feel toward the socially inferior "other kind."

Reba Freitag

Reba Freitag, is "a pretty, vague woman, not quite in sync with everybody else" in her middle forties.⁴⁷ She is the widow of Simon Freitag and thus the sister-in-law of Adolph and Boo. She is the mother of Sunny and aunt to Lala. Reba assists Boo with the keeping of the house. She is a peacemaker in the household and generally gets along with everyone, looking for the best in people. Reba likes to do small acts of service for the ones she loves, including all the family members, but does not make a big show of being helpful. She keeps Boo company and helps with the household chores. She compliments Lala, tries to boost her confidence, and helps her when her dress gets torn. She is seen working hard through most of the play at knitting a sweater for Sunny to take back with her to college, even though they could easily afford to purchase one. On Christmas day we also discover that she has knitted Adolph a sweater as a Christmas present.

Reba is a little "out there" and could be described as slow or ditzy, but she is not unintelligent. She has a logic that is all her own and a unique way of looking at the world. She can be quite witty and funny without trying to be or realizing that she is being humorous. She often does not get other people's humor as she takes things people say

⁴⁷ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 7.

very literally but is unfazed by it. In many ways she is the most content person in the play, even though her life did not turn out as she had probably intended or dreamed. She looks for the good and the positive in any situation and remains calm and optimistic. Reba is friendly, colorful, and kind, but enjoys indulging in friendly gossip. However, her stories are not told in a malicious way – she is very matter of fact. She enjoys sharing what she knows, although most of the time she is wrong or sees things very differently than most other people.

Reba is a good and loving mother to Sunny, but they are very different, and Reba does not “get Sunny” sometimes. With her unflappable and contented nature and oversimplified view of the world, Reba has inadvertently contributed to Sunny’s inner-conflict and identity crisis. She also struggles to relate to her at times. When Reba thinks that Sunny is not concerned about going to Ballyhoo she tells her, “It’s a good thing we had babies at home in my day. That’s all I have to say. ...Because if you had been born in the hospital I’d be ‘fraid I brought home the wrong child.”⁴⁸ After Sunny tells her mother that she does have a date for Ballyhoo and exits up the stairs to air out her dress, Reba says to herself, “She is a little bit like me! Thank the Lord!”⁴⁹

Reba is a secondary character who contributes to the action of the play by serving as an enabler for her daughter, Sunny, and in some ways, Lala as well. Although she may seem to be the most content character in the play, Reba is living a life completely detached from reality and, in many ways, stuck in the past. She accepts what she is told without question and lives a quiet life like a child, or a doll – being totally cared for and

⁴⁸ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 54.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 55.

without need to venture into the outside world. She does not aspire to do or be more. Reba unknowingly perpetuates Sunny living in denial because it works for her. The problem is that, because of their very different personalities and situations in life, Sunny's detachment from reality cannot last. Reba is content in her detachment, but her daughter Sunny is not, and she will not find happiness if she continues to deny her own identity.

Peachy Weil

Sylvan Weil, known as Peachy, is a "visitor from Lake Charles" in his twenties. He is described as "self-important, with bright red hair."⁵⁰ Peachy is from a prominent Southern family. He is extremely confident in himself due to his privileged position in life. He is obnoxious and inconsiderate but has no idea, and probably would not care even if someone pointed it out. He cracks a lot of jokes, but his humor is usually at the expense of others. He has very little understanding of the world and lacks maturity and empathy. He attends Tulane University and plays on the varsity golf team there.

Peachy and his parents, like Boo, are very concerned about social status and "good blood lines"⁵¹ which for them means that the family line is German-Jewish only. He cites it as one of the primary reasons (if not the only reason) his parents agreed to allow him to propose to Lala. He is not romantic, but despite the unromantic philosophy about who would make a good partner in life, he does seem to genuinely like Lala. He can make her laugh, which he enjoys, and he also seems to appreciate her humor and sassiness. There is dramatic irony in the relationship between Lala and Peachy because it

⁵⁰ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 64.

⁵¹ Ibid, 10.

seems as though their relationship is mirroring that of Boo and Dewald because Lala is settling and Peachy seems just as useless as it is implied Dewald was. However, there is hope that, despite Peachy's many flaws and unromantic motives, their relationship, albeit very quirky, has a chance to be a relatively happy one, especially if Sunny's fantasy of family togetherness in the final scene becomes a reality.

Peachy is a secondary character and helps drive the action of the play by asking Lala to the dance and then proposing marriage to her afterwards. He also plays the pivotal role of being the one who inadvertently introduces Joe to the idea of "the other kind" and the prejudice and exclusivity of the Standard Club and the attitudes of most of its membership. Peachy represents the ugly side of gentility and Southern culture.

Idea: Title and Overall Meaning

The title of the play, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, refers to a week-long social event called Ballyhoo that took place in Atlanta every year during the winter holiday season when young people would be on break from college. Historically, Ballyhoo began in the early 1930s and was held annually through the mid-1950s. It consists of a series of social activities and outings for the eligible young men and women of the elite Southern Jewish families to mix and mingle together that culminates in a formal dance held at the Standard Club on the last night of the multi-day event.⁵² The most obvious reference to the title is that the climactic scene of the play takes place on that night, following the dance, however, there are also other meanings layered in the title.

⁵² Dan Hulbert, "What was Ballyhoo?" *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, September 22, 1996, Sunday, <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SD9-C4C0-009T-X125-00000-00&context=1516831>.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word “Ballyhoo” means “a noisy attention-getting demonstration or talk,” “flamboyant, exaggerated, or sensational promotion or publicity,” or “excited commotion.”⁵³ In the world of the play, the characters, particularly Sunny and Lala, but others as well, have been in a state of identity crisis – an excited commotion—but their journey throughout the play brings them to the peace and serenity of a new sense of self. They have moved from the exaggerated, inauthentic identity that they had created in a desperate attempt to fit in and escape reality to a newfound more genuine, natural, personal and family identity that will bring them hope, light, and love in the future.

Also, in a world-view sense, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* can be viewed as a “last hurrah” before the dark times that are coming with World War II, which has already started in Europe by the time the play begins. In that way, the play takes place at a time of innocence and ignorance, but it is the “last night” before the coming change. While the conflict is played out in an intimate family setting, playwright Alfred Uhry uses the characters of Lala and Sunny to thematically represent problems in the larger worldview of the time: society’s general prejudice against Jews and their ignoring the reality of Hitler and his fascist and anti-Semitic rhetoric politics until the eleventh hour. Both women are microcosms of the whole of humanity that playwright Uhry is critiquing.

Conclusion

This text-based analysis of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, coupled with the research of Chapter One, served as the basis for the artistic decisions made for the production

⁵³ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “ballyhoo,” accessed Aug. 3, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ballyhoo>.

throughout the design and rehearsal processes. Details of the artistic process, including the development of the directorial concept and an examination of each of the areas of production design follow in Chapter Three. The themes and ideas revealed through the analysis informed and supported those artistic design decisions and led to the creation of the visual and aural world of the play.

CHAPTER THREE

The Design Process

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the process of designing the world of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* from the development of the directorial concept to the early sparks of inspiration, and through the design process to the final implementation of the designs. Not every design decision will be analyzed in detail, but some of the major decisions in each of the technical design areas of scenic, properties, costume, sound, and lighting design will be chronicled. Special attention will be given to discussing the working relationship between the director and designers, exploring how the research and analysis of the play as found in Chapter One and Chapter Two informed and influenced design decisions, and on highlighting some of the challenges and opportunities unique to the play and our production.

It should be noted that the theatre department of Baylor University, and consequently our production of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, was not immune to the many hardships and challenges faced by live theatre artists during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic that began in March of 2020 and continued throughout the entire production process. As a company we were faced with various challenges that were either generated or exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic, including delayed decision making, accelerated timelines, shortages on resources, and stringent COVID safety protocols. Though difficult at times, we worked together with patience and determination to keep the

production moving forward. Some of these pandemic-related hardships may be touched upon in this thesis, but most of these kinds of challenges will not be discussed in great detail. Instead, I will focus on the core of the process and key decisions made that moved us forward to opening night.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo was officially approved as my thesis production on March 26, 2021, and by mid-April the pre-production process had begun. It had been decided that ‘*Ballyhoo*’ would be the first production of the 2021-2022 season, so it was important to get started right away. This pre-production phase included meeting with my directing mentor, solidifying my directorial concept and ideas, preparation for auditions and casting, and informal meetings with some of my designers. Auditions and callbacks, which began on April 29, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. This chapter is focused on the design process which began in mid-May and lasted until mid-August.

Directorial Concept

My first experience with *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was as a sixteen-year-old student when I saw a production of the play put on by my high school theatre department. I thoroughly enjoyed the play. The story and characters struck a chord within me, though, at the time, in my youth and inexperience I did not understand what that chord was or why the story resonated with me. Since that time, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* had been in the back of my mind as a play I would like to direct someday. I did not, however, come into the program at Baylor University thinking that it would be my thesis production. In one of my graduate courses during the summer of 2020 I was asked to compile a list of ten or more potential thesis plays and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* made it onto that list. Later it became one of the three plays from the list for which I developed a director’s

concept for purposes of the class. A directorial concept is an artistic idea, usually a metaphorical idea, thought, or image that encompasses and communicates the director's vision and ideas about the play. This concept serves as a kind of anchor and compass for the artistic team throughout the production process, especially when it comes to making design and staging decisions.

As I developed an artistic concept for *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* during my work for class, I also developed a deeper understanding of why the work resonated with me as a young woman. I am not Jewish, but I am a member of a religious minority. I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly referred to by a once derogatory nickname-- a "Mormon." While it is certainly not to the extent of those in the Jewish Community, I understand, on some level, what it feels like to have a significant part of my identity – my religion – be something that is not necessarily physically apparent, but that is different from the dominant culture. It shapes who I am and how I relate to the world around me. Though mine is a religious identity and not an ethnic identity as it is for many Jews, it is also a specific cultural identity that has, at times, impacted how I have been treated by those around me. In my exploration of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, I realized that the characters of Lala and Sunny especially resonated with me as a young woman because I understood their struggles to reconcile the different parts of their identity—individual, cultural, familial, and societal—to make sense of who they are now and decide who they want to be in the future. I enjoyed *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* for its well-crafted script, fascinating and lively characters, and charming yet meaningful story, but this recognition of my own personal connection with

the work explained why it resonated with me so much in my youth and further deepened my appreciation of the play.¹

This focus on the theme of identity informed the initial concept, developed during the directing class in the summer of 2020, which was “from Christmas lights to candlelight.” The phrase encompassed the varied symbolism of light and evoked the change that the characters, most notably Sunny, experience over the course of the play. Once *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was chosen for the thesis production, and with further research and creative exploration, this initial concept was simplified to an image. The image that I chose depicts the beautiful juxtaposition of Christmas lights and candlelight with a photography technique called “bokeh” defined as “the blurred quality or effect seen in the out-of-focus portion of a photograph taken with a narrow depth of field.”² This image (Figure 3.1) encompasses the ideas, themes, and feelings that I wanted to capture and evoke in my directorial interpretation of the play.

¹ This section was written in part with selections taken from an interview I gave which appeared in the Audience Guide created by the production dramaturg, Piper Vaught, for Baylor Theatre’s production of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

² Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “bokeh,” accessed February 3, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bokeh>.



Figure 3.1. Research image that served as the foundation of the directorial concept.

With the bokeh technique, the lights become circles which represent the family, religious, and social circles that shape the characters' identity in the play and the cyclical nature of those relationships and identities. The image also captures a heightened contrast between light and dark. Each light is a bright colorful center with darkness on the edges which is reminiscent of the idea of being “on the brink” of something big, hearkening back to the meaning of the title of the play—the idea that this moment in time, this society, these characters—are all about to experience great change with the coming world war. The twinkling lights against a dark backdrop also evoke the image of stars in the night sky again alluding to the “last night” in the title.

Light is also symbolic of the journey of illumination and enlightenment that the characters, particularly Sunny, experience throughout the play. Light is often used in metaphors for gaining knowledge, for example the illumination of a lightbulb to symbolize the discovery of something new or an idea and the lighting of a flame to symbolize the ignition of a new idea or passion. In addition, in both Jewish and Christian

religious culture, light is representative of many sacred concepts including hope, remembrance, miracles, love, the soul, and God, all of which are thematically present in the play.

The image contains two candles, representative of the two shabbat candles that are lit at the end of the play, but other symbolic meaning can be ascribed as well. There is even romantic symbolism to be found in the image: the kindling of a romantic flame, or the idea of the two flames “dancing” together under the lights. In addition to lovers, the two candles and the two sources of light also represent other dualities – a major thematic element in the play, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Finally, the image illustrates the idea of choosing genuineness and what is real over the artificial and unnatural. Christmas lights are beautiful and exciting, but artificial, and in the world of the play represent the dominant Christian culture into which the Freitag family has assimilated. They can be tangled, chaotic, and distracting just as the struggles the family faces in their relationships with each other. Candles, on the other hand are natural and beautiful in their simplicity and authenticity. In the concept image the Christmas lights are out of focus and fade into the background while the candles, which are natural light and represent the family’s Jewish religious and ethnic heritage, are bright and in-focus.

Inspiration Images

The primary concept image and the thoughts and ideas behind it were presented to the design team as part of a concept presentation at the first group meeting which was

held on May 28, 2021 via the online video conferencing platform, Zoom.³ The presentation also included other images of inspiration that captured the general look and feel I was seeking in the design of the production. These images were pulled from a variety of sources and included pictures of vintage tinsel-draped Christmas trees, still pictures from classic movies, and various paintings and photographs. As I presented the images, I talked through what about the images inspired me and reminded me of the play.

I felt particularly inspired by some paintings by Edward Hopper: *Automat* and especially *Compartment C Car* (Figure 3.2). There were also two paintings by contemporary artist Sally Storch, and a painting called *Portrait of a Young Woman* by the twentieth century British Jewish artist Alfred Aaron Wolmark which shared similarities to the Hopper paintings. The paintings first caught my eye because the subjects of the paintings are solitary young women who seem to be alone, but not lonely, which reminded me of our protagonist, Sunny. These paintings shared a similar color palette of muted jewel tones, a contrast of light and shadow, and a texture that evokes nostalgia and memory – all of which I liked for the visual world of the play. I also included several paintings by modern and contemporary Jewish artists such as Avital Sheldon, Yoram Raanan, and Elena Fradkin. While all stylistically diverse, these images depicted the shabbat candle lighting ritual from different perspectives, but I was drawn to the way they seemed to capture the beauty and reverence of shabbat balanced with joyous bursts of color, light, and warmth.

³ Many design and production meetings throughout the process were held either entirely online or in a blended meeting format with some participants gathered in person and others on Zoom. Initially this was due to the timing of the meetings being in the summer when classes were not in session and some designers were not physically in the area. Later, this blended meeting option continued to be made available to accommodate individuals with COVID-19 safety concerns.



Figure 3.2. *Compartment C Car* by Edward Hopper.

The photography of Alfred Eisenstaedt (Figure 3.3) was also a source of inspiration. As I was conducting visual research, I found and collected several striking black and white photographs before realizing that they were all by Eisenstaedt who was a German-born Jewish immigrant to the United States just prior to the outbreak of World War II. This discovery felt quite serendipitous. I was struck by his ability to make people and events that seem ordinary and everyday look romantic and glamorous. This slightly heightened version of reality was a feeling that I wanted to evoke in *'Ballyhoo.'*



Figure 3.3. Photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt.

Scenic Design

The scenic designer was the earliest designer attached to the project. He was excited for the challenge as it had been some time since he had been able to design a realistic interior set, and he was very enthusiastic about the story and characters in the play. We were able to talk informally a few times before the first group design meeting which was the official launch of the design process and we continued to meet one-on-one throughout the process. During our first meeting, on May 10, we talked about our ideas and inspiration, the basic needs of the set, and potential challenges.

The play takes place in three locations: the Freitag house, a train car, and the Standard Club. The house is the primary set where most of the scenes take place. The train car set is used twice, once in act 1, scene 3 and once in act 2, scene 7, and the Standard Club is used once for act 2, scene 5. At minimum, the house required a living room space with seating and a large Christmas tree, a dining room space, a door or opening that implies the existence of a kitchen off the dining room, a front door, and stairs leading to an unseen second story. The needs of the train car and Standard Club sets

were not very specific. One design challenge would be figuring out how to create each of the three distinct locations on our stage and transition between these as needed. Baylor's Jones Theater, where the production would take place, is a proscenium style stage that is approximately thirty-three feet wide with a deep apron, or forestage, of about twelve feet which can create some design challenges. Another potential challenge included the placement of the dining room because it is the setting of the very important shabbat candle lighting ritual in the final moments of the play, but it is not a space used for many other key moments in the play. A final potential challenge discussed at this first meeting was the large, decorated Christmas tree and its need to "disappear" just before the final scene of the play.

In the first meeting, neither of us were set on a specific architectural style for the house, so we agreed to gather some research and inspirational images for our next meeting. We did agree that we liked the idea of having lots of windows, both for architectural detail in the interior design and for the lighting design opportunities it would provide. I also expressed my desire to have a visible, grand staircase instead of one that is tucked away.

Much of the discussion at the first meeting and other early meetings centered on the thoughts and feelings we wanted to evoke in our audience with the set, particularly the Freitag house. The choices we made would directly influence the way the characters would be perceived by the audience and help tell their story. Based on the research, directorial concept, and inspiration images, the house would be grand and beautiful. We wanted the visual world of the play to evoke feelings of comfort, nostalgia, elegance, and

familiarity, like a distant, but pleasant memory. It needed to be a place one would want to visit and stay awhile.

The set designer and I were also both excited about the idea of this play being the first in-person mainstage play happening at Baylor Theatre since the pandemic had shut down live performances. We recognized that for many of our audience members, this play would be their first time back in a theatre in eighteen months or more, so in addition to communicating a message about the play and its characters, we also wanted to celebrate and communicate the joy and excitement that we were feeling about getting to create live theatre again. We hoped audiences would feel those same things as they stepped into the theatre and experience a “wow” moment when they saw the set for the first time.

Designing The Freitag House

With all those things in mind, the set design began to take shape over the course of the next two months. The basic ground plan was the first element to be decided. The walls of the house were built at an almost 90-degree angle with the grand staircase anchoring the upstage center apex. The dining room and unseen kitchen area were stage left of the staircase and the front door and entry way were stage right. The living room was downstage center. To help with sight lines, it was decided that some parts of the set, such as the entry way and the dining room, would be elevated from the stage floor. The different levels also helped create distinction between the rooms, even though the floor plan was very open, and would prove useful for blocking as well. The final ground plan (Figure 3.4) did not change much from its first iteration except for the placement of the Christmas tree which was originally upstage right between the front door and the

staircase but was moved to downstage left in the living room. This helped with the overall balance of the set elements, would be better for blocking, and was a much easier place from which to move the tree off stage when it was time to do so.

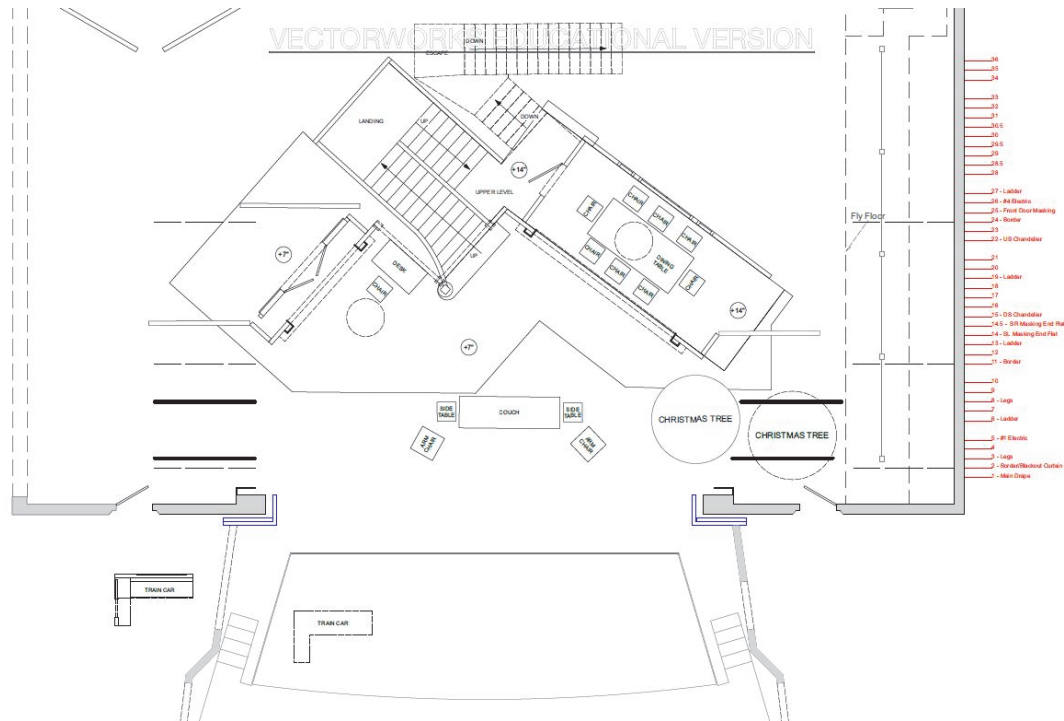


Figure 3.4. The final ground plan design for *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

In the stage directions of the script the house is described as “vaguely Spanish, stucco with a tile roof, Moorish archways, wrought iron railings, etc. The furnishings are many and heavy.”⁴ The set designer and I discussed this and looked at some initial research images that aligned with this vision of the set, however, early in the process it was decided to take the design in a different direction. Though a popular architectural

⁴ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 7.

style of the period, Spanish revival architecture as described in the script has potentially different connotations to our audiences in central Texas. We wanted to evoke a real sense of the time and place being Atlanta 1939 and there was some concern that having a Spanish style house would potentially confuse the audience about the setting at the start of the play. So, it was decided to pursue a style that had a more distinctly Southern feel.

In addition to the Spanish revival style, the scenic designer had gathered some images of various other architectural design styles that would be appropriate to the period including Craftsman, traditional Southern, Colonial, and Neoclassical revival. Over a few meetings we went through the images together, each pointing out various architectural features and details that we liked. As we looked over the images, we also talked about my analysis of the Freitag family and how the different elements would help to communicate information about the characters to the audience. We know from the script and research that the Freitag's neighborhood on Habersham Road is an established, stately, and stylish area of northern Atlanta. In the play the Freitags are a well-established family and are comfortably upper-middle class. The house belongs to Adolph, but his sister Boo is the primary housekeeper and decision maker when it comes to things about the house. She cares a great deal about appearances and social status, so the house needed to reflect that. Through our discussion of these things and looking at the images, we began to paint a mental picture of the interior of the house with things like detailed trim in white and antique wood, high ceilings, chandeliers, and wallpaper all of which became a part of the final design. I also really loved the transom windows which appeared in many of the images. This led to the creation of the large fan shaped window above the front door. The final design of the house (Figure 3.5) ended up as a little bit of a mishmash of a few

different architectural styles with emphasis on traditional Southern and Colonial revival. This conglomeration of styles seemed right for the play and for the Freitag family as it visually reinforced the theme of conflicting worlds, roles, and identities with which each character grapples; the idea of simultaneously blending in and standing out. The home felt comfortable and familiar and yet still captured the slight feeling of working hard to be impressive and perhaps a little too perfect.



Figure 3.5. The final design drawing for the house set of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

The Train Car and The Standard Club

It was decided that the train car set piece would “live” in the stage right portal and enter and exit through the doors there onto the apron. The entrance and exit for the Standard Club would therefore be through the stage left portal. After looking at research images and talking about the needs of the two scenes that take place on the train, we decided against having a bed or berth in the train car and that a bench would be sufficient.

Inspired by research images, the train car was designed with warm wood and green tones (Figure 3.6). It featured an upholstered bench with a window behind it, an overhead luggage rack, and a pocket sliding door for the entrance to the car. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the design of the train car design was later simplified and some elements, including the pocket door were cut.

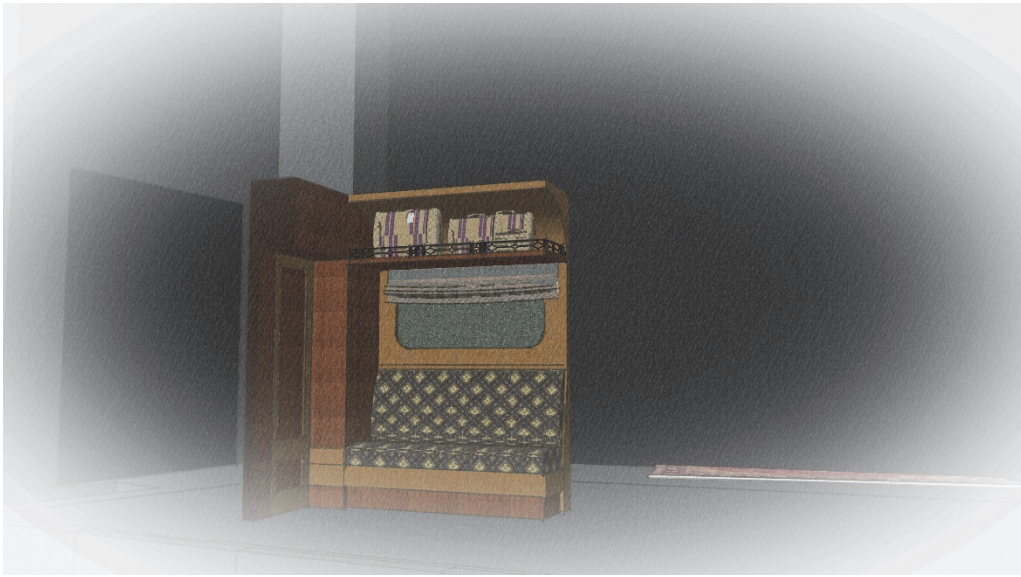


Figure 3.6. The final design drawing for the train car set of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

Several scenic design ideas for the Standard Club were discussed, but ultimately, none of the specific scenic ideas came to fruition. We imagined the scene taking place in a hallway or foyer next to the ballroom. The stage left portal doors would act as the doorway between the ballroom and this antechamber where the scene takes place. The main idea was that music and light would be coming from the portal to indicate the dance happening next door, and we would create a decorative sign, or multiple signs, for this outside space indicating the placement of the ballroom and directions to the restroom or other spaces in the club. We also discussed the possibility of a carpet or other decorative

items such as faux plants, vases, columns, or similar décor. The challenge became figuring out how to get any of these on and off stage quickly enough for this very short scene. Due to the location of the scene on the apron in front of the proscenium arch and black curtain, we were unable to hang anything from a fly rail, so anything we used would have to be brought in and out again by either an actor or stagehand. The actors, in their fancy clothes for the dance, would not be very inconspicuous. Our limited crew members were occupied elsewhere and would likely not be very subtle either at such a close distance and in such a short transition. Ultimately, due to these various challenges and the lack of time to adequately solve these issues, it was decided to rely solely on lights and sound to set the scene.

Placement of the Set

In the Jones Theatre, there cannot be any set pieces built that would block the fire curtain coming down in the event of an emergency. This can create challenges because of the depth of the forestage (approximately twelve feet). With this in mind, the scenic designer suggested that if we kept all of the set pieces for the house upstage of the furthest downstage fly rail (which was close to the fire curtain line anyway) a flat black curtain could be lowered to mask the house during the three scenes that take place in the alternate locations of the train car and the Standard Club. This would make the lighting of those scenes much easier because we would not need to be concerned about light spilling onto the house set, and it would allow any changes to set dressing and props to be made in the house out of view of the audience. As we thought more about this option, we realized that the most drastic set changes, or at least the ones that had the potential to be the most distracting to the audience, occurred during the scenes when the house would be

masked if we went with this plan, including the removal of the star from the top of the Christmas tree after act 1, scene 2 and the removal of the Christmas tree itself after act 2, scene 7, which was of particular concern. The current trend in contemporary theatre is to avoid raising and lowering curtains during scene transitions to help keep scene transitions very quick. It is also a common practice to incorporate scene changes into the action of the play, if possible, to avoid disruption. However, the more we examined the script and the changes that would need to take place at various times, the more it seemed that using a black curtain to mask the house during those particular scenes was the right choice for our production in our space.

Set Decoration and Properties

The furnishings and decorations for the house were almost exclusively from the Baylor Theatre properties (props) storage area. From early in the design process, the scenic designer had in mind a period sofa and armchairs that he knew we owned and felt would be appropriate, so the color palette of the house was chosen with the color of this sofa in mind. If it had been necessary to reupholster the sofa or find a different one, it would have been done, but we both agreed that the existing sofa worked well for the world we were creating and that using it and other furniture pieces that we already had would save on time and budget. The colors of the house became pale blues, greens, grays, creams, and golds with some pops of burgundy in the carpets and festive dining room tablecloth. The walls were covered in gray and cream damask patterned fabric that became the wallpaper. The heavy molding and trim consisted of a balance between dark wood and cream. The wood furniture was primarily dark with reddish undertones such as one would see in mahogany or cherry wood.

In addition to the sofa, there were two tables with lamps and two armchairs that completed the living room set. A secretary style desk and chair were upstage between the staircase and the entry way. The dining room had a large dining table and six matching chairs. The ten-foot-tall Christmas tree occupied the downstage left corner of the house for most of the play and was replaced for the final scene with an armchair. Due to a small oversight, the set had accidentally been built further toward stage left than had been intended by the scenic designer thus leaving a larger gap between the front door and the proscenium. A large free-standing period style radio was added downstage right during tech week to help anchor the set and fill this empty space. While it did not feature in the story, the radio looked nice in the house and helped immediately establish a sense of the period in the minds of the audience.

The assistant scenic designer also served as the properties (props) master, so props and scenic worked together closely to decorate the set. The smaller props needed for the play primarily consisted of realistic items that would have been a part of everyday life, such as a telephone, an umbrella, newspapers, playing cards, and various food props. The props team created a variety of beautifully detailed food props including a soup tureen of Brunswick stew, an angel food cake, “grandma’s kuchen,” and Adolph’s bowl of fried chicken. Another impressive feat was the creation of Adolph’s many newspapers that he reads throughout the play. Each paper was based on historical copies of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution made with the proper dates, headlines, and news stories.

A few paintings from props storage were hung on the walls of the house in the dining room, but the scenic designer wanted to have family photographs hanging on the empty wall in the living room leading up the stairs. We had spoken of it earlier, but when

he mentioned this to me again during tech week as the set decoration was coming together, I remembered the many old family photographs of which I had digital copies, and I offered to send him some of mine. He loved the idea that the portraits would be of my own ancestors, so I sent him many photos from which to choose. He chose three of them to frame and hang on the wall on the set. Though no one else knew they were portraits of my own ancestors, it was quite moving for me to see those familiar faces on the set, and I appreciated that very nice nod to my family from the set designer.

Costume Design

Following our first design meeting, the costume designer collected digital images from the online collection of the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum located in Atlanta, Georgia.⁵ The collection includes a wide variety of historical photographs of Jewish families in Atlanta in the 1930s, and the designer wanted to begin her research with these very specific images. The designer also collected some other historical photographs from Atlanta including newspaper photographs from the various events of the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*. She gathered fashion advertisements from newspapers and magazines from 1939, and finally looked at some of the most popular films and movie stars of the late 30s. She compiled a variety of these images into a PowerPoint presentation which we went through together in early June. I went through them first on my own to take notes on my initial impressions and which looks, styles, and items stood out to me, and then we went through them together and talked. As we did so, we discussed how we felt about the characters, our vision for them, and what kind of

⁵ The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives for Southern Jewish History at The Breman Museum, William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, <https://www.thebreman.org/Research/Southern-Jewish-Archives>.

things we felt their clothes needed to communicate about them. One of the things that was revealed by this research is that, as we compared the photographs from the Bremen Collection with other images depicting the fashion of the period, we found no discernable differences between the way members of the Jewish community of Atlanta dressed and the way their non-Jewish neighbors dressed. It is impossible to determine whether or not someone is Jewish based simply on their physical appearance or clothing styles.

As I explained the classic beauty, elegant simplicity, nostalgia, and sense of familiarity that I was hoping to capture in the visual design of the production, the costume designer described it as a “memory play,” which felt like a good description. From that conversation, the word “memory” became the cornerstone of the costume design, and especially informed the color palette. The designer liked to describe the colors as not quite a specific color but were rather memories of a color, for example, the “memory of pink.” They were muted and dusty shades. For the color palette the neutrals generally stayed in the creams, greys, and browns, and the rest of the colors consisted of mainly shades of blue ranging from pale sky blue to a dark navy and shades of reds and pinks ranging from dusty baby pink to deep burgundy, with a few other colors in the mix occasionally.

One of the colors I strongly associated with the play was midnight blue. For whatever reason, that shade of blue was what I had pictured for Sunny’s blue velvet Ballyhoo dress from my first read through of the script, and for that reason it had become the color of our advertising poster for the production as well. The costume designer liked the shade and decided that we would incorporate it into the design. That, along with other observations on the characters led to the concept of having Sunny in blues and Lala in

more pinks and reds. We were unable to strictly adhere to that idea in the final costume plot because of the limitations of our stock, but Sunny wore the most blue out of all of the characters, and Lala never wore blue.

The next time we met, the costume designer had created a basic costume plot filled in with ideas and images from our previous meeting and had created some initial rough sketches. She walked me through those, describing the ways that she wanted to highlight the characters' personalities through their clothing choices. For example, Boo was elegant and fashionable, but sensible. Reba was similar but leaned into more comfortable and relaxed clothing with more vibrant colors. Lala's wardrobe was feminine and a little fussy and childish. Sunny's clothes were simpler, more practical, and mature. Adolph has little variety with his suits to illustrate that he is a creature of habit and does not want anything fussy, but his clothing is high-quality and well-tailored indicating his social status and professional standing. Peachy is a man of leisure, chases after the latest trends and shows off his money, but within the realm of comfort, fun, and frivolity. Joe's wardrobe was inspired by the actor Jimmy Stewart and the classic character types that he often played with suits that were dapper and charming, but still youthful, and exuded warmth and friendliness.

The design sketches were a perfect jumping off point. We would be limited to some extent by what we were able to find in stock, but the designer felt confident that we would be able to create the kind of looks we were wanting. We decided to focus mostly on separates for the women, meaning skirts, blouses, and cardigan or pullover sweaters that could be layered on, rather than dresses. These items are generally easier to find and fit, and can make costume changes faster and easier. We also agreed to accessorize where

and when we could, but to keep it simple because of the numerous costume changes. Once we had items pulled from stock, the majority of the design process involved choosing which pieces to use in combination with others and fittings, however, there were some specific costume and hair design challenges and opportunities which I will further address.

The Ballyhoo Dresses

It was decided early on that most of the costumes would be pulled from stock, supplemented with a few purchased items, but that the two formal dresses worn by Sunny and Lala to the Ballyhoo dance would be the major costume builds of the production. As described in the script, both of the gowns had very specific requirements that would have been difficult to fulfill in something pulled from stock and would likely have been prohibitively expensive to purchase even if something that worked well could be found. With that in mind, the two gowns seemed the most logical choice to build. The costume designer and I were also excited about the prospect of having something that was unique to our production and would showcase the skills and talents of the costume shop staff and student workers.

It is clear from the script that Lala's Ballyhoo dress is inspired by the large hoop-skirted gowns of Scarlett O'Hara. In the stage directions it is described as "very *Gone with the Wind* with a hoopskirt so wide she can barely get down the stairs" and Adolph jokes that her dance partners "won't be able to come within six feet of you."⁶ In her research, the costume designer discovered that in many productions of *The Last Night of*

⁶ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 56.

Ballyhoo Lala’s dress is designed to look like a replica of the *Gone with the Wind* “barbecue dress” designed by Walter Plunkett that Scarlett O’Hara wears early in the film. It is white with a pattern of green sprigs on it and is trimmed with emerald-green at the ruffled neckline and tied waist (Figure 3.7). In one of our early design meetings, the costume designer and I decided that we both preferred to have something inspired by the “barbecue dress” rather than something that looked like a copy of it. While both Lala and her dress are a bit over-the-top, when she appears in the gown it should still feel like a genuine “Cinderella moment” for her, not a mockery, and when Sunny says, “Lala, that’s such a pretty dress,” it is a sincere compliment.⁷ If the dress was a replica of the one in the film, it would seem as though Lala is going to a costume party rather than a high-stakes social event. The final design for our production incorporated elements of Scarlett O’Hara’s gown, research into ballgown trends of the period, and the color palette of our production. The final dress was a hoop-skirted gown with three tiers of ruffles on the skirt and a ruffled neckline. The gown was white, and the layers of ruffles were made of sheer white fabric embroidered with small burgundy flowers and green leaves. It was tied at the waist with a burgundy sash (Figure 3.8).

⁷ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 57.



Figure 3.7. Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara wearing the "barbecue dress" designed by Walter Plunkett for the 1939 film, *Gone with the Wind*.



Figure 3.8. Costume design drawing for Lala's Ballyhoo ballgown.

Sunny describes her gown to her mother as “the blue velvet I wore in David and Virginia’s wedding.”⁸ When she enters wearing the dress in act 2, scene 4 the stage directions describe her as “dressed simply, but well. She looks great.”⁹ For this gown, the costume designer was inspired by a dress designed by Dolly Tree for film actor Myrna Loy as her character, Nora Charles, in the 1939 film *Another Thin Man* (Figure 3.9). In the film, the dress is a two-piece suit-like dress and jacket ensemble that is mid-calf length. The elegant, clean lines of this classic 1930s silhouette suited Sunny’s character well and our costume designer adapted the design to make it a floor-length formal gown. The designer had already decided that it would be more cost effective and practical to only have part of the dress made of velvet as velvet is expensive and can become easily crushed. Inspired by this suit-dress, it was decided that the jacket and an accompanying evening wrap would be made of the velvet and the gown itself would be made of a crepe-backed satin material in a matching midnight blue color (Figure 3.10).

⁸ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 55.

⁹ Ibid, 69.



Figure 3.9. Myrna Loy as Nora Charles wearing a dress designed by Dolly Tree for the 1939 film, *Another Thin Man*.



Figure 3.10. Costume design drawing for Sunny's Ballyhoo gown.

Reba's Knitting

Beyond the basic costume design requirements of the play, there were some unique challenges for costume, hair and makeup design which emerged from the script. One such unique costume challenge we faced was that Reba spends much of the play knitting a sweater on stage that Sunny is then seen wearing in the penultimate scene of the play. The designer explored multiple options for creating this effect including the possibility of purchasing two identical sweaters and cutting one of them apart for the actor playing Reba to pretend to knit, or commissioning a hand-knit sweater and a half to be made for our production. Neither of those were very cost-effective options. In the end, the designer was able to find and purchase a vintage hand-knit sweater that was a solid light blue color, and the props master was able to find yarn that was a very close color match. The actor playing Reba, who had taken the initiative and learned to knit over the summer, used the blue yarn to knit on stage to make it seem that she was the one who had made the sweater. The vintage sweater was bulky and a little inelegant, but that helped sell the idea that it was handmade by Reba. The costume designer paired it with a slim skirt and layered a belt over it to cinch in the waist and that helped give the actor playing Sunny more shape while wearing it.

Lala's Hair

Almost immediately after she was cast, it was decided that the actor who played Lala, whose natural hair color is a light blonde, would be made a dark brunette for the character of Lala. The decision was based on several factors, the primary one being that the actor playing Sunny also had blonde hair and we did not want both characters to be blonde. Lala's dark hair would help create a distinction in her physical appearance from

Sunny which is important for the story as Lala makes it clear that she feels inferior to Sunny in physical appearance during their argument at the end of act 1.¹⁰ The physical distinction would also aide the audience in distinguishing the two girls from one another early in the play as they are still getting to know the characters. This design decision also helped clearly illustrate family relationships in the play as the actor who played Boo (Lala's mother) has naturally dark brown hair while the actor who played Reba (Sunny's mother) is a blonde like the actor playing Sunny. The costume designer also liked the idea of Lala as a brunette because she felt it would expand the options for the color palette of Lala's costumes, especially in relation to the color palette for Sunny, allowing her to accentuate the contrasts between them. Finally, the actor playing Lala and I both appreciated the idea of playing against the "dumb blonde" stereotype by having smart and studious Sunny remain a blonde, while dramatic and flighty Lala is brunette.

The original plan from the start of the design process was to color the actor's hair, but after we began rehearsals the costume shop manager expressed discomfort with the idea, primarily because it would be difficult, if not impossible, to fully restore the actor's hair to her natural color after the show closed. Even a temporary dye or coloring conditioner could take months to wash out of such light-colored hair. In turn, however, I was uncomfortable with the idea of using a wig. I worried that if the actor playing Lala was the only one onstage wearing a wig that it would negatively stand out as unnatural and fake-looking. I was also concerned about the overall quality, fit, and comfort of a wig for the actor.

¹⁰ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 50.

After some discussion among the production team, one of the costume design professors in the department with training and experience in wig-making offered to serve as wig master for the production and help create a wig specifically for our Lala. Although I remained skeptical, I agreed to allow her to show me what was possible. The newly appointed wig master worked with the costume designer to select a wig from stock that was a color and texture that they liked for Lala. Then, the wig master altered the wig by creating a new lace-front that worked with the actor's natural hairline. She then painstakingly hand-tied the strands of hair to create the new front of the wig. To ease my worries, the wig master kept me well-informed throughout the process by sending status updates and pictures of the fittings. I was pleased with how the final wig turned out and happy for the opportunity to work with someone with such expertise and to have this new experience. Most importantly, the actor playing Lala felt comfortable and confident in it which helped push away any remaining doubts that I held. It worked well for the character and really helped Lala come to life onstage.

Peachy's Hair

The other character in need of a change of hair color from the beginning of the process was Peachy. In the script, Peachy has "ugly red hair"¹¹ (as described by Boo), and the actor playing Peachy in our production had brown hair. After some research we decided to use a specific color conditioning product designed to wash out of hair after a certain number of washes so that the actor's hair would be restored to its natural color more quickly. Unfortunately, even after several applications of the product we ordered, the color saturation was still not enough. The actor's hair looked red when he was

¹¹ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 35.

standing in close proximity to the viewer, such as in the dressing rooms, but when he was standing on stage under the lights, the red color was not reading much at all from the audience. The actor was open to trying anything to help achieve the red color we needed, so during tech week it was decided that his hair needed to be dyed.

As this experimentation with Peachy's hair was happening, the costume design team and I also began to look at the hair of the actor playing Joe in a new light. His natural hair is brown with some subtle copper undertones, but under the stage lights those reddish tones were accentuated and appeared surprisingly strong, which was not something we anticipated. When the actor playing Joe and the actor playing Peachy stood side by side on stage, their hair (before Peachy's was dyed the final time) looked very similar under the lights. So, although it had not ever been part of the original design for Joe, it was decided, with consent from the actor, that Joe's hair would be dyed as well. During tech week, about five days before opening, the assistant costume designer dyed the hair of the actor playing Peachy red and the hair of the actor playing Joe a dark brown. Peachy's hair continued to look much more vivid up close than it ever did on the stage, but the final red color was a vast improvement over what it had been previously. It appeared red enough to be effective for the story, and it looked nice on the actor. Joe's dark hair suited the actor very well too, and it was very effective in the overall look and design of the production.

Sound Design

The sound design for *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was centered on realistic sound effects and music appropriate to the historical period and setting. The script calls for a few practical sound effects such as the telephone ringing and a doorbell, but much of the

sound design was focused on scene transition music. We knew from the beginning of the process that due to the number of scene transitions and the scenic and costume changes that would need to occur, the music would play an important role in keeping the audience engaged in the world of the play during those brief breaks in the action. In our initial meeting the sound designer and I discussed our thoughts about the music and its role in the show and decided to use music realistic to the period of the play, exclusively. The 1930s were a rich musical era and we wanted to highlight that and use the music to help evoke a sense of nostalgia and establish the period in the minds of the audience.

The sound designer researched music of the period and created a playlist that included a wide range of popular music from the 1920s and 30s as well as songs from earlier that would have been popular in Adolph, Boo, and Reba's youth. After listening to the music selections and discussing the options it was decided to lean more on music of the late 1930s that would be more contemporary to the time of the play and popular with the younger, primary characters in the story: Sunny, Joe, Lala, and Peachy. In addition, it was thought that these later songs would be more recognizable and easily identifiable as 1930s songs to our audiences.

With those things in mind, the sound designer curated a new, more specific playlist that included music from various genres including Big Band and Swing and popular artists such as Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, The Ink Spots, The Andrews Sisters, and others. In addition to finding the songs, the sound designer decided which songs to use for which transitions and chose the specific selections of the songs to use as the scene transitions would only be approximately ten to thirty seconds long. The music choices typically focused on setting the tone and mood for

the next scene, although some consideration was given to providing a fitting end to the scene that had just finished as well. Some musical selections were chosen based on the mood and feeling of the music itself while others were chosen for their fitting lyrics. For example, a recording of the song “I Thought About You” played by Benny Goodman and His Orchestra with vocals by Mildred Bailey was used in the transition between act 2, scene 6 when Joe and Sunny have fought and separated and scene 7 which opens with Sunny on the train on her way back to Wellesley with the lyrics, “I took a trip on a train, and I thought about you.”¹² For a complete list of songs used in the play and during the scene transitions, see Appendix C.

The sound designer also took some inspiration from film scores in part because of the many references to *Gone with the Wind* in the play, but also because songs from theatre and film dominated the popular music charts and radio airwaves in the 1930s. We wanted to include the “Main Theme” from the *Gone with the Wind* film score by composer Max Steiner in the sound design somewhere but struggled to find the appropriate place for it, at first. It seemed awkward when used as scene transition music, and it was also tested during the first tech rehearsal for curtain call music but did not feel thematically appropriate for the ending of the play. In thinking about moments in the show where it would be thematically appropriate, we decided to try it at the end of act 1 as a transition from the scene into the blackout and then lights up for intermission. At the end of act 1, scene 5 Sunny and Lala have been arguing leading up to Lala’s final line of the scene where she declares, “You’ll see. You’ll see what happens when you come

¹² Benny Goodman and His Orchestra and Mildred Bailey, “I Thought About You,” composed by Jimmy Van Heusen, lyrics by Johnny Mercer, Columbia Records, 1939.

crawlin' into Ballyhoo with a pushy New York Yid tryin' to suck up to his boss and I sweep in with someone who belongs there. When I sweep in on the arms of a Louisiana Weil!"¹³ Lala's newfound determination to go to Ballyhoo with Peachy seemed to mirror the drama, grit, and determination of Scarlett O'Hara's iconic act 1 closing line, "As God is my witness, as God is my witness, they're not going to lick me. I'm going to live through this and when it's all over, I'll never be hungry again! No, nor any of my folk. If I have to lie, steal, cheat, or kill, as God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again!"¹⁴ Adding a few seconds of the most recognizable refrain from the "Main Theme" as the lights faded out added a little extra theatricality and humor to the end of the act.

The sound designer's faculty mentor disagreed with the decision and felt that it was a distraction that took the audience away from the seriousness of the moment, so the request was met with some resistance at first, but it felt right to me as it matched the consistent pattern of serious moments interrupted by comedy found in the dialogue throughout the play. It took a few tries to get it right, but when we tested it during one of our next tech rehearsals, most people present also agreed that it felt like the right moment which seemed to help alleviate the designer's trepidation. The theme music swelled as the lights faded with the end of the scene, and then as the house lights came up the music shifted back to more pop standards of the period which continued to play through intermission.

Unfortunately, although we had a period radio onstage in the house set, this was not incorporated into the sound design because the radio was not part of the original

¹³ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 51.

¹⁴ *Gone with the Wind*, directed by Victor Fleming, produced by David O. Selznick, (Selznick International Pictures, 1939).

design. The radio was not added until tech week, and there was not enough time to integrate its use into the existing sound design and technical set up. If we had known earlier that we would have a radio onstage or had more time in tech week, this is something that would have been nice to explore.

Lighting Design

Using the director's concept images for inspiration, the lighting designer created a design based on the juxtaposition of artificial white light and colorful "natural" light. In the design the uncolored, white, artificial light represented cultural assimilation and the characters' struggles with their identity. This light included the practical lights in the house set: the chandeliers and table lamps. This white light was contrasted with colorful, "natural" light that represented light sources from the natural world: the sun and the moon shining through the windows, and the flame of the Shabbat candles in the final scene. This colorful light symbolized the characters embracing authenticity and their increasing acceptance and understanding of their own identity. In the initial design, the lights on the Christmas tree were also white, but after conducting further research and consulting with the props master and scenic designer it was determined that colored lights were more appropriate and accurate to the period. This change did not negatively impact the overall design.

The scenes of the play take place at a variety of times of day and night and the lighting designer was able to create lighting looks that captured these various times by using both the lighting within the house and the light visible through the windows on either side of the set (Figure 3.11). While staying within the boundaries of the realistic of world of the play, the lighting designer also artfully manipulated lighting to match the

mood of a scene. Even small, subtle changes in the interior—such as whether a lamp or the tree lights were illuminated in a scene—made an impact in the overall look and feel of a scene, and, like a painting, the colors of the light streaming in through the windows varied in temperature, hue, and intensity.



Figure 3.11. Two contrasting lighting looks depicting the night (left) and the day (right).

The lighting designer and I wanted to do something special to highlight the beautiful ending of the story and lean into the designer’s concept of colored light representing self-acceptance and love. Early in the design process, the lighting designer had an idea to introduce a lighting technique in the final scene of the play that would potentially create circles that would look similar to the bokeh effect in the concept photograph. After some experimentation and discussion with the lighting design mentor and the master electrician, it was decided that this technique would be unlikely to produce the precise desired effect and, even if successful, such an effect could prove to be more distracting than impactful for the audience. Instead, the designer chose to bring the colorful, “natural” light that he had created for the “outside” of the house, heretofore visible only through the windows, into the inside of the home itself for the final scene.

Designing and Staging the Final Scene

The final scene of the play, act 2, scene 8, is a brief scene in which the entire family, including Peachy and Joe, are gathered around the dining room table while Sunny enters and lights the Sabbath candles and recites the Sabbath prayer. Then they each say “Shabbat Shalom” to one another and the play ends. The scene represents a break in the progression of time in the play as it is ambiguous in the script if the scene is reality or happening in Sunny’s imagination and how far into the future it is occurring if it is real. The prior scene, act 2 scene 7, ends with Joe telling Sunny to “...think of something good and we’ll just make it happen”¹⁵ after their romantic reconciliation on the train. The stage directions in the script describing the transition from scene 7 to scene 8 read: “[Sunny] stands c[enter] and thinks hard. The light fades on her,” followed by “Scene 8. Lights up on the Freitag house. The Christmas tree is gone. Joe, Adolph, Boo, Reba, Lala, and Peachy are seated at the dinner table. Sunny walks into the scene and lights the Sabbath candles.”¹⁶

From early in the process, I decided to interpret this moment as something that is happening in Sunny’s mind, but because Sunny and Joe are the kind of people that are going to work to make their dreams reality, and we believe in them and are rooting for them, it is also a vision of the future. So, in a sense, the scene is both real and imaginary. With that interpretation in mind, it was decided that the staging and design needed to introduce an extra touch of theatricality to the final scene and do something to surprise the audience and highlight the break in conventions.

¹⁵ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 82.

¹⁶ Ibid.

As Joe said his final line and exited, Sunny watched him go for a moment and then walked out of the train set in the opposite direction to center stage. She stopped and looked out over the audience, thinking of “something good.” Behind her, the black curtain that had come down to mask the house on stage rose to reveal the house, mostly as before except now without the giant Christmas tree downstage left. Adolph, Boo, Reba, Lala, and Peachy are seated around the dining table. Sunny turned and walked through the “fourth wall” into the scene. As she reached the dining room, Joe entered from the kitchen carrying the shabbat candles which he set on the table in front of Sunny as she took her place at the head of the table. Sunny lit the candles and recited the prayer with the rest of the (presumably now all) family members looking on. Then, they each said “shabbat shalom.” The lights faded out leaving only the candles burning for a moment more, then two cast members blew out the candles creating the blackout signaling the end of the play.

For the lights, the designer created a slow sunrise effect with oranges, yellows, and reds that started at the beginning of act 2, scene 7 and progressed and brightened during Sunny and Joe’s reconciliation on the train. According to the dialogue the scene took place in the morning, and the use of the symbolic “natural,” colored light of the design concept fit perfectly with the symbolism of a light turning and the dawning of Sunny’s relationship with Joe, and her new relationship to her own identity and sense of self. Then after Joe’s exit and Sunny’s cross center, the curtain rose on the house bathed in warm pinks, purples, and blues of a heightened sunset turning to dusk continuing with the symbolism of the natural, colored light, signaling the jump forward in time, and indicating the proper time of day for the shabbat candle lighting ritual (Figure 3.12).



Figure 3.12. The lighting for act 2, scene 8.

To accompany the lighting design, the sound designer chose the song “How Deep is the Ocean” written by Irving Berlin in 1932, The specific recording by Frank Sinatra that was used was from 1947 – one of only two recordings used in the show that were from post-1939. The song began as Joe exited and played through the scene transition with Sunny walking center stage, the curtain rising, and her cross through the house into the dining room, up until the moment she began to light the candles. Then, the music faded out. All together it was only the first minute and thirty seconds of the song. While it is a beautiful and sentimental song, we were unsure if it was giving us the emotional and artistic impact we wanted initially, so we thought that a change in song choice might be needed, but the sound design mentor had an idea to try something with two different recordings of the song. He and the sound designer worked together to create a version of the song that used the original 1947 recording and a digitally remastered version of the

recording. The original recording played first as Joe exited and Sunny crossed to the center and looked out, then as the curtain rose the song seamlessly transitioned on a glissando into the digitally remastered, stereophonic version. All the music in the show until this moment had been original non-remastered recordings, so although small, the sound was remarkably clearer and noticeably different which helped to emphasize the moment.

Together, the light and sound design at the moment of the curtain rising created a magical, whimsical effect that was reminiscent to that of Dorothy opening the door to the wondrous technicolor Land of Oz in another famous film from 1939, *The Wizard of Oz*. As Sunny made her way across the house to her waiting loved ones, the intense color and sound emphasized the sensorial richness of the moment. As the sound faded away and the light gathered around the family there was a sense of spiritual enrichment and newfound clarity, peace, and warmth. The staging was simple, but with the light and sound elements that came together during tech week, we were able to create a heightened reality for Sunny's vision of the future on stage that we felt was both surprising and moving. The designers and I were all very pleased with the final effect and it felt like a very fitting end to the story.

Construction Delays

Unfortunately, as we were nearing the end of the design process, we suffered an unexpected delay. In the third week of July, the air conditioning went out in the design wing of the fine arts building. Summertime in Waco, Texas can be brutally hot and we were experiencing average daily temperatures in the upper 90s and into the 100s at that time. The costume shop, on-site costume storage area, design lab, and the offices of most

of the production and design faculty were all sweltering. For about three weeks, progress slowed almost to a halt as the designers had to finalize their work from home and we waited for the air conditioning to be fixed by maintenance workers from the university. New parts were ordered, but they did not come in for many weeks. In fact, the air conditioning was not fully repaired until after the semester (and rehearsals) had begun, but finally, when it became clear that it was going to take longer to be fixed than we could afford to wait, our department production manager was able to persuade maintenance to provide us with temporary cooling systems. These systems were set up in a few of the critical spaces including the costume shop and storage area and the scenic design lab. The cooling systems moderated the temperature enough to allow the costume designer and her assistant to pull needed costumes from stock, and the scenic designer and his assistant to resume work on the building plans and the construction of the 3-D scale model.

By this time in late July, most of the designs had been finalized, or were close to being finalized, but this situation did create a somewhat rocky transition from the design phase into the building phase of the process for everyone. During these weeks, we did not hold any group design meetings, but the individual designers and I continued to meet and communicate one-on-one. Consequently, we never had an official “final design” meeting signifying the transition from one stage of the process to the next, but our first production meeting, which included the designers as well as production staff, was held on August 19th. Rehearsals began the next day, on August 20. For a variety of reasons related to either the pandemic or the air conditioning situation, set construction did not begin until

after rehearsals began, which was several weeks behind schedule. Those delays, as applicable to the rehearsal process, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

Overall, the design process went smoothly and was a positive collaborative experience. The production team worked together to address challenges as they emerged, and every designer brought wonderful ideas and made exciting contributions that helped create a cohesive visual and aural world of the play. As a team we were well-prepared to transition from the design phase into the building and rehearsal phase of the production process.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Rehearsal Process

Introduction

This chapter contains a broad examination of the collaborative rehearsal process from auditions and casting to the final dress rehearsal. Collaboration between the director and the actors is a special area of focus as the foundational research, analysis, and design work led to furthering the creation of the world of the play through the dialogue, actions, and truthful reactions, of the characters. This is not a record of every decision that was made or event that happened throughout the process. It will, however, closely examine some specific aspects of the rehearsal process that impacted the final production or were distinctive to our production or process as we worked toward the integration of all the various elements of the production into a cohesive whole.

Auditions and Casting

For the initial audition, rising sophomore, junior, and senior theatre majors were given an audition packet that included breakdowns of the seven characters along with nine different monologues from the play. They were asked to choose one of the monologues and submit a self-taped video of themselves performing one of the monologues from the packet. These video auditions were due on Thursday, April 29 which also happened to be the last day of classes for the semester. Audition information was distributed to students on Tuesday, April 20, and students had just over a week to prepare and submit their auditions. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the

timeline was condensed and auditions felt a bit rushed, especially in the context of it being the final week of the semester. Overall, I was pleased with the audition submissions, but there were some students that submitted auditions that did not accurately reflect their talents and abilities.

The video audition format was chosen because of the time constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic protocols in place that would have made an in-person audition for so many people difficult to organize. In some ways the video format was useful. Video auditions can be watched on a more flexible timeline, and rewatched as many times as necessary. Conversely, however, the video format also eliminated any opportunities for interactions, responses, or feedback in real-time.

Sixty-three audition videos were submitted. Callback auditions were scheduled to be held two days later, on Saturday, May 1, so the callback list needed to go out quickly to give the students adequate time to prepare. After watching and evaluating the audition videos on my own on the day they were due, I met with my directing mentor the next day (the day before the callbacks) to discuss the audition videos and who I would like to invite to the callbacks. The list of people I was initially interested in was too long, with about forty-five people, so she helped me narrow the list. To help limit the numbers, it was decided that actors would not be called back as a reward for exhibiting good audition techniques, or to give them the experience of a callback as is sometimes a practice in the department. Also, it was decided that no current freshmen (rising sophomores) would be called back for any of the female characters. It was a difficult decision to make, but it was an effective way to pare down the list. There were several students in that category who gave strong auditions, but it was determined that there were enough excellent auditions

for the roles from the upper-class women that it seemed highly unlikely an under-class woman would be cast over one of these. In addition, very few under-class men were called back for the male roles for the same reason.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo is a Modern realistic play, and although it was written in the late 1990s, its structure and tone more closely mirror the style of plays and films of the 1930s and 40s. That style needed to carry over into the acting performances as well, so it was something I was watching for in the auditions. In general, there is more formality in the way the characters express themselves in both movement and speech than one would find in more contemporary acting styles. This is due to both the style of the play and the historical world of the play. Yet, while the style is more formal, the characters are still sincere and without affectation or pretentiousness. They need to feel grounded in reality and believable.

In the initial audition videos, I looked for actors who understood the tone and style of the world of the play and exhibited that understanding in their vocal and physical choices. Also, I looked for actors who portrayed the characters with a sense of earnestness and sincerity. I watched for bold, interesting character choices but ones that did not push the characters so far that they felt like caricatures. I was also looking for actors who exhibited good pacing and comedic timing. Finally, although I felt badly about the timing of the auditions, it was very helpful to see which actors had taken the time to submit a well-prepared audition even at the hectic end of the semester. I love the play and I wanted to work with actors who also love the play and genuinely want to be a part of telling the story. The students who took the time to read and research the play,

prepare their monologue well, and exhibit professionalism in their audition video stood out to me as students who truly desired to be part of this production.

Ultimately, thirty-one students were invited to the call-back auditions. Each person who was called back was listed under a specific character name on the posted list; there were four or five people listed for each of the seven roles. Students were told that they may be asked to read for other characters at the callback as well. Once the list was sent out, the day before the callback audition, students were provided a packet of thirteen selections (sides) from the script that ranged in length and number of characters.

The callback auditions were held in person in the Jones Theatre on the evening of Saturday, May 1. Two students who were called back were unable to attend due to prior commitments, so there were twenty-nine students who attended. The audition was open to all those called back, so everyone gathered in the theatre together at the start to hear instructions and they were able to watch their fellow auditionees over the course of the evening. For most of the attendees, it was the first time being in an in-person audition setting in over a year. For many, it was also the first time in as long that they were able to see so many of their peers gathered and performing in-person. There was a wonderful, palpable energy and excitement in the air.

At the callback audition students were divided into groups based on the sides and assigned to read for a specific character in that group. These groups were announced, for example: “For audition side #1, group 1, student one will read for Lala, student two for Reba, and student three for Boo.” The actors would find their partners and then exit the theatre to read through the sides together if they wished. Actors were free to go out into the hallway and lobby of the theatre to read their sides aloud with other members of their

group and come and go into the theatre to watch the auditions from others. In general, groups performed in the order they had been assigned, but the order was fluid. An undergraduate stage management student attended the audition and helped keep the groups organized. Soon after this audition, this student was officially assigned as the stage manager of the production.

The reading groups went quickly one right after the other. In the time between groups performing, new groups for new sides would be formed so the audition kept flowing. It felt like a merry-go-round – a little dizzying but exhilarating. Every student in attendance was able to read at least twice, and many of them read more frequently. Although I continued to watch for the same things that I had looked for in the video audition, for the callbacks I concentrated more on observing the actors' versatility in trying new things as they read for different characters or different scenes with contrasting moods for the same character, their chemistry with other actors, and their general attitude and demeanor while working with others. The seven actors chosen needed to work well together and be a stage family.

Two faculty members from the theatre department, including my directing advisor, attended the callback auditions, as well as a fellow MFA graduate student from my cohort. They were all helpful and supportive throughout the evening. We took breaks a few times during the audition to confer, and I used those breaks to release people as they were not needed any more. The ultimate decisions were mine, but it was very helpful to have people with whom to share my thoughts and ideas and to hear from them if they were hearing and observing the same things.

The format of the callback auditions kept things moving quickly and the atmosphere pleasant and supportive. Afterwards, several actors mentioned how much they appreciated the callback audition, some of them saying it was the most positive, enjoyable experience they had ever had at a callback. The drawback to this format was that it was more difficult to provide individualized feedback or direction because of the fast pace and the number of people in attendance. However, even with the disadvantages, it was an effective format for observing versatility, chemistry, and energy and giving each actor multiple opportunities to read.

The character of Peachy proved surprisingly challenging to cast. There were no audition monologues for the character in the original audition packet as there were not enough longer pieces of his dialogue to string together to form a monologue, so a somewhat eclectic group of actors were called back to read for Peachy, all of whom had shown some bold energy and quirky character choices in their audition videos. It was planned to have some of the actors called back for Joe and Adolph also read for Peachy. Eight different actors read for Peachy at the callback, but none were quite capturing the outrageous comedy of his character. After some time, though I was feeling a little discouraged, I knew I needed to move on and focus my efforts on other roles, so the men called back for Peachy were released in the first group of actors that were released. I had seen enough from them that I felt I could make a good choice and coach the actor during the rehearsal process to help get the character of Peachy where we needed him to be.

There was one more person that I decided I wanted to have read for Peachy who had originally been called back for Adolph, so I kept him back and I paired him with a potential Lala and had them read a scene together. His reading for Peachy was electric.

He had an excellent understanding of the character and brilliant energy and comedic timing. Within seconds of beginning, he had the entire room in stitches, including myself. One of the faculty members present later called it “a masterclass in auditioning” and it truly was. Anyone who witnessed his audition knew that he would be Peachy.

By that time there were two clear front runners each for the roles of Sunny, Joe, and Adolph in my mind, and now we had our Peachy set. The three remaining women’s roles (Lala, Boo, and Reba) were proving to be more challenging than anticipated. Prior to the callback auditions, I was the most concerned about casting the role of Adolph because of his age, demeanor, and dry humor, the combination of which I thought could prove tricky for undergraduate actors. However, the role of Lala unexpectedly turned out to be the most difficult role to cast. Lala is a deceptively complicated role because it would be easy to play her as a very one-note character by playing up one or more of her many zany characteristics, but in reality, she is a very layered, complex character full of contradictions. Seven actors read for the character of Lala at the callback auditions, and though each talented, most of them were inclined to latch on to one character descriptor such as “loud” or “awkward” and center their performance on that one characteristic. I was not seeing much depth being brought to her even as they read different scenes that covered different ranges of emotions. Many of the portrayals felt too presentational, which is challenging because Lala is somewhat presentational by choice, but I was not seeing that characteristic layered consistently with the sincerity and vulnerability that I needed.

The challenge for the role of Boo and Reba was that there were several good candidates for each, but it was difficult to fully decide on any one of them to be Boo

without having a definite Lala, and the role of Reba could not be settled on without a Boo because of the way the two characters interact, and play off one another. After several more rounds of reading, the choices were still not clear. By the end of the night, the choices for Sunny, Joe, and Adolph were pretty well set in my mind, but still subject to change depending on how the other roles would be filled, but it was all hinging on the casting of Lala and it was getting late and it felt like we had hit a bit of a wall. My initial thought was that I simply wished to take some time to mull it over and sleep on it and then I would make the best choices that I could. They were all gifted actors, so even though I was not seeing exactly what I was hoping to in the auditions, I felt that we would be able to find our way in the rehearsal process. In our final chat of the evening, however, my directing mentor and the other visiting faculty member encouraged me to hold a second callback audition, which was not something that had occurred to me prior to them suggesting it. It would be a first-ever second callback for me as a director, but they both assured me that it was appropriate and a good idea. I am grateful for that advice because the second callback proved to be very helpful.

Nine women were invited to the second call-back audition. The focus of the second call-back was on the role of Lala, so six of the nine were in consideration for her, but a few potential Boos and Rebas were called back as well to read with the potential Lalas. Of the six actors that read for the role of Lala in the second callback, five of them had read for her at the first callback. The sixth actor who read for Lala was initially called back as a potential Boo and read for both characters at the second callback. The second callback audition was held on the evening of Monday, May 3. That morning, I sent out an e-mail to the nine actors that included a bulleted list of notes and observations about the

characters of Lala, Boo, and Reba, much of which had come from the work I had done in my character analysis found in Chapter Two. I also included a few links to YouTube video clips of scenes from *Gone with the Wind* featuring Scarlett O'Hara that I felt would be helpful to the actors reading for the role of Lala.

The second callback was structured similarly to the first. There were four audition sides from the previous packet of sides that were used, all of which included Lala. All together the different sides were performed about fourteen times with various casting combinations. There was improvement in the readings overall, especially for the role of Lala, but gradually one front runner emerged. She seemed to have a good understanding of Lala's core personality and captured the vulnerability, awkwardness, and desperation without making her tomboyish or cartoonish. Her performance felt the most natural. Once I settled on my choice for Lala, I was able to make a decision for Boo and Reba as well.

My directing mentor was unable to attend the second callback audition, but the other faculty member and my fellow MFA graduate student who had been present before were both in attendance, and they were supportive of my choices. I was in contact with my directing mentor via e-mail following the second callback and she was in support as well. The cast list was sent out on Wednesday, May 5 just after the last semester exam period ended.

Ballyhoo Summer Updates

There were fifteen weeks of summer vacation between casting and the first rehearsal, so I wanted to find a way to help the cast stay engaged and excited about the show and updated on the process throughout the summer. I decided to send out regular communications to the cast via e-mails called "Ballyhoo Summer Updates." Four of these

upbeat newsletter-like updates were sent out throughout the summer. The first was sent on May 20 and introduced the idea of summer updates and included an announcement of some of the members of the production and design team. The second Ballyhoo Summer Update was sent out on June 3. In it the remaining design team members were announced, and students were asked to send their mailing addresses for the summer so that their scripts could be mailed to them. I also let them know that they would be hearing from one of the faculty members about resources for the dialect work that they were expected to do over the summer. The third Ballyhoo Summer Update was sent out on June 29 and included information about their script and dramaturgical actor packet which had been mailed to them a few days prior, a reminder about the dialect resources, and an assignment to watch the film *Gone with the Wind* before rehearsals began. I also shared with them the image of the marketing poster that had been designed for the show. The fourth and final Ballyhoo Summer Update was sent out on July 21. This update included some important calendar and rehearsal schedule information, some links to interesting facts, trivia, and online quizzes about popular culture in 1939, and a challenge from the Box Office staff to come up with clever ideas for a social media hashtag for our production. During the final month of summer leading up to rehearsals beginning, the Stage Manager continued to send regular communication about rehearsal schedules, contact forms, and other production business, and the production dramaturg sent out the second part of the actor packet on July 30.

Early on, my advisor and I discussed the idea of gathering the cast sometime in the summer to have a read-through of the script via a video-conferencing platform, but with the cast members scattered across several different time zones and having different

work and family responsibilities, it was decided that meeting would be too difficult and was unlikely to prove very helpful to the overall process. The “Ballyhoo Summer Update” e-mails helped the company stay connected, but also allowed cast members to read them and complete tasks on their own time and at their own pace. After the difficult school year of 2020-2021, because of the global pandemic, it was important that the updates provide joy and excitement but did not feel like a burden or put unnecessary pressure on the actors so they could come back to school and start rehearsals feeling refreshed, rejuvenated, and excited to get started.

One of the things the cast was asked to do before beginning rehearsals in one of the Summer Updates was to watch the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind* which is referenced many times throughout the play. Unprompted by me, the cast members gathered and watched the film together on the day before the first rehearsal. They had food and made a party of it. At our first rehearsal the next day they were all enthusiastic about what an enjoyable bonding experience it was for them which was very pleasing to hear. That shared experience contributed to the camaraderie and general positive atmosphere felt at the first rehearsal and gave us some exciting things to discuss in our table work regarding the connection between the play and *Gone with the Wind*. I was happy that the cast took the initiative and the time to come together outside of rehearsal, and that experience proved to be indicative of the friendship and positivity they shared with each other throughout the rehearsal process.

Dialect Work

While it was always planned to have the actors speak in character-specific dialects for the production, accents were not required in either the video auditions or at the

callbacks. I wanted the actors to be able to give their best performances, uninhibited by concerns for proper dialects and to spend their preparation time getting to know the play and the characters instead of accent work. Also, I knew there would be plenty of time between the casting of the show and the first rehearsal for the actors to learn and practice their dialects. One of the Baylor Theatre faculty members with an expertise in voice and dialect work graciously offered to assist with that process. During the summer he shared resources with the cast to help them learn and practice their dialects and made himself available to coach them one on one via Zoom, or in person once the semester began. Once rehearsals began, he came to observe several times throughout the process and offered specific notes and feedback on the dialect work in addition to other general acting notes.

Dramaturgical Actor Packet

In the spring semester of 2021, I took a class on dramaturgy and for my final project in the class I made the first part of a packet of dramaturgical information on *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* for my actors (see Appendix A). I continued to work on the packet in the early part of the summer and, once completed, they were printed and mailed to the cast in late June with their scripts. One of my classmates from the dramaturgy class, an undergraduate student, was assigned to be the production dramaturg. She took the lead on the creation of a second “actor packet” that covered additional information that had not been included in the first. Collectively, the two actor packets define important words and contain an overview of important historical, geographical, and cultural information to help give the actors context for their characters and lines they say. The production dramaturg attended a few rehearsals throughout the process to offer feedback and answer

questions. She also created a lovely online audience guide with relevant contextual information for theatre patrons interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the play.

First Rehearsals

Our first rehearsal was held on August 20, which was a few days before school started for the new semester. The rehearsal began with the first read-through of the script. It was exciting to finally hear all the actors' voices reading the script together after all the weeks that had passed since auditions, and though I had never doubted my casting decisions, it was a very gratifying experience affirming that I had made good choices for each of the characters. Following the read which was held in a classroom, we moved into the theatre and played two well-known theatre games designed to increase awareness of your surroundings and communication with others in the group. It was a chance for the actors to have a bit of a brain break and stretch after being seated for so long. Our stage management team (stage manager and two assistant stage managers) played along as well.

After this, one of the faculty members in the theatre department visited rehearsal at my invitation and helped me introduce the students to the Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) practice of consent-based boundary setting.¹ The visiting faculty member and I had both attended a training workshop by TIE in the summer and in that workshop, we had been introduced to several practices that we and our department chair who had also attended the workshop were interested in implementing in rehearsals and classes department-wide. As the first mainstage production of the year, the first rehearsal

¹ For more information see *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy* by Chelsea Pace with contributions from Laura Rikard (New York: Routledge, 2020).

with my small cast seemed to be the ideal place to introduce the practice. Our demonstration was short and very basic, but the intent was that more training would be layered on to that when we got further into the rehearsal process. We then began table work which was continued at the next days' rehearsal.

Our second rehearsal day was held on Saturday August 21. It was a double rehearsal, meaning that there were two rehearsals in one day. The first rehearsal was from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm followed by a 90-minute dinner break, and then the second rehearsal of the day was scheduled from 6:30 pm to 10:30 pm. The day began with a visit from the scenic designer who showed us the digital renderings of the set design. This was the first time the cast had seen the designs and they were very excited. There were audible gasps and applause when the designs were revealed which was very gratifying for both the set designer and myself. Following the scenic design presentation, we continued with our table work from where we left off the day before.

For the table work, we went through each of the characters one by one and discussed them using a set of questions as a guide for our conversation. All the actors were encouraged to actively participate in the discussion for each of the characters, not just their own. The actors took notes for one another so that the performer whose character was being discussed could give their undivided attention to the conversation. On the first night we began with the character of Peachy and then moved to Lala and finished out the evening discussing the character of Sunny. The next day, we discussed Boo, Reba, Adolph, and Joe, in that order. In general, we spent approximately twenty to thirty minutes on each of the characters, but there was no set time limit.

The questions were based on the idea of familial, societal, cultural, and individual identity. The first question was about the character's relationship to their family and then their relationships to other characters that were not family. Then, their role in society including societal expectations and social status were discussed. Next, we talked about each characters' relationship to Judaism. Then, we examined their sense of self and their personal identity including likes and dislikes and basic personality traits. Lastly, we took a step out of the world of the play and looked at the character from more of literary point of view and discussed the character's function in the story. One of the goals of this exercise was to present the information that I had gleaned from my research and discoveries that I had made in my script analysis work found in Chapters One and Two but to make it more conversational and let the cast discover some of these things for themselves, rather than having me simply give the information to them. I encouraged every cast member to contribute to the conversations about each character because I wanted to help them understand that every character contributes to the story in unique and significant ways and that all the characters share many overlapping connections that help shape the identities and arcs of the other characters in the story. I also wanted the actors to understand more about the function of the characters to see that even though some roles are smaller than others that they are each vital pieces of the story. After we talked about all the characters, the final thing we discussed in our table work was the title of the play and its significance as discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

The character of Peachy is only present in act 2 in a few scenes, so the actor portraying this character was not called for the entire rehearsal, yet he opted to attend anyway. It was nice to have him present for the set design presentation and for the rest of

the table work discussion. Throughout the process, the actor playing Peachy did a wonderful job of being very supportive to his fellow actors and being a great team player. Even though he had considerably less stage time than the other actors, and thus was not called as often, there were many times that he chose to come to rehearsal earlier than his called time or on days that he was not called simply to be a part of the process and supportive of his fellow actors. This was not expected, but greatly appreciated by all.

De-Roling

A few days before the first rehearsal, the actor playing Boo had emailed me expressing concern about the use of the Jewish slurs in the script, and more particularly her own discomfort with saying “kike” at the end of act 1, scene 2. She asked if there was another word that could be substituted. I responded to her and explained that it is important for the language to remain as written because the use of those words is integral to the conflict of the overall piece and the character arc of Boo. The playwright, Alfred Uhry, used those words very intentionally. There is very little profanity or foul language in the play, but there are Jewish slurs used three times: once by Boo, once by Lala, and once by Joe. Each of these uses is significant. It is shocking that Boo uses that word, but it is supposed to be shocking. For the play to work thematically and structurally, Boo cannot use just any insulting word in that moment— it must be something that is specifically targeted to a Jewish person because that is the point. That is the moment that the audience fully realizes that this funny, zany family has some serious identity crises that run much deeper than cultural assimilation which sets us up for the primary conflict of the entire play.

The actor's message was an important reminder that special care and concern needed to be taken when approaching the offensive language in the script. The cast members had not spent as much time researching and analyzing the play as I, and I needed to help them better understand the significance and weight of those words in the context of the play. While I would never condone such language in casual conversation, these offensive terms were chosen by the playwright for a very important purpose. The cast needed to be able to use those words at the appropriate moment as their characters without it disrupting their work on stage. This became an important topic of discussion in our table work at our first rehearsals, and a continuing conversation in rehearsals.

For the first several weeks of rehearsal, I allowed the actors to use substitute words in place of the slurs. When it came time to incorporate the real words into rehearsal, the cast was introduced to the concept of de-roling, one of the topics of the boundaries training from TIE. De-roling, as a theatrical practice, was not first conceived by TIE nor is it exclusively used by them, but the techniques for implementing it in our rehearsal process came from their book. In the book, de-roling, is described as “a simple but powerful tool for getting separation between actor and character” and “a valuable tool for maintaining emotional boundaries.”² In de-roling, the actor speaks, out loud, and describes what their character is “doing, both physically, emotionally, what they’re saying or what lines of text they’re speaking, and maybe even how they’re feeling. Then they say, ‘But as the actor,’ and then they say what the actor has been doing physically, emotionally, verbally.” De-roling is commonly used for instances of physical or sexual

² Chelsea Pace, with contributions from Laura Rikard, *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 33.

intimacy, violence, or abuse on stage, but the basic principles and practices are the same and could be applied to any situation where the attitudes and behaviors of the character and the actor need to be separated.

While only some of the characters use Jewish slurs, all the characters exhibit attitudes and behaviors that are prejudicial and hurtful to other characters, so it was decided that everyone would create a de-roling statement to share in a designated rehearsal. After sharing them once together, it was not deemed necessary to share the statements again, although if the need had arisen, we could have done so. Instead, after that time, the cast employed the use of springboard gestures backstage after the high-intensity moments. A springboard gesture is a small physical action or gesture that an actor can do to help ground themselves after an emotionally intense scene. They can be small and camouflaged within the scene onstage, such as touching a specific prop, or they can be something that the actors do once they are offstage. The actors can also partner with another cast member to create a physical gesture such as a high-five, a hug, a “secret” handshake, a hand squeeze, or a silly dance – anything they want – to acknowledge that they successfully completed the scene and signify the end of the moment and help re-ground themselves in reality. As a company, we opted for this second option, and the cast members established these among themselves and used them backstage after many emotionally powerful moments including after using the Jewish slurs, after an intense argument, or after a romantic moment. The springboard gesture is a physical symbol of the de-roling statement that can be done quietly and quickly during a run of a show to provide emotional support and grounding.

Warm-Ups

It was decided that the actors would do a brief warm-up at the beginning of every rehearsal and that the actors themselves would lead those warm-ups. One cast member was assigned each day to be the leader of warm-ups for the following rehearsal. This was coordinated by the stage manager and written in the daily call for each rehearsal. These daily warmups were enjoyable, but also proved to be a useful tool. At the start of rehearsal, the stage manager would set a timer for ten minutes and the leader would guide everyone through the warm-up exercises of their choice. Each actor had their own way of leading warm-ups, so every day was a little different which made it more exciting and feel less like a mundane routine. Some actors conducted warm-ups that were more focused on stretching and physicality, others were more focused on character work or vocal technique. Sometimes the warm-up consisted of theatre games or even a dance-off. Occasionally the stage managers and I would join in, depending on what needed to be done before beginning rehearsal. The actor-led warm-ups were a nice way to begin rehearsals for the cast, but they also provided the stage managers and me with an extra cushion of time to finish up any needed preparations and make sure that everything was ready to go for the start of rehearsal.

The First Week

Once table work was finished, most of the time in the double rehearsal was spent blocking the show. There were not any pieces of the set built yet, but stage management had taped out the ground plan on the stage floor prior to the rehearsal, so we focused on entrances, exits, and the general areas of the set where each scene would take place. The actors read through all their lines again, this time on their feet, moving around in the

space, and interacting with one another. It was a rough draft, but the entire show was loosely blocked by the end of the second rehearsal day, which had been the goal. It was a good first weekend of rehearsals and we all felt a real sense of accomplishment and excitement for the show.

Our first full run-through of the show was scheduled for Friday, August 27, one week after rehearsals began. This was to be the “designer run,” meaning that the designers and other invited technicians and crew members would come to view the production as it looked, so far. It was a chance for them to see the basic staging, get a sense of the flow, and ask questions. It was a little unusual to have the designer run so soon after the start of rehearsals, but due to some scheduling conflicts it was the best day for everyone who needed to attend. Rehearsals in the first week leading up to the designer run were spent working on refining and adjusting the blocking and beginning to work through character choices with the goal of being able to give a respectable full run-through of the show on Friday to our designers and other guests. Mid-way through the first week, the platforms for the floor of the house were built so the cast could adjust to having small steps up and down as they entered the various rooms of the house. To aid in the development of the physicality of their characters, the cast members began to wear rehearsal attire: skirts and dress shoes with a higher heel for the women and suit jackets and dress shoes for the men. For scheduling reasons, we worked on individual scenes, out of chronological order, on Monday and Tuesday. Then we did more scene work on Wednesday, followed by a run through of act 1 and the last of the scene work and a run through of act 2 on Thursday. The designer run was held on that Friday as scheduled. Some of the designers watched it remotely via online video streaming, and some were

present in person. It was a little intimidating to have an audience for our first run through of the entire show since the second rehearsal, but all the work we had done came together well. We received positive feedback from those who watched. My directing advisor and another member of the faculty who had helped with our dialect coaching attended the rehearsal as well and took notes which they passed on to me and some of which they delivered to the cast themselves with my permission.

Working Rehearsals and Run-Throughs

The next phase of the rehearsal process involved a week of working through the scenes individually again and putting them together and running the acts with the work we had done, repeating that process as many times as time allowed. The following week consisted of run-throughs of the full show each day, followed by notes and using the remaining time to work notes and pieces of scenes that needed attention. While working scenes over these weeks, various techniques and rehearsal strategies were employed at different times throughout the process to cater to the needs of the scene and the actors. For example, the pacing of act 1, scene 1 was proving to be particularly challenging. It is a long scene that contains a lot of exposition and eight pages of dialogue spoken by only three characters: Boo, Reba, and Lala before Joe and Adolph enter. Boo, in particular, has a great many lines in the first scene. The pacing of the play seemed to flow well once the actors reached the second scene, but it felt like a chore to get through the first scene. The actors playing Boo, Reba, and Lala could sense it and were starting to feel some anxiety about it which was intensifying the problem. In one of the rehearsals, we took the time to divide the scene into beats and name the tasks and actions in each beat. It is a simple and commonly used exercise based on the methods of Konstantin Stanislavski, but it proved

to be quite effective. By breaking the scene down into more manageable pieces and discovering what each piece was meant to do in the larger story and for each of their character arcs, the actors were able to get past the mental block about the scene being long and overwhelming. The storytelling and pacing of the scene vastly improved with immediate effect and continued to improve as rehearsals progressed. Similar work was done with the various argument scenes throughout the play: the one between Boo and Adolph, the one between Sunny and Lala, and the one between Sunny and Joe. Another rehearsal strategy that proved effective was isolating the scenes and selections from scenes where Joe and Sunny are together, just the two of them, without any of the other characters. By working those scenes in order from their first meeting on the train in act 1, scene 3, to their late-night conversation in act 1, scene 5, to the argument after Ballyhoo in act 2, scene 6, and then to their final reconciliation on the train in act 2, scene 7, we were able to make some exciting discoveries about their characters and the development of their relationship as they fall in love over the course of the play.

One of the challenges and delights of the script of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* is the clever way that it moves quickly back and forth between moments of drama and moments of comedy. Throughout the play almost every serious moment is swiftly diffused with a joke or a wisecrack, a unique style of humor that is one of Uhry's trademarks. He does not allow the characters or the audience to wallow in grief or melancholy for long. Most of the jokes, however, are also meant to land swiftly and cleanly, and then the story and the characters quickly move on. The actors and I were continually working on striking the right balance between the drama and the comedy throughout the rehearsal process. As we approached each scene we would search for

those switchbacks and spend time playing with different ways of delivering the lines vocally and physically to see what worked best in each moment. Often the humor was found in a witty quip, but sometimes it was a matter of finding subtle physical humor to add to a moment, or even punctuating a moment with a humorous sound cue, as discussed in Chapter Three. Throughout the rehearsal process the actors had a great deal of freedom to explore this humor and different character choices as we worked through the scenes. My usual method was to have the actors go through the scene first and then ask them questions about what felt right in the moment, about the choices they made that they liked or did not like and discuss why they thought they worked or did not. I would offer some notes and suggestions and let them share ideas as well and then they would do the scene again, keeping choices we liked and trying new ones for the moments we wanted to change. This process was repeated many times.

Several faculty members from the theatre department visited one or more rehearsals throughout the process to offer a fresh pair of eyes to observe and give feedback about the show, which was always appreciated. We also received some coaching help from our stage combat professor who met with the actor playing Lala to help her learn to fall to the floor safely for her faint. We were also very fortunate to have a faculty member who is Jewish and grew up in the south visit a rehearsal. He was gracious enough to come to speak with the cast one evening about his experience and answer their questions. He also helped with the pronunciation of some of the Hebrew and Yiddish words in the play, including the sabbath prayer that Sunny recites in the final scene. He also loaned us the sabbath candles and candlesticks that were used in the production.

Working with the Stairs

On September 4, the grand staircase was finally ready for use in rehearsal. For the first rehearsal with stairs, the stage manager made time in the schedule for the actors to practice going up and down a few times to get comfortable with using them. While most of us use stairs in our daily life with no trouble, there is something slightly disorienting about traversing a staircase as tall as the one we were using and one that is free-standing, or unattached to a permanent structure. It was perfectly sound, but when we first began using the stairs, the set was very much unfinished, and it was another four rehearsals until the escape stairs behind the set were also fully installed. This meant that the stairs simply led to a platform at the top, about fifteen feet off the ground, and the only way to get down was to return the way you came. For a few rehearsals the actors had to either stay on the platform at the top of the stairs, if their wait was short and their character was entering the scene again from upstairs or, more often, they had to come down the onstage stairs directly after going up. This made for some awkward but amusing intrusions for several rehearsals, but it also meant the cast quickly got used to going up and down the stairs. It was anticipated that there would be an adjustment period in terms of the pacing of the scenes as the actors adjusted to the longer time it takes to enter or exit via the stairs, and there was some, but the actors adapted quickly, and that interruption was not as pronounced as we thought it might be.

At the suggestion of the costume shop manager, the building plans for the upper platform landing of the staircase and the escape stairs behind the set were modified to accommodate backstage costume changes. A large, platform was built at the top of the stairs so that the actor playing Lala and the actor playing Sunny could both change into

their Ballyhoo gowns there. The platform was large enough to accommodate the two actors, their dresses, and two backstage dressers to help them. This quick-change area at the top of the stairs allowed the costume changes to go much more rapidly and saved the actors from having to use the escape staircase while wearing the long dresses, which would have been difficult and dangerous as the escape staircase was much narrower and, in part, a vertical ladder. In the end, the upper platform was used for several other costume changes for other characters as well. It was a very wise modification, and I am grateful that the costume shop manager had the forethought to suggest it so that we did not have to discover this problem during tech week.

Unfortunately, we did experience two stair-related accidents during rehearsals. One evening the actor playing Boo mis-stepped on the bottom stair and fell, scraping and bruising her shins. She was shaken and sore, but was otherwise unharmed. Five days later, the actor playing Reba, also suffered a fall on the stairs. A piece of facing on the stairs had come loose causing her to trip and fall. She was higher up on the staircase than the actor who played Boo had been, but luckily, she was able to catch herself with the banister after only tripping down a few steps, instead of tumbling down to the ground level. Her shoe broke, and her ankle twisted in the moment, but she was not seriously injured. However, she was very shaken up and was experiencing a lot of anxiety about the thought of using the stairs again. The actor's fall was not necessarily caused by the unfinished state of the stairs, but she said she would not feel comfortable using the stairs again until they were finished. The incident caused some apprehension in other cast members as well. Following the incident, the technical director and scenic designer prioritized finishing the staircase during their work time the following day so that it was

completed and carpeted by the start of our next rehearsal that evening, which was also the first technical rehearsal. Their efforts were greatly appreciated by all as it allowed us to push forward with our rehearsals without further disruption.

Technical Rehearsals

As we moved into technical rehearsals, the focus shifted to incorporating the technical elements and integrating all the various components of the production together. The cast was well-prepared for this transition- I continued to take acting notes alongside technical notes, but instead of giving them in person I would type them out and send them via e-mail each night. The next day I would check in with the cast in person before the run to see if they needed any clarification or had any follow-up questions or concerns. Many details about the integration of the technical elements have already been addressed in Chapter Three of this thesis. In rehearsals there were some typical challenges during tech week that come with fine tuning cues, finalizing details for the costumes, set, and other elements, tightening up scene transitions, and practicing costume changes, but overall, the week went very smoothly.

Theatre in the Time of COVID

The university had not fully developed their evolving policies regarding coronavirus protocols and restrictions for the coming academic semester when rehearsals were about to begin. In the prior spring and through most of the summer, COVID-19 infection rates had been going down and with that data and the release of the new vaccine, Baylor had announced they were preparing to return to a “normal” fall semester. However, in late summer, the Delta variant of COVID-19 was spreading, and the

numbers of cases were rising again, so there was some uncertainty about what this was going to mean for the start of school, specifically regarding face masks. On the day we were set to begin rehearsals, just after the university had finally released their mask policies, the theatre department received approval for face mask policies specific to rehearsals and performances. Masks were to be worn by the actors in rehearsals except for specific times when the director could request for them to be removed for working a scene or for a run-through of the show. Beginning with the technical rehearsals and through the performances, the actors would be unmasked. All crew members, technicians, and stage managers working on the production would wear masks at all times throughout the rehearsals and performances. These masking policies were coupled with other efforts in encouraging vaccines and the university's policy of mandatory weekly COVID testing for unvaccinated individuals. Our theatre audiences would be highly encouraged to wear masks, but per university policy and gubernatorial executive order in the state of Texas, we could not require them. These policies were all strictly adhered to throughout the production process. Aside from the wearing of face masks, we had a fairly typical rehearsal process. We did not have to be concerned about actors maintaining distance from one another on stage or multiple actors handling the same props, as we had to do for most productions in the previous academic year, and we were able to have a live audience in the theatre.

We were very fortunate that throughout the process we remained relatively unscathed by the effects of COVID-19 although we did have a couple of close calls. On the morning of Tuesday, August 31 the actor playing Reba texted the stage manager and me, informing us that she was feeling very ill with COVID-like symptoms. She went to

the University Health Center and was tested for COVID, and the test came back negative, but she was advised that it could be too early for an accurate result so she should re-test in two days. She stayed home from rehearsal for the next two rehearsals and then re-tested on Thursday. It was again negative, so she was prescribed antibiotics by her doctor and was well enough to be able to return to rehearsal the next day. In total, she was out of rehearsal for three days, but during that time she was able to watch rehearsal via the Zoom online video conferencing platform. One of the assistant stage managers stood in for Reba to do her blocking and read her lines while she was out. It was unfortunate to have the actor miss rehearsal, but it was more important to keep her and everyone else safe and in good health. Thankfully, nobody else among the cast or crew contracted the illness, the actor did very well with catching up on what she missed, and the incident did not have a lasting negative impact on the rehearsal process.

A second scare was during tech week when one of the backstage run crew members tested positive for COVID-19 after taking a routine test. Thankfully, this crew member notified stage management immediately and was released from the production and replaced by another crew member. The original crew member fully recovered, though she did not return to the production, and no other cast or crew members were affected. Finally, during the performance week, one of the cast members was diagnosed with strep throat, however he was not exhibiting any symptoms, so he was cleared by his doctor to continue with the performances as scheduled. The actor stayed masked and distanced from others backstage as often as possible for their protection, and to my knowledge, no other members of the company contracted the illness.

There was, however, one way in which the staging of the production was impacted by COVID-19. In act 2, scene 7, when Sunny and Joe meet again on the train and reconcile, they are supposed to share “a good big passionate kiss”³ according to the stage directions in the script. We had scheduled to stage this kiss between Joe and Sunny on the day that the actor playing Reba became ill, and although she was not involved in the stage kiss at all, it was decided to postpone the staging of the kiss until we knew for certain that the diagnosis was not COVID and that it was clear the other actors did not catch her illness. The plan had been to introduce more of the Theatrical Intimacy Education training exercises and use their techniques and methodology to stage the kiss.⁴ However, in the intervening days it was decided by the department chair that due to the ongoing pandemic the policy in the theatre department for all scene work and mainstage productions for the semester would be that there would be no kissing on the mouth permitted. While I understood the concerns, I was disappointed by this news. I felt strongly that the kiss between Joe and Sunny is a very important climactic moment in the play. I feared it would be painfully awkward and obvious if we did not include it because everything in Joe and Sunny’s love story throughout the play is leading up to that moment and I feared it would ruin the emotional impact of the ending. Yet, the policy was in place for everyone’s protection, so we made the next best choice under the circumstances.

Staging a fake kiss was not an option because of the placement of the train car on stage which was far downstage, near the audience. Fortunately, the actors playing Joe and

³ Uhry, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, 81.

⁴ For detailed information about the TIE method of staging kissing see *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*, pages 60-64.

Sunny had a great relationship and camaraderie offstage and wonderful chemistry onstage and they had worked together to create lovely placeholder choreography in the scene that involved touching each other's faces and leaning their foreheads together. It was a sweet and intimate moment, and emotionally powerful even without the kiss, so it was decided that this placeholder choreography would no longer be a placeholder and would be used in the production. We made the best of the situation, and it was still a beautiful scene.

Conclusion

Besides a few very minor hiccups along the way, the rehearsal process was very smooth and went by quickly. The company found joy in the process of exploring and playing with the characters, uncovering the humor and the heart in the story, and working together to overcome any challenges that came along. Throughout the process we stayed true to the directorial concept with which we had begun and felt that we had successfully captured the feelings of romance and nostalgia which we had sought. The work we had done in rehearsals felt true to the story and the characters, and after four weeks of rehearsals, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was ready for an audience.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reflection and Production Assessment

Introduction

Baylor University Theatre's production of *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* opened on September 21, 2021 and held six performances between the twenty-first and the twenty-sixth of September with approximately eight hundred and ten people in attendance. The production had the distinction to be the first Baylor Theatre mainstage production held for live audiences in the theatre since February of 2020. In addition, one of the performances was interpreted into American Sign Language (ASL) by two Baylor University faculty members from the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. It had been several years since an ASL interpreted performance had been available at Baylor Theatre and this was the first time the interpretation had been provided by faculty members, so it was an exciting honor. All the performances went very smoothly and were well-received by audiences. The aim of this final chapter is to reflect upon the process of bringing *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* to life on stage and to assess the effectiveness of the final production.

Reflection on the Research and Play Analysis

The research and analysis work that make up the first two chapters of this thesis was completed before the rehearsal process began and proved invaluable throughout the design and rehearsal process. When embarking on this thesis process I was unsure how useful my specific research into the life and works of Alfred Uhry would prove in the

context of directing the play. However, examining *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* as one of a trilogy of works that explore the experience of Jews in Atlanta provided much insight into the cultural and social context of the play and the world in which the Freitags live. I even found watching interviews of Alfred Uhry to be very useful in understanding the style of humor in the play. His slightly dark, very self-deprecating style of humor and his strong tendency to deflect discussions of serious subject matter by making a joke is reflected in the play and several of its characters, particularly, Adolph.

This research combined with the script analysis helped me feel confident in my knowledge and understanding of the world of the play, which in turn helped me feel confident about making key decisions for the production design and direction along the way. This also helped establish a relationship of trust with my actors and designers. As a result of the research and analysis, a strong, cohesive sense of the setting, characters, and story was established among the members of the company from the outset. While no production is perfect, I feel that we successfully produced the story that we set out to tell and highlighted the themes and ideas that were revealed by my analysis.

Reflection on the Design Process

Overall, the design process was very enjoyable and effective. Working with a team of talented and dedicated professionals was an entirely new experience for me as I had come from a background of high school teaching and directing in programs where I had extremely limited design or technical support. I was used to having to either do everything myself or do without. It felt amazing to collaborate with so many passionate artists who were just as invested in the success of the production as I was, and even with the minor setbacks and stresses that we faced, this was one of the least stressful

production processes of which I have ever been a part. This is real testament to the skills and professionalism of the team of designers, technicians, and stage managers and I felt very fortunate to have them. Supported by research and analysis of the script, the production design that we worked together to create effectively communicated the visual and aural world of the play and enhanced the storytelling.

One of the most challenging aspects of this production for me personally was when my designers and production team were experiencing struggles that were not in my control to fix or alleviate because they were either pandemic-related challenges, delays caused by the air conditioner breaking, or other things beyond anyone's control. The set construction delay, specifically, caused a great deal of stress and hardship on many of the production team members. As a director, I struggled with feeling powerless, unsure of what to do to support them during those times. As the performance dates grew closer, I did not visit the scene shop or other workspaces very often unless specifically invited because I did not want the designers and technicians to feel that my presence was a burden or that I was trying to put pressure on them in any way. I wanted them to feel that I had confidence in them because, even though we were pressed for time and it was stressful, I did trust that everything would get finished to a very high standard. In hindsight, my absence may have been perceived differently than I intended, and I should have visited at least a little more frequently. That is something that I will strive to be more aware of and improve in the future, however, I am very proud of the team for working together through the challenges and overcoming obstacles to create a beautiful production.

Reflection on the Rehearsal Process

The positive relationships and open communication established among the company at the beginning of the process proved to be a good, solid foundation on which to build mutual trust and collaboration that carried us successfully through the rehearsal process. I felt the actors' trust in me as they took notes well and were willing to play and try new things with their characters in rehearsal. As I worked to come to each rehearsal with energy and fresh ideas, they did too. For me, it truly felt like a collaboration between the actors and myself and I believe the actors felt a stronger sense of ownership of not only their individual performances, but of the production as a whole. The warmth, camaraderie, and support felt in rehearsals carried through to the off-stage relationships of the cast which, in turn, further strengthened their onstage character relationships. It was an enjoyable rehearsal process for the entire company.

Throughout the rehearsal process the cast worked on embodying the characters both physically and vocally and on listening and reacting to one another truthfully. We also worked to discover and sharpen the humor, and contrast those moments of comedy with the emotional depth and complexity of the more serious moments. With a firm understanding of the script analysis and historical context of the play we were able to play in rehearsal and discover choices that helped to effectively tell the story. We used our rehearsal time well and felt well-prepared for the performances.

As discussed in previous chapters, the late completion of the set and the unavailability of some of the final set dressing props and hand props until the final dress rehearsals created some challenges in rehearsal. There are ways in which the characters interacted with the set and props that could have been better integrated into the action or

physicality of the characters if we had more rehearsal time with those elements, however, I think we did well under the circumstances.

Areas for Improvement

Overall, I am very pleased with the work that we did throughout the design and rehearsal process and I feel very proud of the final production. I am also grateful for the personal and artistic growth that I experienced during the process of directing this production. No production is perfect, however, and I am cognizant of some aspects of the process and final production that could have been improved upon and lessons that I learned and will carry with me into my future endeavors. I will address some of those here.

While I personally was not bothered by the length of the scene transitions, and felt they were stylistically appropriate to the play, some members of the faculty felt that they were too long and disrupted the momentum of the play. Since we had never set out to make the scene transitions blend into the action of the play and we had experienced such improvement over the course of the rehearsal process, I had, perhaps, lost some perspective on their length and level of disruption. That is something that, with more time, we could have continued to improve upon or explore other solutions that could have proved valuable, and it is something of which I will be more conscious in future.

One of the pieces of feedback that I received from a faculty member about the production after we closed was that I tended to have the actors move to climactic blocking too quickly in some scenes. In hindsight, I could see this as an issue. Striking a balance between using the large space well and finding the perfect moment to close the distance between actors proved to be a challenge at times. This was my first experience

directing a production on such a large set and I did not always get that balance right. This was valuable feedback that I will learn from and a skill that I will practice to improve.

Another minor issue that I take full responsibility for is that most of the actors were having some trouble remembering to cheat out, or to keep their body position more open toward the audience in some scenes. I had given some notes on this occasionally throughout the process, but I failed to place enough emphasis on it in early rehearsals. The actors made significant improvements in this area in our last few rehearsals leading up to opening, but it is something of which I should have been more aware and brought it to the cast's attention sooner. I tend to associate the need for cheating out with hearing and understanding the actors' lines, but since I was not having problems with that, I was not as conscious of or bothered by the issue as I should have been. Also, it can be easy to overlook some of the fundamentals while dealing with other, seemingly larger issues. It's a common simple problem that was exacerbated by the depth of the stage and the placement of our set so far upstage. As stated before, the actors made significant improvements in the final week, and while there was still room for improvement, I do not think it significantly impacted the performance, but it is something of which I, as a director, will be more conscious in the future.

The company worked hard throughout the design and rehearsal process to honor the work of the playwright and be to be especially mindful and respectful of the Jewish cultural and religious elements of the play. The play was well-received by audiences, but during a few of the performances it became clear that some audience members were not as prepared for the Jewish elements in the play as we would have liked, as evidenced by some giggles when Yiddish or Hebrew phrases were spoken on stage. The production

dramaturg had created an audience guide with some helpful contextual information to help prepare audiences and invite them into the cultural and historical world of the play, and had curated a lobby display of historical, religious, and cultural items related to the play. The audience guide was only made available to theatre patrons digitally, and unfortunately, the QR code for the guide was left out of the printed program accidentally. Therefore, although there were some QR codes for access to the audience guide on printed fliers hanging up in the lobby, the guide was not as widely distributed as we would have liked, and relatively few patrons took the time to view the lobby display. While the majority of audiences were fine and did not seem to struggle, there is more that we could have done to better prepare our audiences for what to expect in the play, beginning with our marketing materials and communications and carrying through to the things like audience guides and lobby displays once patrons are in the theatre. This is something that I have been contemplating and of which I will be more mindful in my future directorial projects.

Audience Reception

The Last Night of Ballyhoo was well-received by audiences with enthusiastic laughter and applause. Each of the actors gave good, solid performances and I received many compliments on the strength and excellence of the cast. Sometimes it took a little time for the audience to warm up and give themselves permission to laugh, enjoy, and get into the story, but most seemed invested by scene 2, and were completely hooked by scene 3 when Joe meets Sunny on the train. They laughed at Lala's antics and foibles, Boo and Adolph's sarcastic banter, and Reba's hilarious quips. Later, the much-anticipated arrival of Peachy was always met with fits of laughter as soon as he let out his

ridiculous giggle and he quickly cemented himself as a favorite—sometimes receiving cheers and applause mid-scene. Many people seemed to find the love story between Sunny and Joe very touching. Each performance had many tear-glinted eyes and choruses of light sniffles that usually began as Sunny and Joe reunited on the train in act 2, scene 7 and lasted through the moving ending vignette of the family gathered around the shabbat candles. One night a particularly invested audience member even shouted, “Kiss her!” to Joe during his reconciliation with Sunny.

It was incredibly gratifying for me and for the cast and crew to hear the appreciation of the audience through their laughter and tears and then to hear the happy chatter and praise in the house and lobby after the show was over – a sound that we had all sorely missed when the pandemic had prevented us from having live audiences in the theatre for so long. The design of the production was universally praised, with the stunning set being the highlight. The beautiful costumes, especially the two Ballyhoo gowns, the lights, and the music choices were all well-admired. The departmental response among faculty, staff, and students was also very positive. Several current students and alumni at different performances complimented the production and said it was one of their favorite shows they had seen at Baylor.

Even more gratifying to me was hearing from all of my cast, and many crew and designers as well, about how much they genuinely enjoyed the process of working on this production. Overall, it was a smooth and positive production process. The few challenges we faced were primarily due to pandemic-related hardships that were beyond anyone’s control, but I am proud of the entire company for working through and overcoming those various obstacles with positivity and professionalism. As frivolous as it may sound, one

of my primary goals going into the production, was to enjoy the process. I also wanted to do everything in my power to make working on the production a positive, joyful, and enriching experience for all involved. I believe I succeeded in that, and I received praise for my leadership, professionalism, and communication skills throughout the process, which meant a great deal to me.

Conclusion

Directing *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was a truly enjoyable experience, for which I am grateful. Everyone that I worked with, from my cast and crew to the designers and stage management team, was wonderful and I felt very supported throughout the process. It was not a perfect production, but I am proud of our work and the final performances. The play itself was a beautiful story to tell, and I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to help tell it. We told the story we set out to tell and told it successfully which is always the ultimate goal of any theatre artist.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Dramaturgical Actor Packet

This appendix includes all of the pages of the first dramaturgical actor packet for *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* that was first created as a part of a dramaturgy course, as discussed in Chapter Three. The packet was designed to have the look and feel of a magazine and was distributed to the cast members both in printed form and electronically. The aim of the packet was to provide the actors with an engaging overview of important historical, geographical, and cultural information that would provide context for the world of the play for their characters. Though not included here, the second dramaturgical actor packet created by the production dramaturg contained additional historical and cultural information that was not included in the first packet, including information specifically regarding Judaism.

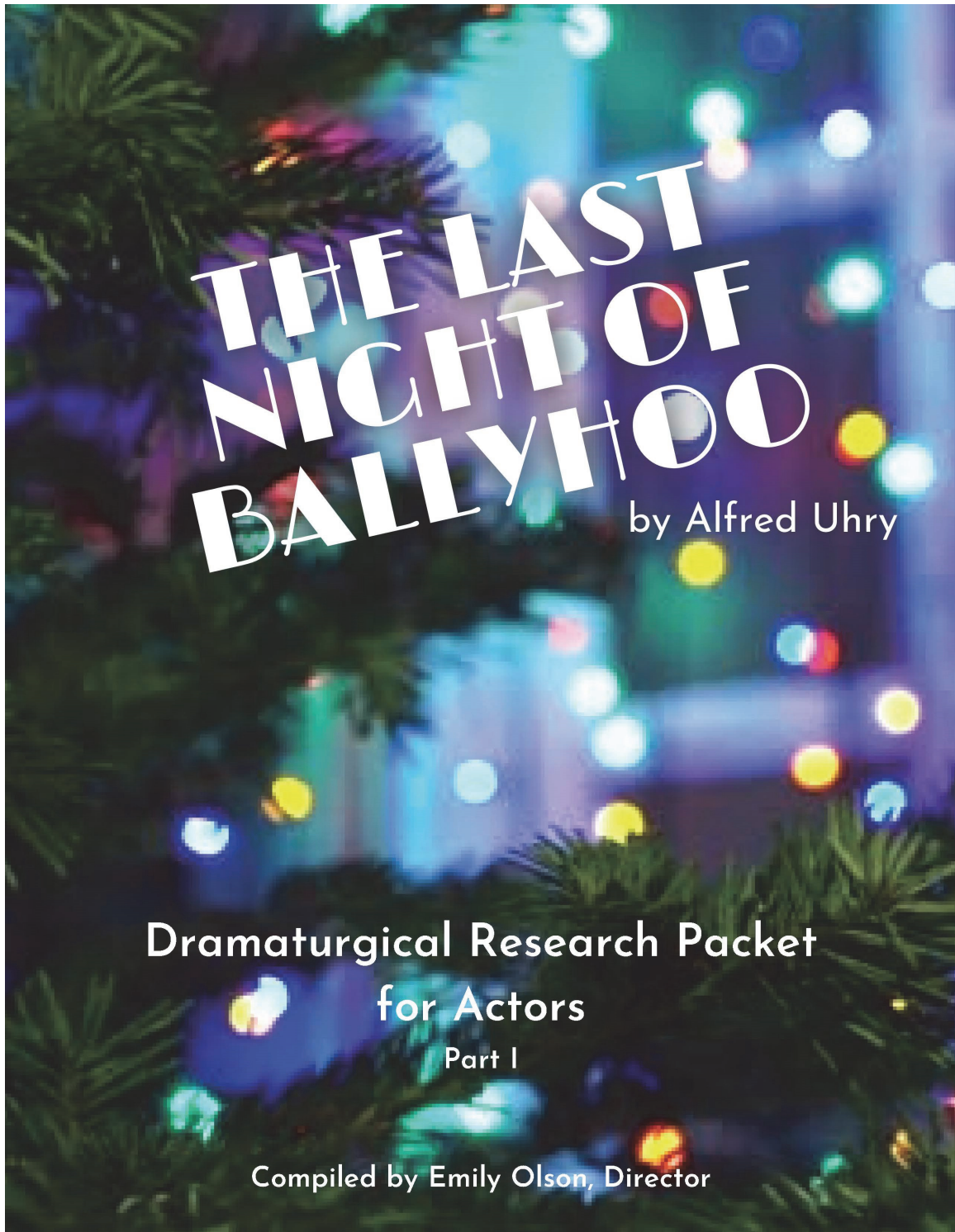
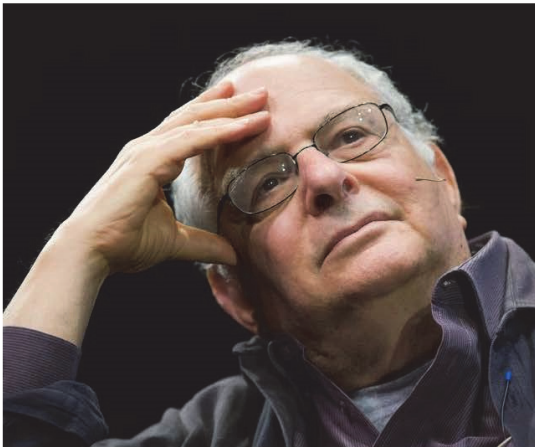


Figure A.1. Dramaturgical actor packet.

PLAYWRIGHT PROFILE:

ALFRED UHRY

AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF *THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO*



"...when I'm writing a play I'm in the play. I have to see it to write it: the characters move around, walk, talk, and I'm the audience. I'm watching the play in my head when I write."

-- Alfred Uhry, in an interview for [BOMB](#)

Biographical Sketch

Born in 1936, Alfred Uhry was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia and his southern roots grow deep. He is of German-Jewish descent, but many of his ancestors emigrated to the United States in the 1840s and some even served in the Civil War. In a [1998 interview with Back Stage](#) he said, "My great-great uncle was a blockade runner for the Confederates! And there were many southern Jews in the Civil War, which we called 'The War Between the States.' Southerners find nothing civil about it." Explorations of this distinctive southern Jewish heritage are another hallmark of his work. He explained further saying, "If you're a Southerner you're a Southerner for the rest of your life, whether or not you're living in the South anymore. In fact, southern Jews define themselves as Southern first, American second, and Jewish third. ...Yet to be a true Southerner, to be part of the 'in' group, you have to be Christian." This exploration of conflicting identities lies at the heart of his most well-known works: the plays *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, and the musical, *Parade* which are collectively sometimes referred to as the "Atlanta Trilogy."

Figure A.2. Dramaturgical actor packet.



NOTABLE WORKS & AWARDS:

Driving Miss Daisy -- 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
The Last Night of Ballyhoo -- 1997 Tony Award for Best Play
Parade -- 1998 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical

How 'Ballyhoo' Got Started

In 1996, Uhry's hometown of Atlanta, Georgia was to host the Summer Olympic Games and he was commissioned by Atlanta's Alliance Theatre Company to write a play for the Cultural Olympiad. Uhry said, "...it could be anything I wanted it to be about. So I thought I would write a play about the last time Atlanta was in the international spotlight: the *Gone with the Wind* premiere, December 15, 1939."

Uhry examined other world events that were happening at the time of the December 1939 premiere, which included Hitler's invasion of Poland. He jokingly said, "I thought, there's three disparate elements: Hitler. Christmas. And Scarlett O'Hara. This is a field that I can deal with!"

"I realized that Hitler was busy invading Poland at the time; the premiere took place at Christmastime. And I'd wanted to write a play about disassociated Jews, trying to assimilate into the culture of being Southern and being Christian. ...Since it was for the Olympics, I thought it would be fitting to write about brotherly love in some way or other. And I thought probably the hardest brotherly love to deal with in a way would be taking one tiny step. You can embrace the Nigerian and the Dutch and say we're all brothers; that's easy, because they all go home! ...But I thought it would be nice to write a play about accepting your own ethnicity and who you are and making a step to people that may have been assumed to be socially inferior to you. That's one step--that's a teeny step, but it's a big one. And there's a lot of stuff you can write about."

Figure A.3. Dramaturgical actor packet.



"It's not the words so much, it's the rhythms. I really hear rhythms in my head when I write. I'll write a scene and read it to myself and it's almost like music to me. ...I like people's speech patterns, so the prepositions, the conjunctions, all those things are important. The rhythms are as important to me as the words."

The Premiere of 'Ballyhoo'

The Last Night of Ballyhoo debuted at the 1996 Olympic Games' Olympic Arts Festival and played from July 27 to August 3, 1996. It then opened the fall season of the Alliance Theater, a professional theatre company in Atlanta.

In the winter of 1997 *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* opened on Broadway. The production ran in the Helen Hayes Theatre from February 27, 1997 to June 28, 1998. The Broadway production won the 1997 Tony Award for "Best Play" making Uhry the first-ever writer to win a Tony Award, an Oscar (for the screenplay of *Driving Miss Daisy*), and a Pulitzer Prize (for the play, *Driving Miss Daisy*). In his Tony Award acceptance speech, Uhry, visibly astounded, said "I don't know what to say. This is amazing. My wife kept telling me to stop being such a chicken and sit down and write another play. And I did. Thank you, honey, you were right. And I do have to thank my mother because she always made me feel like I was a winner, and she even provided me with all those relatives that I write about."

Original Atlanta Cast:

Lala	Mary Bacon
Reba	Valerie J. Curtin
Boo	Dana Ivey
Adolph	Terry Beaver
Joe	Stephen Mailer
Sunny	Jessalyn Gilsig
Peachy	Stephen Largay

Original Broadway Cast:

Lala	Jessica Hecht
Reba	Celia Weston
Boo	Dana Ivey
Adolph	Terry Beaver
Joe	Paul Rudd
Sunny	Arija Bareikis
Peachy	Stephen Largay

"What you're looking for in an actor is somebody who can bring the stuff to the play that you can't write. ...I find with all of you in the play, you add something that I can't bring to it, that I can't write."

Figure A.4. Dramaturgical actor packet.

The Characters of 'Ballyhoo'

A Playwright's Thoughts

excerpts from an [interview](#) with Alfred Uhry by Paul Rudd for BOMB Magazine

On Joe: "You play a lot of love scenes in this play where you clearly are thinking, 'God I really like this girl. This girl is really the one.' You never say it. But that makes it interesting to me, to feel something and to be talking about all the other things but the way you feel."

On Reba: "...her character is so otherworldly. I had two relatives in my family who were like that, dear sweet ladies in deep outer space quite a bit of the time. And what they said was mostly composed of non-sequiturs. When I was a little boy, one of these relatives was going to New York. My mother said, 'Are you going to go on the train or fly?' She said, 'Well if I buy that navy blue dress I saw at Richard's yesterday, I'm going to go on the train.' Did I miss something? I mean, I always was a big fan of Gracie Allen's. When she got the driver's test and they said, 'Have your eyes ever been checked?' She said, 'No, they've always been light blue.' (laughter) It's just another world. But [she] seems not to be joking."

On the Men: "[Joe] and [Adolf] are the way into this play for me. Without them I couldn't have written it, because they're really observing these women. I just find women fascinating. At least the women that I have observed in my life, because they basically think differently than I do."

On Sunny: "Sunny, is not Little-Miss-Goodie-Two-Shoes. She's a wonderful girl and I love her a lot, but she does do something to engender dislike in the relationship with her cousin, Lala. It's not all Lala's doing. I thought, 'What could she have done?' And then I thought, to wear a brand new dress to your cousin's father's funeral would be a bad thing to do, because it would make people look at you. Lala's right when she says no girl wears a new outfit if she doesn't want somebody to look at them."

On Lala and Sunny: "It interested me, the relationship between the two cousins. People who read the play kept saying, 'Oh, they really love each other.' I said, 'No. They don't love each other. I don't think that they hate each other, they just don't like each other.'"

On Joe: "I was tempted to talk more about the war but I thought, These people don't know what's coming. It just looks bad in Europe. But, nobody knows about concentration camps or Holocausts, that was in the future. And I didn't want to hit it hard. I knew [Joe] would say that he had relatives in Eastern Europe. But once is enough to say that in a play like this. That to me is horrible, when he says, 'Yeah I got relatives over there,' and everybody in the audience knows something he doesn't know. How could he know?"

On Boo: "The character of Boo is doing the best she can in the world, I don't know what she could do any differently. She may be too much of a pile driver of a mother, but she only wants what's good for her daughter, she really loves her daughter ..."

On Sunny and Joe: "Real romance. It appealed to me enormously. I found it so sexy—in a lovely sense, not in a smarmy sense—to get all cleaned up and put on shaving lotion, put on your best suit, and go pick up this girl that you're falling head over heels in love with. And she comes down the stairs looking like \$50 million and smelling like an angel. And you get to take her to a dance and hold her in your arms, and dance with her to that remarkable music, and you've never even kissed her. We've talked about the kiss that almost ends the play, being the first kiss that these two have ever shared."

On Sunny and Joe: "I wrote my parents' love story, but clearly I wasn't there, so I probably wrote my own love story. I don't know how my father talked to my mother when they were courting, that's just what I imagine. And [Joe] ... Bob Waldman was my friend from Brooklyn who came to Atlanta when we were 19 years old. He was dapper and a good dancer. He was catnip to the ladies, and I didn't think I was. I wanted to be him. So I certainly wrote his speech patterns. I heard Bob's voice a lot, but I put my father's life into his mouth."

On Lala, Sunny, and Joe: "I think there's something in the characters of *Ballyhoo*, in Lala and in Sunny, that in spite of themselves is inherently Jewish, and that's why none of those people tried to change their names or pass themselves off as something they weren't. They just didn't want to be very Jewish. And I guess what I've come to realize is, either you're Jewish or you're not Jewish. If you're Jewish, you're very Jewish to the rest of the world, so you might as well be. I was able to put in your character's mouth all that good stuff that I wish I'd believe in, like, 'I guess being Jewish is being Jewish.' It took me a long time to come to that."

Figure A.5. Dramaturgical actor packet.

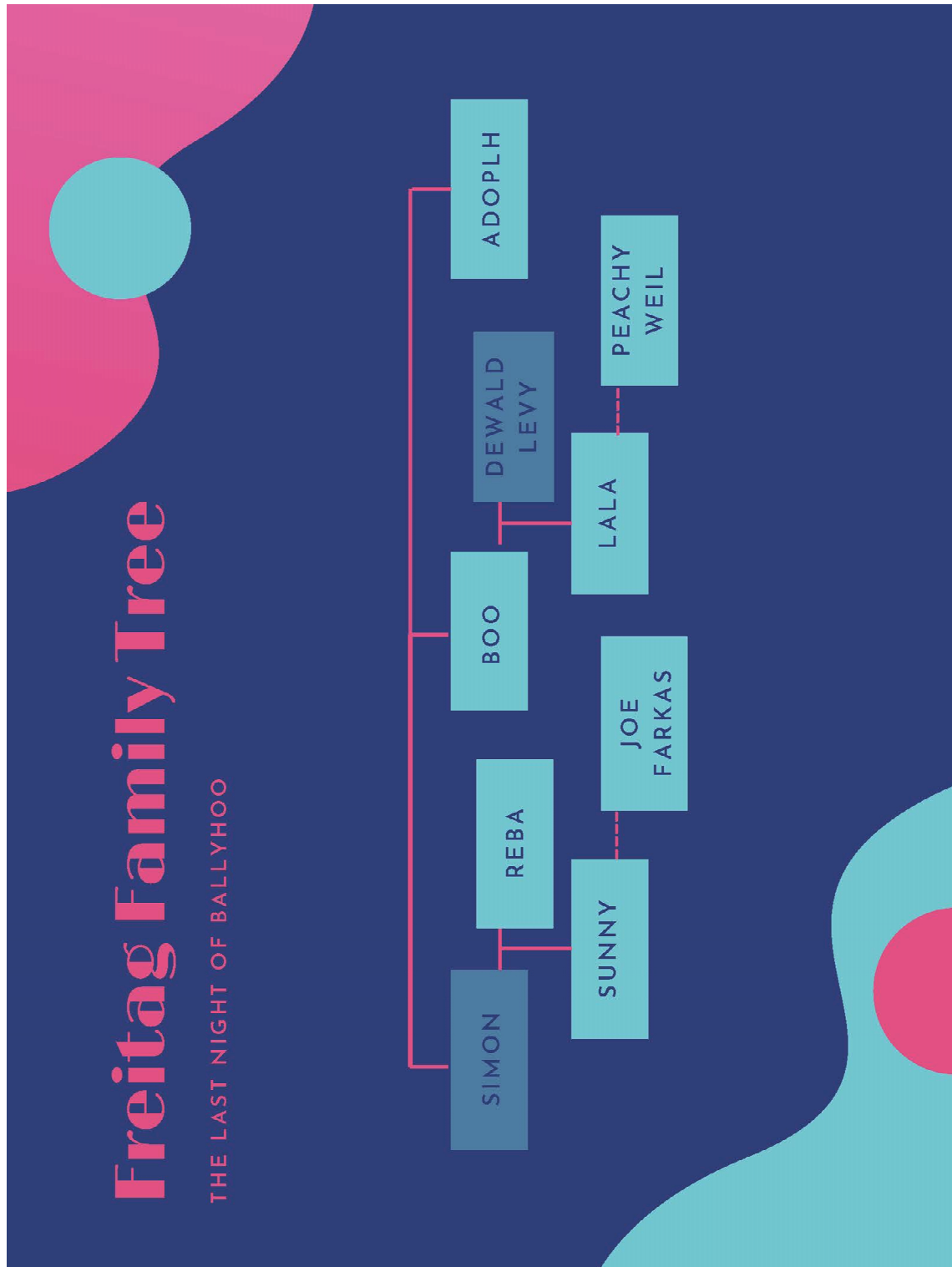


Figure A.6. Dramaturgical actor packet.



THE SOUTH

"THE SOUTHERN JEWISH GRAPEVINE"



WHAT IS "THE SOUTH?"

"The Southern United States, also referred to as the American South or simply the South, is a geographic and cultural region of the United States....The South, being the most racially diverse region in the United States, is known for its culture and history, having developed its own customs, fashion, architecture, musical styles, and cuisines, which have distinguished it in many ways from the rest of the United States. Sociological research indicates that Southern collective identity stems from political, historical, demographic, and cultural distinctiveness from the rest of the United States." (from "Southern United States" on Wikipedia.org)

"NAME DROPPING" PEOPLE AND PLACES

The characters in *Ballyhoo* (especially Boo and Reba) mention names of places a LOT when they are talking about the people they know. Why all the name dropping? One reason is that it helps establish the geographically large yet tight-knit social circle in which the Freitag/Levy family operates as upper middle class southern Jews of German-American descent. They have a lot of labels placed on them by society and those labels strictly define who are and who are not socially acceptable companions and friends for them.

Figure A.7. Dramaturgical actor packet.

PLACES MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPT

GEORGIA

- Atlanta (9)- home of the Freitag/Levy family; the capital and largest city of Georgia; unofficial "capital" and center of commerce of the post-Civil War south
- Tybee Island (15) - a small island town on the Atlantic coast near Savannah; a popular vacation destination
- Milledgeville (14) - a town south east of Atlanta, was the state capital from 1804 to 1868 (during Civil War)
- Savannah (24) - a popular port city located near the Atlantic coast; close to the South Carolina border; Georgia's first capital from its founding in 1733 until 1804 (during colonization and the Revolution)
- Macon (24) - a city in central Georgia; southeast of Atlanta
- Rome (37) - a city located in northwest Georgia
- Columbus (78) - a city in western Georgia on the Chattahoochee River near the Alabama border; southwest of Atlanta

LOUISIANA

- Lake Charles (9) - Peachy's hometown; a city in southwest Louisiana
- New Orleans (24) - the largest city in Louisiana; located in the southeast; known for music, Cajun food, and Mardi Gras
- Baton Rouge (36) - the capital city of Louisiana; located on the east bank of the Mississippi River, northwest of New Orleans

SOUTH CAROLINA

- Myrtle Beach (8) - a vacation resort city located on the Atlantic coast; a popular tourist destination
- Charleston (18)- a popular port city on the Atlantic coast; the largest city in South Carolina

ALABAMA

- Birmingham (10) - a city in north central Alabama; an industrial center of the south; the most populous city in Alabama
- Point Clear (14) - a resort town located on the coast of Alabama on Mobile Bay off the Gulf of Mexico; a popular vacation destination



Figure A.8. Dramaturgical actor packet.

PLACES MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPT, CONTINUED

TENNESSEE

- Chattanooga (24) - a city on the southern Tennessee border across the Tennessee River from Georgia; northwest of Atlanta; south east of Nashville
- Nashville (37) - the capital of Tennessee; located in north central Tennessee along the Cumberland River; the most populous city in Tennessee

VIRGINIA

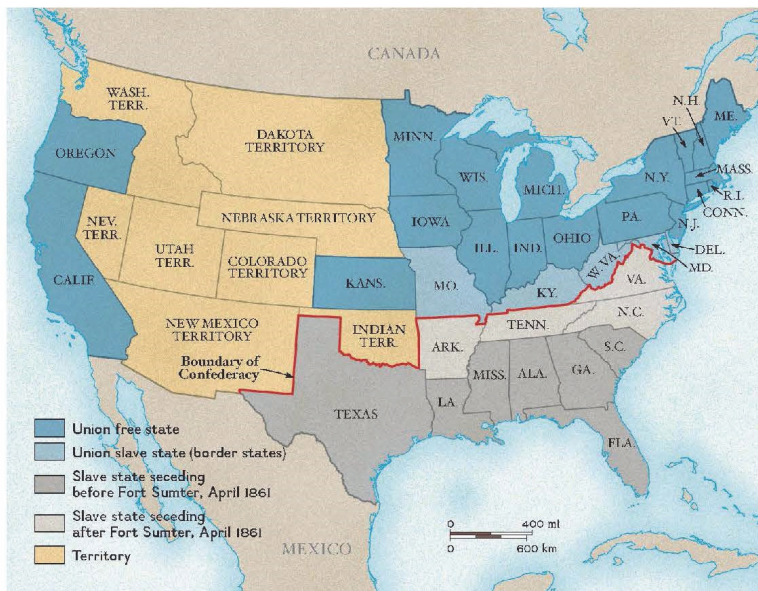
- Richmond (24) - the capital city of Virginia; the capital of the Confederate States during the Civil War; located about 90 miles south of Washington, D.C.; about 500 miles northeast of Atlanta

MISSISSIPPI

- Hattiesburg (35) - a city in south central Mississippi
- Gulfport (24) - a city on the southern coast of Mississippi on the Gulf of Mexico; the second largest city in Mississippi; about 70 miles northeast of New Orleans

KENTUCKY

- Louisville (37) - the largest city in Kentucky; located on the northern border between Kentucky and Indiana along the Ohio River; Kentucky is often considered to be in "the south" culturally, but it is the only state on this list that was not part of the Confederacy during the Civil War




THE CIVIL WAR

Our play does not deal directly with the Civil War, but it is important to note that it was (and in some ways continues to be) a major influence on the societal, cultural, and economic development of the southern U.S. as distinct from the north.

The Civil War lasted for 4 years (from 1861-1865). It is still the deadliest conflict in U.S. History. Our characters' parents and grandparents would likely have been living during the war and some would have fought in it.

The Civil War is about as far back for the characters in 1939 as WWII is for us in 2021.

Figure A.9. Dramaturgical actor packet.



ADOLPH, BOO, AND REBA

"THE LOST GENERATION"


"The term 'lost generation' came from a statement. 'All of you young people who served in the war. . . . You are all a lost generation,' writer Gertrude Stein said to a young Ernest Hemingway in the years after World War I, according to his account years later in *A Moveable Feast*."

World War I

"Worldwide, about 20 million people died in World War I (or the Great War, as it was known at the time)—and another 20 million or so were wounded. Those born in the last two decades of the 1800s were heavily impacted. Young people served in the military in large numbers and figured highly in those casualties.

Many who survived the war emerged with deep physical or emotional wounds. Young adults lost friends and often saw their careers and family plans disrupted. In war-torn regions, family homes and livelihoods were sometimes destroyed. During a season of life when they would typically anticipate joyful rites of passage—graduations, new jobs, weddings, parenthood—many instead felt alone, disabled, unmoored from traditional values, and uncertain or pessimistic about the future.

In regard to survivors, the phrase 'lost generation' suggests that even though their lives were physically spared, many still felt lost." -- from FamilySearch.org.



"The Great War" was significantly less devastating to the U.S. than it was to Europe, and we do not know to what extent Adolph, Boo, and Reba were personally involved or impacted by WWI, but regardless, their lives have been shaped by these generational events and experiences.

Growing Up:

Individuals born between 1883 and 1900

[Adolph, Boo, and Reba were born between 1888 and 1894]

Major World Events:

- Rise of Labor Unions
- First Wave Feminism (suffragettes!)
- Construction of the Panama Canal - 1900-1914
- World War I - 1914-1918

Popular Culture/Entertainment:

- Music on the Phonograph
- Books, Magazines
- Bicycle Riding
- Ragtime Music

Tech/Industry Advancements:

- Telephones
- Automobiles
- Airplanes
- Typewriters
- Radioactivity (discovered)
- Radios

THE LOST GENERATION

Figure A.10. Dramaturgical actor packet.



SUNNY, LALA, JOE, AND PEACHY

"THE GREATEST GENERATION"

a.k.a. "The G.I. Generation" and "The WWII Generation"

"The Greatest Generation" is the name given to the generation of Americans born between 1901 and 1927. The name was popularized by a 1998 book of the same title written by journalist Tom Brokaw. Here is an excerpt from his book:

"At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting in the most primitive conditions possible across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, and the coral islands of the Pacific. They answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs. They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. They succeeded on every front. They won the war; they saved the world. They came home to joyous and short-lived celebrations and immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted. They married in record numbers and gave birth to another distinctive generation, the Baby Boomers. A grateful nation made it possible for more of them to attend college than any society had ever educated, anywhere. They gave the world new science, literature, art, industry, and economic strength unparalleled in the long curve of history. As they now reach the twilight of their adventurous and productive lives, they remain, for the most part, exceptionally modest. They have so many stories to tell, stories that in many cases they have never told before, because in a deep sense they didn't think that what they were doing was that special, because everyone else was doing it too. This book, I hope, will in some small way pay tribute to those men and women who have given us the lives we have today--an American family portrait album of the greatest generation."

Growing Up:

Individuals born between 1901 and 1927

[Sunny, Lala, Joe, and Peachy
were born between 1914 and
1919 -- during WWI]

Major World Events:

World War I - 1914-1918
Russian Revolution - 1917
The Great Depression - 1929-1939

Popular Culture/ Entertainment:

Radio Shows
Books, Magazines
Silent Movies (until 1928)
Movies (with sound! after 1928)
Jazz Music (swing, big band, etc.)

Tech/Industry Advancements:

Automobiles
Telephones
Radios
Medicine
Film/Television

THE GREATEST GENERATION

Figure A.11. Dramaturgical actor packet.



The World of the Play: The Present

At the time of the action of the play in December of 1939, the Germans, led by Adolf Hitler, had invaded Poland a few months earlier on September 1, 1939, marking the beginning of the war that would come to be known as World War II. Many European countries, including Britain and France (American allies), have already declared war on Germany. The United States has not joined the war (and won't for two more years -- until December of 1941), but people who are paying attention are concerned about what is happening in Europe.



"OUR DEBT TO THE
HEROIC MEN AND
VALIANT
WOMEN IN THE
SERVICE
OF OUR COUNTRY CAN
NEVER BE REPAID.
THEY
HAVE EARNED OUR
UNDYING GRATITUDE.
AMERICA WILL NEVER
FORGET THEIR
SACRIFICES."

- PRESIDENT HARRY S
TRUMAN
APRIL 17, 1945

World of the Play: Looking to the Future

The United States will join the War following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, two years after the events of this play take place. Our characters' lives will be impacted by the war.

It is extremely likely that both **Joe** and **Peachy** will serve in the military until the war's end in 1945. According to Wikipedia, during WWII "some 16,112,566 Americans served in the United States Armed Forces, with 405,399 killed and 671,278 wounded."

Sunny and **Lala** will likely work in support of the war effort as well. According to the [National World War II Museum](#), "More than six million [American] women took wartime jobs in factories, three million volunteered with the Red Cross, and over 200,000 served in the military."

Boo and **Reba** will do their part on the home front by starting a "victory garden," canning food, fundraising, and contributing to other charitable work that supports the war effort. Businesses such as **Adolph's** will pivot to manufacturing items that support the war.

The audience watching the play knows what is coming, but the end of the play leaves us feeling hopeful that our characters will be ready to face the challenges that lie ahead with courage, determination, and resilience.



THE GREATEST GENERATION

Figure A.12. Dramaturgical actor packet.

COLLEGE LIFE: SUNNY

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Sunny is "a junior at Wellesley with an A-minus average."



Welcome to Wellesley...

Wellesley College is a private liberal arts women's college located in Wellesley, Massachusetts (about 20 miles west of Boston). It is a highly selective and prestigious college that is still in operation today. While not an "Ivy League" school, Wellesley is one of the "Seven Sisters" which was a group of seven women's colleges in the northeast that were formed to provide women with educational opportunities similar to those that their male counterparts were receiving at the nearby Ivy League schools. In 1939, most of the Ivy League schools were still reserved for men only.

You can find out more information about Wellesley by visiting their website at <https://www.wellesley.edu/>.



FUN FACTS:

Colors: Blue & White

Campus: 500 acres, by Lake Waban

Motto: *Non Ministrari sed Ministrare*, "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"

Most Unique Tradition: senior hoop rolling



Figure A.13. Dramaturgical actor packet.



Student Life

For some insight into the lives of 1930s Wellesley students, check out the short silent film that was made at Wellesley in 1936 called "[The World of Wellesley: An Adventure in Education](#)" available on YouTube. It contains images and video reels of students in their classes, participating in sports, other extra-curricular activities (including theatre!), and campus events and traditions, and living in their dorms.

You can also browse a copy of the 1939 (or any other year) [Wellesley Legenda](#) (the name of their yearbook) on the Wellesley library website.

Academic Life

When Joe first meets Sunny on the train (Act I, scene 3) she tells him she is a Sociology major. Sociology is defined as "the science or study of the origin, development, organization, and functioning of human society; the science of the fundamental laws of social relations, institutions, etc." (Dictionary.com).

In the scene she is also reading a book called *The Profits of Religion* by [Upton Sinclair](#) which is described on Wikipedia.org as "...a snapshot of the religious movements in the U.S. before its entry into World War I....In this book, Sinclair attacks institutionalized religion as a 'source of income to parasites, and the natural ally of every form of oppression and exploitation.'" Joe teases her a bit and asks if she also reads [Eugene V. Debs](#) to which she responds, "yes." Both Sinclair and Debs are socialist political activists. It is likely that Sunny is reading them for a class.

STUDYING FOR EXAMS OVER WINTER BREAK?

It is mentioned several times in the script that Sunny is studying for her exams. Traditionally, college fall semesters did not end until after the holidays, so semester exams would take place in January, after the break.

Figure A.14. Dramaturgical actor packet.

College Life: Lala and Others

University of Michigan

a public research university and Michigan's flagship state university located in Ann Arbor, Michigan; visit their website: umich.edu.

Lala attended the University of Michigan for a brief time until (according to Boo) she "snuck home in disgrace in the middle of her first term." (page 15)



Sigma Delta Tau

Sigma Delta Tau - a sorority founded in 1917 by seven Jewish women at Cornell University; visit their website: sigmadeltatau.org.

Lala was rejected by Sigma Delta Tau during rush week of her first term. Boo blames Lala: "You didn't prepare for rush week." It is implied that the rejection, or perhaps a humiliating experience connected to rush week, was one of the primary reasons she dropped out of school and returned home. (pgs. 12-13, 71)



A.E.Phi

Alpha Epsilon Phi - a sorority founded in 1909 by seven Jewish women at Barnard College; visit their website: www.aephi.org

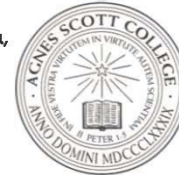
Lala was accepted into A.E.Phi during her first term at the University of Michigan, but that was not considered a social triumph by her mother who says, "nobody but the other kind belongs to A.E.Phi and the whole world knows it." (page 13)



Agnes Scott College

a private, liberal arts women's college located in Decatur, Georgia, just east of Atlanta that was established in 1889; visit their website: agnesscott.edu

Lala "took [a] literature course at Agnes Scott last year." (page 32)



Other Colleges:

Peabody Normal: a college in Nashville, Tennessee that is now a part of Vanderbilt University. It is mentioned in a story that Reba and Adolph are telling about a girl they used to know. (page 37)

Georgia Tech: a public research university in Atlanta, Georgia; one of the state universities of Georgia. Adolph is an alumnus of Georgia Tech which he mentions when he is talking about his elder brother, Simon: "...he didn't have to put me all the way through Tech..." (page 33)

Tulane University: a private research university in New Orleans, Louisiana, founded in 1834. Peachy is a student at Tulane who plays on the golf team: "Varsity at Tulane three years running." (page 65)



Figure A.15. Dramaturgical actor packet.



GONE WITH THE WIND

The Novel



MARGARET MITCHELL (1900-1949)

Margaret Mitchell was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. She was interested in writing from a young age and worked for some years as a journalist. While stuck at home recovering from an ankle injury in 1926 she began writing *Gone With the Wind*, her only novel, which was published in 1936.

THE STORY



"...*Gone With the Wind* explores the depths of human passion with an intensity as bold as its setting in the bluff red hills of Georgia. A superb piece of story-telling, it brings the drama of the Civil War and Reconstruction vividly to life. ...This is the tale of Scarlett O'Hara, the spoiled, ruthless daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, who arrives at young womanhood just in time to see the Civil War sweep away the life for which her upbringing prepared her." -- from the cover of the 75th Anniversary Edition

"Margaret Mitchell's epic saga of love and war has long been heralded as the Great American Novel. ...In the two main characters, the irresistible, tenacious Scarlett O'Hara and the formidable, debonair Rhett Butler, Margaret Mitchell gives us a timeless story of survival and two of the most famous lovers in the English-speaking world since Romeo and Juliet. *Gone with the Wind* is a thrilling, haunting, and vivid book readers will remember for the rest of their lives." -- from the 2011 Paperback Edition

Figure A.16. Dramaturgical actor packet.



GWTW: FAST FACTS

- Published in **1936**
- won the **Pulitzer Prize** (1937) and **National Book Award** (1936)
- sold **1 million** copies in its first year
- **1,037 pages** long
- cost **\$3.00** (Adjusted for inflation, \$3.00 in 1939 is **equal to \$55.82** in 2021.)
- **#1 Bestseller** in 1936 and 1937
- over **30 million** copies sold, worldwide (one of the best-selling novels of all time)
- considered by many to be the/a **"Great American Novel"**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The [Margaret Mitchell House](#) is operated as a museum as part of the Atlanta History Center. Mitchell wrote *Gone With the Wind* while living in a small first floor apartment of the house.

The [Margaret Mitchell Special Collection](#) at the Fulton County Public Library includes (according to their website), "the typewriter used to write *Gone With the Wind*, Margaret's Pulitzer Prize, her American Book Award, photos, her personal collection of books, various important editions of *Gone With the Wind* and other pieces of ephemera and books."



GWTW THROUGH A 2021 LENS

Both the novel and the film of GWTW were revolutionary in many ways, but they are also products of their time and culture, and consequently there are many depictions and descriptions that are problematic and offensive. Overall, the popularity of GWTW has contributed to the romanticization of the pre-Civil War American South, a society that relied on slavery and other systems of oppression.

There is a wealth of information available about this very important topic that is well worth exploring, but for purposes of our production, a good place to start is this recent (2020) [video introduction to the film](#) by film scholar, Jacqueline Smith. In it, she gives a concise overview of the issues but also offers insight into why, despite its faults, this is still a story worth experiencing.

Figure A.17. Dramaturgical actor packet.

GONE WITH THE WIND

The Motion Picture



PRE-PRODUCTION

The film rights were sold in July 1936, one month before the book was released to the public. Due to the immense popularity of the novel, the film adaptation was highly anticipated (and publicized) long before it was completed, but because of many pre-production complications including issues with the script, casting, and the production team, filming was delayed for a few years.

FILMING

The making of the film of *GWTW* is an epic tale itself, and there are many books and articles available on the subject.

Filming officially began on January 26, 1939 and ended on July 1, 1939. The film premiered in Atlanta on December 15, 1939.



THE FINISHED FILM

Released: December 15, 1939

GWTW broke box office records at the time, and is still the highest grossing film of all time (when adjusted for inflation).

Run Time: 3 hours and 58 minutes

(including an overture, and intermission, entr'acte, and exit music)

Figure A.18. Dramaturgical actor packet.



BY THE NUMBERS...

- **1,400** = the number of women who auditioned or were interviewed for the part of Scarlett O'Hara in a highly publicized, country-wide "search for Scarlett"; **32** actresses were screen-tested
- **2,868** = the number of costumes (plus **1,230** military uniforms)
- **53** = the number of buildings that were constructed for the Atlanta set, built on a Hollywood backlot (plus **7,000** feet of streets)
- **9,000** = the approximate number of extras that were hired over the course of filming (**800** were hired for a single scene)
- **125** = number of days Vivien Leigh (Scarlett) spent filming (**54** days more than any of the other actors)

THE CAST

Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara
Clark Gable as Rhett Butler
Olivia de Havilland as Melanie Hamilton
Leslie Howard as Ashley Wilkes
Hattie McDaniel as Mammy
 and many more...



THE ACADEMY AWARDS



GWTW was nominated for 13 Academy Awards (a record at the time) and won 8 of them (another record), including Best Picture, Best Direction, Best Screenplay, Best Actress for Vivien Leigh, and Best Supporting Actress for Hattie McDaniel making her the first African-American to win an Oscar.

Figure A.19. Dramaturgical actor packet.



IN THE SCRIPT

Clark Gable (pg. 9 & 10) -- the famous movie star who was cast as the rakish Rhett Butler
Margaret Mitchell (pg. 9) -- the author of GWTW, an Atlanta native

Reconstruction Period (pg. 11) -- the period of time after the American Civil War from 1865-1877; a large portion of GWTW takes place in this period

"Scarlett in her barbecue dress" (pg. 41) -- one of Scarlett's most iconic costumes from the book and film; she wears it to a barbecue
Tara (pg. 41) -- the name of the fictional O'Hara family plantation in Clayton County, Georgia; a major setting of the story

"FIDDLE-DE-DEE"

The book and the film open with a scene in which Scarlett is talking and flirting with two brothers who are both trying to court her. It establishes Scarlett's character as the quintessential southern belle, capable of wrapping any man around her little finger with a single glance. When Lala first meets Joe (pg. 19-20) she falsely claims to have a date with two boys that night, and uses Scarlett's catchphrase: "Fiddle-de-dee." Her behavior in that moment is a clear mimic of her favorite heroine, Scarlett.



SHOOTING THE YANKEE DESERTER

In an intense scene, a dangerous "Yankee deserter" (a union army soldier who has deserted his unit) comes to Tara and attempts to steal from the family (and possibly do them bodily harm). In an effort to protect herself and those under her care, Scarlett shoots and kills him. You can watch the scene [here](#). Lala mentions this scene in the script (pg. 41).

Figure A.20. Dramaturgical actor packet.

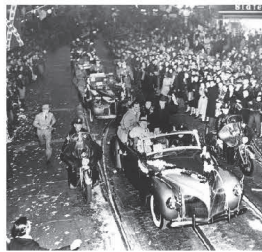


December 13-15, 1939

The premiere of *Gone with the Wind* was an unprecedented epic three-day extravaganza with receptions, parties, parades, concerts, and a themed grand costume ball hosted by the Junior League. The culminating event was the premiere of the film on Friday night at the Loew's Grand, a theater on Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta.

An estimated 300,000 people lined the streets to see the parade of movie stars being driven from the airport to downtown Atlanta.

Friday, December 15th was declared a state holiday by the Governor.



L to R: Vivien Leigh (Scarlett), Clark Gable (Rhett), Margaret Mitchell, David O. Selznick (producer), and Olivia de Havilland (Melanie)

Figure A.21. Dramaturgical actor packet.

"Atlanta is the center of the world tonight..." - Lala

Hollywood descended on Atlanta. Almost all of the main cast members attended the premiere, and most with their significant others, many of whom were also famous movie stars. The social elite of Atlanta came out in force as well with 6,000 people attending the grand ball. The main event, the movie premiere, could only seat 2,051 people.

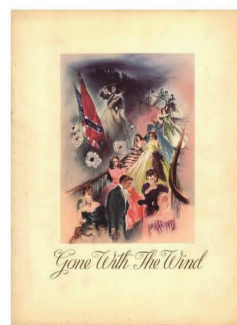
Not fun-fact: Hattie McDaniel (Mammy) and the other African-American cast members were not permitted to attend the premiere due to Georgia's Jim Crow laws. Legend has it that Clark Gable wanted to boycott the premiere in protest, but Hattie McDaniel, with whom he had become friends, convinced him to go.



L to R: Margaret Mitchell, her husband, John Marsh, Clark Gable, his wife, actress Carole Lombard, and Mayor Hartsfield at the premiere before the film began.



The front page of The Atlanta Constitution the day after the premiere.



The cover of the opening night program.



A ticket stub to the premiere. Tickets cost \$10.00. The average movie ticket price in 1939 was \$0.23.

Gone with the Wind: The Atlanta Premiere

Figure A.22. Dramaturgical actor packet.

LET'S GO TO THE...



Going to the movies was an extremely popular pastime in the 1930s and 40s -- even more so than it is today. It was the only way to view movies! And 1939 is almost universally considered the "greatest year in movies" by film historians.



Figure A.23. Dramaturgical actor packet.

POPULAR MOVIES OF THE LATE 30'S

Lost Horizon (1937)	The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938)
Stage Door (1937)	Love Finds Andy Hardy (1938)
A Day at the Races (1937)	You Can't Take it With You (1938)
Saratoga (1937)	Wuthering Heights (1939)
Broadway Melody of 1938 (1937)	Dodge City (1939)
A Star is Born (1937)	Good-bye, Mr. Chips (1939)
Heidi (1937)	The Little Princess (1939)
The Good Earth (1937)	Dark Victory (1939)
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	Stagecoach (1939)
Shall We Dance (1937)	Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (1939)
Bringing Up Baby (1938)	Babes in Arms (1939)
Boys Town (1938)	Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)
Alexander's Ragtime Band (1938)	Wuthering Heights (1939)
Marie Antoinette (1938)	The Wizard of Oz (1939)
	Gone With The Wind (1939)

These are some of the movies that your characters may have gone to the movie theater to see!

If you have the chance to view a few movies from this era, I highly recommend it! They are fantastic movies, but also they could offer some interesting insight or ideas for your characters as far as voice and movement styles.

Figure A.24. Dramaturgical actor packet.

MOVIES SET IN THE LATE 1930S

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000)

Cradle Will Rock (1999)

The Sound of Music (1965)

The Remains of the Day (1993)

A River Runs Through It (1992)

Me and Orson Welles (2008)

The Rocketeer (1991)

Dick Tracy (1990)

The Aviator (2004)

Swing Kids (1993)

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day (2008)

The Zookeeper's Wife (2017)

The Dig (2021)

The King's Speech (2010)

Australia (2009)

Indiana Jones Trilogy (1981-1989)

If you need ideas for your next movie night, here is a list of some modern (ish) movies that take place in the late 1930s. Most of these are probably not be very historically accurate, but they are still fun.

Figure A.25. Dramaturgical actor packet.

BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS

A Selection of Publishers Weekly List of Bestselling Novels from 1935-1939:

The Yearling by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (1938)
The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck (1939)
Good-bye, Mr. Chips by James Hilton (1934)
Gone With The Wind by Margaret Mitchell (1936)
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (1937)
The Citadel by A. J. Cronin (1937)
Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier (1938)
The Years by Virginia Woolf (1937)

Popular Children's Books Published in the 20s & 30s:

The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams (1922)
The Box-Car Children by Gertrude Chandler Warner (1924)
Winnie The Pooh by A. A. Milne (1924)
The Secret of the Old Clock (Nancy Drew) by Carolyn Keene (1930)
The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper (1930)
Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1932)
Mary Poppins by P.L. Travers (1934)
The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien (1937)

Other Popular Books that Take Place in the 1930s:

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960)
The Color Purple by Alice Walker (1982)
Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen (2006)
The Blind Assassin by Margaret Atwood (2000)
Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe by Fannie Flagg (1987)
Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie (1934)
The English Patient by Michael Ondaatje (1992)
For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway (1940)
Rules of Civility by Amor Towles (2011)

Lists to Check Out:

20 Books That Defined the 1930s
(Penguin Books)

The 10 Books That Defined the 1930s
(LitHub.com)

Further Reading:

What People Were Reading During the Great Depression (NPR)

1930s: Print Culture (Encyclopedia.com)

Figure A.26. Dramaturgical actor packet.

APPENDIX B

Selected Production Photos

The following production photographs were taken during a dress rehearsal and special photo session. They are presented in sequence.



Figure B.1. Lala decorates the Christmas tree as the play begins.



Figure B.2. "I'm writing a novel!"



Figure B.3. "He ain't visiting, Boo. He's working for me."



Figure B.4. “From where she sat atop the weathered buckboard wagon, Ropa Ragsdale could see the charred and twisted remains of her beloved plantation.”



Figure B.5. “You miss Freitag? Sunny Freitag?”



Figure B.6. “Dewald had beautiful table manners.”



Figure B.7. “Peachy? Well, hey stranger. I thought you fell in a bayou or something.”



Figure B.8. “Because higher education can lead to insanity.”



Figure B.9. “Look!”



Figure B.10. “Everybody I know has a Christmas tree. It doesn’t mean we’re not Jewish.”



Figure B.11. “Ballyhoo. We made a deal, remember?”



Figure B.12. "Remember your Daddy's funeral?"



Figure B.13. "I told you!"



Figure B.14. "I'm so glad you like it. Because it cost a weensy bit more than we planned on."



Figure B.15. "May I have this dance, sir?"



Figure B. 16. "Shall we?"



Figure B.17. "It tore! He tore my beautiful dress."



Figure B.18. “Just what I need – another female to live in this house.”



Figure B.19. “My! You certainly do take after the Zacharias side of your family! I’d recognize that hair anywhere.”



Figure B.20. "I'm allergic to nuts. I would die if I ate a pecan."



Figure B.21. "Say! I thought this shindig was formal! Why didn't you get dressed up?"



Figure B.22. “My God! What did I say?”



Figure B. 23. “I’m not going! I’m not!”



Figure B.24. “Well, go on upstairs and work on that radio script. I’m sorry, it’s a novel this week, isn’t it?”



Figure B.25. “And you behave yourself.”



Figure B.26. "Seems to me a little snack always enhances a late-night discussion."



Figure B.27. "Why didn't you tell me?"



Figure B.28. “I’m listening real good and you know what I hear? Jew-hater talk – clear as a bell!”



Figure B.29. “Sylvan! I can hardly believe it! Aren’t you thrilled, Adolph?”



Figure B.30. "So I was hopin' maybe –"



Figure B.31. "So think of something really good and we'll just make it happen."



Figure B.32. The transition from scene 7 to scene 8 in act 2.



Figure B.33. Lighting the sabbath candles.



Figure B.34. The sabbath prayer.



Figure B.35. "The candles shine."

APPENDIX C

List of Songs Used in the Play and During Scene Transitions

St. Stephen's Quartet (1930) – “The First Nowell”

Al Bowlly and Ray Noble (1934) – “Freckle Face, You're Beautiful”

Kay Kyser and His Orchestra (1942) – “Pushin' Sand”

Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra (1926) – “Kansas City Shuffle”

Coleman Hawkins and His Orchestra (1940) – “Body and Soul”

“Main Title” from *Gone with The Wind* (1939), composed by Max Steiner

Bing Crosby with Lennie Hayton and His Orchestra (1933) – “Beautiful Girl”

The Andrews Sisters (1939) – “Beer Barrel Polka (Roll Out the Barrel)”

Glenn Miller and His Orchestra with Ray Eberle (1939) – “Blue Orchids”

Mildred Bailey (1939) – “All the Things You Are”

The Ink Spots (1939) – “If I Didn't Care”

Benny Goodman and His Orchestra with Mildred Bailey (1939) – “I Thought About You”

Frank Sinatra (1946) – “How Deep is the Ocean”

APPENDIX D

The Program



Figure D.1. Cover of the program.

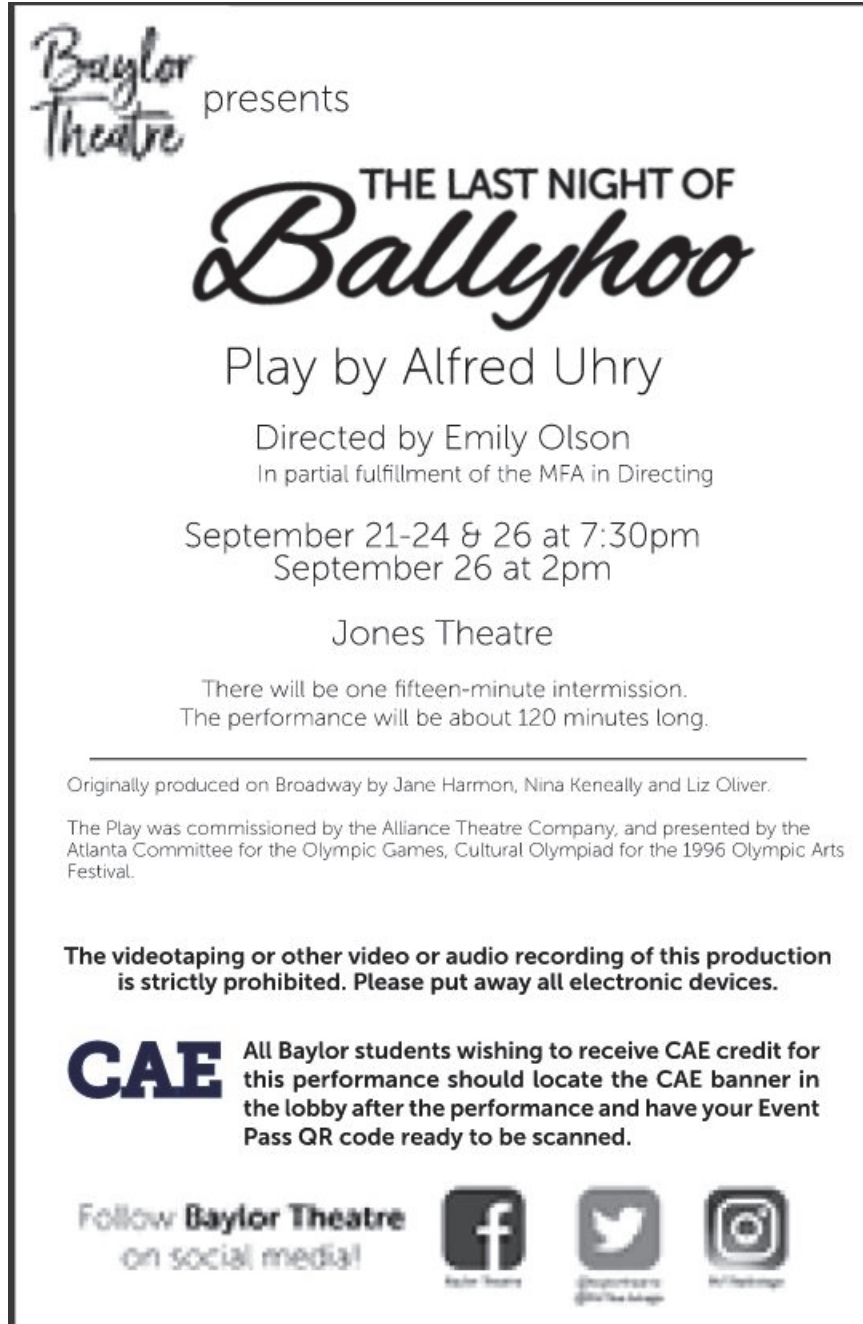


Figure D.2. Inside cover of the program.

DIRECTORS' NOTES & ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION STAFF

How do I know who I am? Where do I belong?

These questions have been on my mind often as I have been researching, writing about, and working on this production over the past five months. I have found myself reflecting on relationships and experiences of the past – both my own and those of my ancestors – that have shaped who I am today.

The Last Night of Ballyhoo explores the intersection of individual, familial, and cultural identity. The play examines how the different aspects of our background – religion, family, ethnicity, class, etc. – interweave to form our own sense of self and our place in the world around us.

The characters in this play struggle, like most of us, with some aspects of their identity. But as they strive to reconcile the various pieces of who they are as individuals, as a family, and as a community, they discover that there is power, peace, and hope in embracing their own identity.

May we all have the courage to discover who we are and live authentically, and in doing so may we find the strength and resilience to truly connect with those around us. It is through those relationships that we will find the resilience to face whatever joys and challenges come our way in the future.

-Emily Olson

Emily Olson★ Director
 Piper Vaught♦ Production Dramaturg
 Michael Sullivan Scenic Designer
 Sally Lynn Askins Costume Designer
 Brian Do♦ Lighting Designer
 Lindsey Swyers♦ Sound Designer
 Madelyn Fritz♦ Stage Manager
 Jessie Rambo♦ Assist. Scenic Designer and Properties Supervisor
 Sophia Lang♦ Assistant Stage Manager
 Willow Keith♦ Assistant Stage Manager
 T.K. Stevens♦ Assistant Properties Supervisor
 Jordan Rousseau Technical Director
 Angelica Ynfante Assistant Technical Director & Scenic Artist
 Cody Harrell Master Carpenter
 Winston Ross♦ Master Electrician
 Christina Vargas♦ Assistant to the Costume Designer
 Sarah Mosher Wig Master & Makeup Supervisor
 Lauren Brown♦ Wardrobe Supervisor
 Marian Barshinger★ House Manager
 Lucas Skjaret★ House Manager
 Ryan Joyner Sound Design Mentor
 JoJo Percy Lighting Design Mentor
 Amanda Slamcik Lassetter Stage Management Mentor

♦ Denotes Undergraduate Student

★ Denotes Graduate Student

The Last Night of Ballyhoo is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.

Figure D.3. First page of the program.

CAST

ADOLPH FREITAG



Jared
Guidry

BOO LEVY



Macy
Lapham

REBA FREITAG



Kalyssa
Smith

LALA LEVY



Katie
Lester

SUNNY FREITAG



Lexi
Stephenson

JOE FARKAS



Connor
Truitt

PEACHY WEIL



Calder
Meis

Figure D.4. Second page of the program.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Jared Guidry (Adolph Freitag) is a Junior BFA Performance Major with a concentration in Musical Theatre from Katy, Texas. He was previously seen as Reverend Parris & Judge Sewall in *Abigail/1702*. Jared is a recipient of The Paul Baker Scholarship.

Calder Meis (Peachy Weil) Calder Meis is a Senior BFA Performance Major with a concentration in Musical Theatre from Victoria, Texas. He was last seen as Senator Fipp/Robby the Stock Fish in *Urinetown*, John Brown in *Abigail/1702* and Tim Porter in *The Last Match*. Calder is a recipient of The Margaret C.B. & S. Spencer N. Brown Foundation Endowed Scholarship.

Macy Lapham (Boo Levy) is a Senior BFA Performance Major from Tulsa, Oklahoma. She was previously seen as Ellen in *Wills and Secession*, Margaret Hale/Ann Foster in *Abigail/1702*, and Eurydice in *Antigone*.

Katie Lester (Lala Levy) is a Junior BFA Performance Major from Livingston, Texas. This is her first performance on the Baylor Mainstage.

Kalyssa Smith (Reba Freitag) is a Junior BFA Performance Major with a concentration in Musical Theatre from Honolulu, Hawaii. This is her first performance on the Baylor Mainstage.

Lexi Stephenson (Sunny Freitag) is a Senior BFA Performance Major from Humble, Texas. She was previously seen as Herself in *Sister Suffragettes* and Ruth/Abigail in *Abigail/1702*.

Connor Truitt (Joe Farkas) is a Junior BFA Performance Major with a concentration in Musical Theatre and a Religion Minor from West, Texas. He was previously seen as Billy Boy Bill/Dr. Billeaux in *Urinetown*, Sergei in *The Last Match*, and Musician in *Yerma*. Connor is a recipient of The Baylor Theatre-Drama Scholarship.



Brian Do (Lighting Designer) is a Junior BFA Design & Technology Major from Arlington, Texas. He last served as the Sound Designer for *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* and the Assistant Lighting Designer for *Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*.

Madelyn Fritz (Stage Manager) is a Junior BFA Design & Technology Major from Hutto, Texas. She last served as the Stage Manager for *Wills and Secession*, the Assistant Stage Manager for *Urinetown*, and the Stage Manager for *Abigail/1702*. Madelyn is a recipient of The Dottie Williams Box Endowed Scholarship.

Jessie Rambo (Properties Supervisor & Assistant Scenic Designer) is a Senior BFA Design & Technology Major from College Station, Texas. She last served as the Properties Supervisor for *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Properties Supervisor for *Abigail/1702*, and the Light Board Operator for *The Liar*.

Lindsey Swyers (Sound Designer) is a Senior BFA Design & Technology Major from Douglas, Massachusetts. She last served as the Sound Designer for *Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, the Sound Designer for *Abigail/1702*, and the Co-Sound Designer for [title of show].

Christina Vargas (Assistant to the Costume Designer) is a Senior BFA Design & Technology Major from Houston, Texas. She recently served as the Costume Designer for *Urinetown*, the Asst. Costume Designer for *Ordinary Days*, and the Asst. Stage Manager for *Yerma*.

Piper Vaught (Dramaturg) is a Senior BA Theatre Arts Major from League City, Texas. She last served as the Stage Manager for *Dancing Lessons*, the Stage Manager for *Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, and the Assistant Stage Manager for *Abigail/1702*. Piper is a recipient of The Baylor University Theatre Student Society Endowed Scholarship.

Figure D.5. Third page of the program.

STUDENT PRODUCTION CREWS

Costume and Hair & Makeup

Assistant to the designer: **Christina Vargas**

Wardrobe Supervisor: Lauren Brown

Stitchers: **Piper Vaught, Madelyn Fritz, Isabella Hernandez, Macy Lapham, Kalyssa Smith, Kaitlyn Bailey, Joseph Tully, Emily Arden Seggerman, Khayla Maywether,** Ashley Kate Sanchez, Lexi Stephenson, Dawson Boudreaux, Mitchell Hall, Caleb Howard, Andy Kanz, Sean Kendrick, Camille Ramsey, Ashley Riccardi, Paige Triplett, Sophie Dryden, Liz Honigmann, Willow Keith, Danelle (Danni) Morrow, Andee Roby, Abigail Rodney

Front of House

Marketing: Colin Beaton, Ali, Brady, Alexie Busch, Shane Cearnal, Maddie Cendrick, Bethany Johnson, Macy Johnson, Sanders Markham

Recruitment: **Sara Beth Dowell, Connor Truitt, Ally Varitek**

Music: Hannah Charles, Jared Guidry, Mackenzie Nelson, Rebecca Smith, Eduardo Velez

Lighting and Audio

Light Board Operator: Sam Acey

Sound Board Operator: Lauryn Bedford

Lighting Crew: **Brian Do, Hannah Early, Lindsey Hartgroves, Winston Ross, Emma Smith,** Sam Acey, Basti Allman, David Allsup, Lauryn Bedford, Kennedy Boehning, Lauren Brown, Kayla Bush, James Jackson, Lauren Meece, Hailey Miller, Jaydon Nget, Noah Obando, Nathan Perez, Asia Richards, Christopher Thompson, Piper Vaught

Audio Crew: **RJ Singleton, Lindsey Swyers, Catherine Richard, Emilia McGuinness Getzinger**

Scenery and Props

Scenic Run Crew: Griffin Quinn, Carly Hinson

Scenic Build Crew: **Miquela Lopez, Jarrod Wells, David Smith, David Poynter,** Zane Arterburn, Evelyn Atwell, Marian Gordon, Carly Hinson, Juliana Johnson, Sophia Lang, Mary Martin, Krishna Nair, Stella Pozzouli, Griffin Quinn, Lauren Richards, Winston Ross, Sara Seggerman, Isaac Sutton, Mack Wright, Emily Barnett, Eric Campos, Katie Lester, Liam McGarity, Calder Meis, Rudy Munoz, Jack Norman, David Aubin Smith, Megan Turpin

Props: **Shelby Adams, TK Stevens, Kayla Mae Jou, Jessie Rambo**

Paint: **Izzy Poehlman**

Bold denotes student leader

Figure D.6. Fourth page of the program.

Faculty

DeAnna Toten Beard, MFA, PhD, History, Dramaturgy, Chair
Guilherme Almeida, MM, Musical Theatre
Sally Lynn Askins, MFA, Costume & Makeup Design
Marion Castleberry, PhD, Directing, Dramatic Theory
Lisa Denman, MFA, Directing, Acting, Undergraduate Program Director
Stan Denman, PhD, Directing, Playwriting
Sam Henderson, MFA, Acting, Theatre Generalist
Melissa Johnson, MA, Musical Theatre Voice
David Jortner, PhD, History, Theory, Directing, Graduate Program Director
Ryan Swift Joyner, MFA, Sound Design
Amanda Slamcik Lassetter, MA, Production & Stage Management
Kelly MacGregor, MM, Musical Theatre Voice (Adjunct)
John-Michael Marrs, MFA, Acting
Sarah Mosher, MFA, Costume Design and Technology
JoJo Percy, MFA, Lighting Design
Steven Pounders, MFA, Acting
Lexie Rains, MFA, Musical Theatre Voice
Adam Redmer, MFA, Technical Direction
Jordan Rousseau, MFA, Technical Direction
Brandon Sterrett, MFA, Acting
Michael Sullivan, MFA, Scene Design
Meredith Sutton, MFA, Dance & Choreography
Lauren M. Weber, MFA, MM, Musical Theatre Voice

Staff

Bailey Cole, MFA, Assistant Costume Shop Manager
Renee Cluke, Department Administrative Manager
Breshena Crosby, BFA, Box Office & Marketing Manager
Cody Harrell, BA, Shop Foreman and Master Carpenter
Chad Kennedy, MFA, Administrative Associate
Erin Torkelson, MFA, Costume Shop Manager
Josh Wilson, MFA, Master Electrician
Angelica Ynfante, BFA, Assistant Technical Director & Scenic Artist

Baylor University is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre.

The **Mission of Baylor University** is to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.

The **Mission of the Department of Theatre Arts** is to nurture a close-knit community of intellectually-curious and artistically-daring theatre practitioners while preparing students for future success through liberal arts education and professional training.

Figure D.7. Fifth page of the program.

APPENDIX E

Poster Image



Figure E.1. Promotional poster image.

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