

## ABSTRACT

A Director's Approach to Steve Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*

Rebekah Christine Baker, M.F.A.

Thesis Chairperson: Marion D. Castleberry, Ph.D.

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of Steven Martin's play *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, followed by a detailed description of Rebekah Baker's directorial approach to the work in Baylor University's production, which ran from April 22 to April 27, 2008. Chapter one will provide background information on *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, as well as Steve Martin's life as a comedian, actor, writer, and playwright. Chapter two will present an action analysis of the play, specifically looking at its style, genre, and dramatic structure. Chapter three will discuss design and production choices made within the collaborative artistic process. Chapter four will elaborate the production process from its proposal for the theatre season through to final performance. Chapter five will explore the strengths and weaknesses of the production as well as the work of the director. The thesis will conclude with an evaluation of the overall effect of the production.

A Director's Approach to Steve Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*

by

Rebekah Christine Baker, B.F.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Theater Arts

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Stan C. Denman, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

---

Marion D. Castleberry, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

DeAnna M. Toten Beard, Ph.D.

---

David J. Jortner, Ph.D.

---

Frieda H. Blackwell, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School  
May 2009

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Steve Martin and Picasso at the Lapin Agile*

#### *Introduction*

Steve Martin is arguably one of the best known and most talented comedians, actors, and writers in America. Since the 1960s, Martin has received numerous nominations and awards for his work, including Emmys, Grammys, People's Choice Awards, American Cinematheque Awards, Golden Globes, Lifetime Achievement Awards, and most recently, a Kennedy Center Honor Award recognizing his lifetime of artistic achievements and contributions to American culture. Adding playwright to his long list of titles, including stand-up comedian, actor, screenwriter, author, producer, and musician, Martin took a hiatus from the silver screen in 1993 to write his first play, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. A clever tale about an imagined meeting between Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis at the turn of the twentieth century, the play achieved instant success, receiving rave reviews after premiering in both New York City and Los Angeles in 1995. Since the play's publication in 1996, theatres across the United States have mounted productions in professional, community, and educational venues.

When the opportunity arose for me to direct *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as my thesis production, I did not hesitate to accept the offer. I knew that it would be an exciting yet challenging play on which to work, and that Baylor Theatre's resources could well supply the needs of a production. I also believed that Baylor's audience—patrons and students alike—would enjoy the play's mixture of cerebral wit and light-hearted comedy, as well as its positive and uplifting themes. Just as *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* celebrates three important historical figures that exploded boundaries set in their



respective fields, it also empowers and invites the audience to pursue their own creative potential. I knew that there would be at least one character to whom each audience member could relate, who would remind them that even one person can influence the world thanks to the limitless possibility of the human mind, body, and spirit. The play clearly diminishes any notions that these three masterminds of the twentieth century were born into prominence; Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis had to develop their talents through hard work and creativity. They each had to overcome great obstacles that could have reduced their ability to change the course of history. Instead of letting limitations hold them back, these three men opened themselves up to inspiration, knowing that it would strike when least expected. They used their creative powers with unbounded determination, and successfully ushered in a new mindset for the twentieth century with their ideas and inventions. Inspired by Martin's play, I looked forward to spending a year of graduate school exploring the work through production and written format. I also discovered that no published scholarly work examining Steve Martin or *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* existed, both of which deserved critical analysis. I hoped that my study would mark the beginning of a larger body of scholarly exploration on Martin's works and his influence within the theatre community.

This thesis will explore in five distinct chapters my directorial process for *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. Chapter One will provide background information on Steve Martin, including his biography, inspiration for writing the play, canon of works including *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, and an analysis of critical reviews over major productions. Chapter Two will present an action analysis of the play, a general synthesis of its style and genre, and a thorough investigation of its dramatic structure, given circumstances, and characters. The third chapter will discuss production choices made within the

collaborative artistic process, providing details about the design concept development and how all of the individual designs worked together to create a unified whole. Chapter Four will elaborate the production process from its proposal for the theatre season through auditions, casting, staging, directorial strategies, rehearsals, and performance. The final chapter will explore the strengths and weaknesses of the production as well as my work as the director. The thesis will conclude with an evaluation of the overall effect of the production.

### *Steve Martin*

Steve Martin, though famous for his line in *The Jerk*—"I was born a poor, black child"—was actually born a middle-class white boy in Waco, Texas, in 1945. The son of Glenn Martin, a real estate salesman and aspiring actor, and Mary Lee, a housewife, Martin showed shyness as a child but overcame it by memorizing skits from *The Red Skelton Show* and performing them for friends and family. At age five, Martin and his family moved to Hollywood, California, and at age ten, they relocated to Garden Grove, California, to escape the impending construction of the San Diego Freeway. The decision to move to Garden Grove profoundly influenced Martin's life, as his home was situated just two miles from the newly-opened Disneyland (Martin 31). Until he graduated from high school, Martin worked after school, on weekends, and every summer at the magical theme park. Starting out as a guide-book seller, Martin developed strong showman skills that quickly landed him a job in Merlin's Magic Shop, a popular location inside of Disneyland. There he developed skills like juggling, performing magic tricks, playing the banjo, creating balloon animals, lassoing, and most importantly, entertaining crowds. After high school, Martin attended Santa Ana Junior College. There he took theatre classes that lead him to successfully audition at the Bird Cage

Theatre in Knott's Berry Farm, where he performed in musical comedies and worked on his magic acts. A girlfriend at the Bird Cage Theatre convinced Martin to enroll at Long Beach State University, where he majored in philosophy for three year (71).

In 1967, Martin transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles, switched his major to theatre, and arduously continued working on his comedy writing and stand-up acts. At night, he performed at local comedy clubs, and at age twenty-one, Martin dropped out of school to pursue a stand-up comedy career. Much like the characters Martin wrote in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, he wanted to hone his skills so that when opportunities arose, he would be ready. Martin did not have to wait long. One of his ex-girlfriends, a dancer on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, helped land him a job as a writer for the show, which received an Emmy in 1969. Unfortunately, CBS cancelled the show the next year due to heated political tensions, and Martin lost his first professional job (Martin 105).

Martin continued to write for various shows through his twenties, and even appeared in short stand-up acts during the 1970s on *The Steve Allen Show* and *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*. He could not, however, shake off the need to perform continuously in front of a live audience. He decided to give himself until his thirtieth birthday to make it as a stand-up comedian (Martin 129). Like Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis, Martin must have felt the urgency to establish his career early in his life. Going on the road with his routines, Martin used the stage time as an opportunity to develop his acts. He listened to tapes of his shows with a critical ear, often rethinking his comedic formulas and punch-line timings. As he tightened his act, Martin made it as physical as possible, saying in *Born Standing Up* that "it was true that I couldn't sing or dance, but singing *funny* and dancing *funny* were another matter. All I had to do was free

my mind and start” (140). Already, Martin showed an understanding and reverence for the power of creativity. As the hippie era came to an end, Martin changed his appearance completely by cutting his hair, shaving his beard, putting on a suit, and stripping his act of all political references, which he felt was “a strong act of defiance” (144). Almost overnight, Martin transformed himself, successfully switching from the tail end of one stand-up comedy era to the forefront of a new one (144). Like the three geniuses written in his play, Martin knew that establishing his act as a comedian would entail becoming a leader of new ideas, not a follower. During this time period, right around Martin’s thirtieth year, he had his stand-up comedy breakthrough. As Martin’s acts strengthened, his audiences grew so large that he realized he needed to wear a stark-white suit on stage so that the crowds could see him (169). This clothing became his trademark look for many years, and he even chose a picture of him donning it for his autobiography’s cover.

In 1976, Martin appeared on his first *Saturday Night Live* show, which increased his popularity and opened the floodgates to his comedy career. He recorded two major comedy albums over the next few years, including *Let’s Get Small* (1977) and *A Wild and Crazy Guy* (1978), both of which won Grammys for “Best Comedy Recording.”

Martin’s fame sky-rocketed and in the late seventies he toured the country, performing before crowds of up to 20,000 people. As Martin puts it in his autobiography:

This lightening strike was happening to me, Stephen Glenn Martin, who had started from zero, from a magic act, from juggling in my backyard, from Disneyland, from the Bird Cage, and I was now the biggest concert comedian in show business, ever. I was elated. My success had outstripped my wildest aspirations. (180)

With great fame, however, came intense isolation and complete destruction of privacy.

He had finally achieved the success he sought, and yet, Martin felt dissatisfaction with what he had earned (187). One option remained for him: to start planning his next career

move, one that would foster the longevity of his career while allowing him to maintain social interaction on a regular basis. This decision ironically took him back to the place he had lived at the age of five: Hollywood (188).

In 1977, Martin wrote and starred in his first short film, *The Absent-Minded Waiter*, for which he received an Academy Award nomination. This spurred him to write his first full-length, multi-million dollar film, *The Jerk*, in 1979. Martin explains in *Born Standing Up*:

The world of moviemaking had changed me. Carl Reiner ran a joyful set. Movies were social; stand-up was antisocial. I was not judged everyday by a changing audience. It was fun to have lunches with cast and crew and dream up material in the morning that could be shot seven different ways in the afternoon and evaluated—and possibly perfected—in the editing room months later. The end of a movie is like graduation day, and right or wrong, we felt we had accomplished something wonderful. (192)

In 1979, Martin also published his first book, *Cruel Shoes*. The success of the film and movie emboldened him to try his first serious film, *Pennies from Heaven* (1981), which received mixed reviews. Martin stuck to comedy by writing and playing the leads in three well-received films directed by Rob Reiner: *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1982), *The Man with Two Brains* (1983), and *All of Me* (1984). In 1986 he filmed *Three Amigos!*, the first film in which he served as writer, actor, and producer. His success as writer and actor continued for the next five years with such films as *Roxanne*, a 1987 adaptation of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and *L.A. Story*, a 1991 romantic comedy about a weatherman seeking love guidance from a magical freeway sign. He also starred in popular movies like *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (1988), *Father of the Bride* (1991), and *House Sitter* (1992). In addition to this, Martin wrote comic essays for *The New Yorker* through the 1990s, which now appear in his book *Pure Drivel* (1998). He

also published several books, including *Pure Drivel* (1999), *Shopgirl* (2000), and *The Pleasure of My Company* (2003).

In 1993, Martin tried his hand at writing for the stage. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, a hit on both coasts, was originally scheduled for a six-week run in Los Angeles; the producers, however, extended performances for another nine months due to the play's popularity. In 1996, Martin added to his numerous honors the Outer Critics Circle John Gassner Playwriting Award for *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. Martin published several more plays that year, including *WASP*, *The Zig-Zag Woman*, and *Patter for the Floating Lady*. In 2002 he released an adaptation of Carl Sternheim's play *The Underpants*. This work was also a noted achievement for Martin, running Off-Broadway in 2002 at the Classic Stage Company. Amid Martin's success as a new playwright, he did not completely switch careers. Martin remained connected to the film world, continuing to write and star in films like *Bowfinger* (1999), *Bringing Down the House* (2003), *Shopgirl* (a 2005 adaptation of his bestselling novella), and *The Pink Panther* (2006). He also played leading roles in films like *Mixed Nuts* (1994), *Father of the Bride II* (1995), *Sgt. Bilko* (1996), and *Cheaper by the Dozen* (2003 and the sequel in 2005). In 2001 and 2003, Martin hosted the Academy Awards, and in 2005 he received the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. His autobiography, *Born Standing Up*, instantly became a New York bestseller upon release in 2007. In 2008, Martin continued his work in cinema with a supporting role in the comedy hit *Baby Mama*, and now in 2009, he plans to release *Pink Panther II*. From all indication, it appears that Steve Martin does not intend to leave the spotlight anytime soon.

Throughout his career as a stand-up comedian, actor, screenwriter, author, producer, and playwright, Martin has assuredly marked his place in history as one of the

most talented and famous Americans of the twenty-first century. Like the main characters of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, he had to overcome many obstacles to achieve his dreams. He had to push the boundaries limiting him and re-think ideas with new perspectives. Martin put it best: “I think I did pretty well, considering I started out with nothing but a bunch of blank paper” (qtd. in [www.compleatsteve.com](http://www.compleatsteve.com)).

### *Influences*

No one is born into success. It takes years of hard work, ingenuity, and sacrifice to develop one’s talents. It also requires the influence of many people and experiences. Martin’s autobiography clarifies precisely who and what directly affected his life. Without a doubt, all of his influences pushed him to develop certain skills, even if he lacked an affinity for them. As Martin puts it in his autobiography, “I was not naturally talented—I didn’t sing, dance, or act—though working around that minor detail made me inventive” (3).

Martin’s father had one of the biggest impacts on his life. Although his father, Glenn, aspired to have an acting career, he never pursued a vocation in the arts as it made life too unstable for a family of four. Instead, Glenn worked in the real estate business, and his son did not know about his interest in show business until he was an adult (Martin 16). Martin discusses his relationship with his father in detail, which to him stayed incredibly strained throughout his entire childhood and most of his adulthood. As he describes in *Born Standing Up*: “the number of funny or caring words that passed between my father and me was few... in our house, my mother was called Mama, but my father was always called Glenn” (20). Martin writes that his father’s enraged silences in the home developed out of a bitterness that “as his show business dream slipped further into the sunset, he chose to blame his family, who needed food, shelter, and attention”

(27). Throughout Martin's entire career, from his magic acts to his stand-up comedy and even through his movie career, his father never seemed impressed with his accomplishments, driving Martin to work even harder. Glenn even wrote a bad review of his son in a local newsletter after Martin's first appearance on *Saturday Night Live* (177). However, Martin writes in his autobiography that in the 1990s his father's attitude toward him softened, and the one thing he did praise was Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. He not only bragged about his son's play to others, he also told Martin that he should have won the Pulitzer Prize for his work. On his deathbed, Martin's father finally expressed his affection to his son, admitting that he loved him and that he felt proud of everything he had accomplished. Martin describes the experience with his father: "'I did it for you,' I said. Then we wept for the lost years. I was glad that I didn't say the more complicated truth: 'I did it *because* of you'" (Martin 197). Clearly, Martin's need for his father's approval drove him into performance, if mostly subconsciously. He could not overcome his father's emotional neglect, and he saw himself as the pariah in the family. Perhaps he developed and wrote comedic characters as an avenue to controlling the world around him. Whatever the case, Martin needed something in his life to fill the perceived void left by his father. As Martin states in *Born Standing Up*: "I have heard it said that a complicated childhood can lead to a life in the arts. I tell you this story of my father and me to let you know I am qualified to be a comedian" (29).

The second biggest influence in Martin's life was his family's move to Garden Grove, California, when he was five years old. Living only two miles from Disneyland, Martin rode his bike there every day for eight years. Starting out as a guide-book seller at age ten, Martin took "25 cents per book, with the norm being about 50 books per day. But, quickly learning the relentless cheeriness necessary (something else that would serve



him well later), Steve [Martin] far outdid the norm. One day he sold 625” (Wills par. 4). Since Martin only sold guidebooks in the morning, he had free admission to the park for the rest of the day, where he roamed the streets, enjoyed the rides, played the arcade games, and most importantly, watched the showmen. One of the great performers he admired, Wally Boag, was the first comedian he ever saw in person. Boag revealed a trade of showy skills like gun twirling and balloon-animal making, which Martin watched from the audience. He soaked up Boag’s showmanship qualities and memorized his timing, even silently saying the punch lines with him. As Martin states: “I studied where the big laughs were, learned how Willy [Boag] got the small ones, and saw tiny nuances that kept the thing alive between lines” (Martin 36). Martin even admits that his childhood fantasy was that one day Boag would be sick with the flu and that he would have to step in as his last-minute replacement. This experience proved critical to Martin, as in his mind, it served as the introduction to his future career.

Another influence at Disneyland, one that would train Martin in some of his trademark talents, was Merlin’s Magic Shop. Apprenticing under Jim Barlow, Martin memorized magic routines and spent eight hours a day behind the counter shuffling cards, manipulating trick decks, and performing ball-and-cup tricks (39). In the magic shop, Martin also discovered joke props like the arrow-through-the-head and the fake nose glasses, which would later become recognized as synonymous with Martin’s comedy. As Martin polished his magic tricks, he became aware of his potential, and started performing outside of Disneyland in amateur magic shows. Studying Dariel Fitzkee’s *Showmanship for Magicians*, Martin followed the book’s advice and scrupulously took notes after each of his own performances, recording how each gag played and what he could do to improve. Many people praised Fitzkee’s book, written in the 1940s, as an

important contribution to the theory of magic. According to Fitzkee, one of the most important elements to note in comedy is that “people are interested in PEOPLE. They are more interested in PEOPLE than in the things people do” (141). Knowing Martin’s works, this idea stands out as one of the major qualities to his comedy routines and writings. Martin seems to focus on the human mind, body, and spirit as the core of his works instead of centering on people’s actions. One of the most important ideas he discovered through Fitzkee’s book and his work in the Magic Shop was that the audiences loved it when the tricks failed (Martin 51). From this revelation, Martin developed what his friend and fellow comic actor Rick Moranis dubbed as his “anti-comedy act” (146). This ironic, playful type of comedy focused on setting up a formula for a joke, building to the climax, and then intentionally twisting the punch line so that the gag either ended abruptly or veered off in a completely different direction. Martin’s development of this concept proved pivotal to his success as a comedian, and also connects him back to the main characters written in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as, like them, he willingly took risks and explored new frontiers in his field.

Martin also discovered music in California. At age eighteen, Martin says he realized that he had no gifts for anything: “I could not sing or dance, and the only acting I did was really just shouting. Thankfully, perseverance is a great substitute for talent” (Martin 53). Hearing Earl Scrugg’s “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” motivated Martin to learn to play the banjo. Playing Scrugg’s record at half-speed, he taught himself how to pick along. So as not to antagonize everyone in the house, Martin exiled himself to his car, practicing the banjo with the windows rolled up. He continued to pursue his goal even in the dead heat of August. Although Martin started out with no strong musical talent, he excelled as a banjo player over time. His creativity and determination helped

him succeed, which is just what he encourages in others through *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. Martin incorporated the banjo and other musical instruments into his stand-up routines, as well as into songs like “You Belong to Me” in *The Jerk* and “My Little Buttercup” in *Three Amigos!*. In 2002, Martin and Earl Scruggs received a Grammy for their banjo performance of “Foggy Mountain Breakdown,” and in 2004, the Library of Congress added that recording to the National Recording Registry.

Martin’s study of philosophy and logic became another major influence in his career. While majoring in philosophy for three years at Long Beach State University, Martin read the novel *The Razor’s Edge* by W. Somerset Maugham, an innovative story about a young man seeking enlightenment. Martin felt inspired by the book to set out on his own personal quest to find “universal, final, unquestionable knowledge” (Martin 65). He explains further in *Born Standing Up*: “I was swept up in the book’s glorification of learning and the idea that, like a stage magician, I could have secrets possessed only by a few” (65). Martin’s philosophy courses opened his eyes to the world of possibility, and he indulged himself in what he calls “over-thinking” (72). One day, it occurred to Martin that he needed to drop his old comedy act, which he had mostly lifted from other performers’ routines, and come up with all original material. Newly self-aware, Martin scrutinized his daily activities. He writes about his epiphany:

‘I laugh in life,’ I thought, ‘so why not observe what it is that makes me laugh?’ And if I did spot something that was funny, I decided not to just describe it as happening to someone else, but to translate it into the first person, so it was happening *to me*. A guy didn’t walk into a bar, I did. I didn’t want it to appear that others were nuts; I wanted it to appear that *I* was nuts. (Martin 73)

Martin appears to have taken Fitzkee’s writings about the importance of focusing on people to a new level; in that way, the audience could feel enough emotional distance from the gags to appreciate their humor. As Martin developed his new approach to

comedy, he discovered another idea: the value of contradicting logic and illogic. Studying word games by Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Martin was fascinated that Carroll's syllogisms could be completely rational and yet still maintain a sense of the ridiculous. Martin explains:

In philosophy, I started studying logic, and they were talking about cause and effect, and you start to realize, 'Hey, there is no cause and effect! There is no logic! There is no anything!' Then it gets easy to write stuff, because all you have to do is twist everything hard—you twist the punch line, you twist the non-sequitur so hard away from the things that set it up, that it's easy... and it's thrilling. (qtd. in Fong-Torres 293)

In studying Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, one can see the connection between his philosophical discovery and the ideas in his work. The biggest example in the play exists in the appearance of the visitor from the future. This moment takes the audience off-guard, as Martin turns the entire plot on its head and introduces a character completely out of the realm of the determined boundaries of the play. Leading up to the moment, the characters all appear to co-exist in the same time period: the dawn of the twentieth century. Once the Singer enters, the play tosses out ideas of logic as it climaxes to the end.

One last influence is Martin's love of art. As he toured the country on his stand-up circuit, Martin often visited modern art museums, viewing works by artists like Paul Cezanne, Henri Matisse, Andy Warhol, and Salvador Dalí. Martin also first experienced a personal art collection in his twenties. Walking through his girlfriend's father's house, Martin viewed political art by artists such as William Hopper, Raphael Soyer, Moses Soyer, and Jack Levine covering the walls. This occasion, Martin claims, inclined him toward the value of owning art (Martin 93). Today, he is an avid art collector, particularly of modern American paintings, and a trustee of the Los Angeles Museum of Art. Martin's personal collection has included works by artists like Georgia O'Keefe,

Willem de Kooning, Edward Hopper, and Pablo Picasso. In 2005, Martin pledged over one million dollars to The Huntington Library of San Marino, California, for the museum's American art collection. In fact, one particular art piece painted by Picasso in 1905, *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass* (see fig. A.1), inspired Martin to write *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*.

### *Inspiration for Picasso at the Lapin Agile*

The story of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* focuses on the imagined meeting of three geniuses of the twentieth century: Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, and the "Singer," presumed to be Elvis Presley. Coincidentally, the first two men, Einstein and Picasso, meet one evening in 1904 at a Parisian bar named The Lapin Agile, or The Nimble Rabbit. The men argue over which one of them will prove more important to the future of the world: Einstein, the scientist, or Picasso, the artist. After much debate, the men realize that they each have important contributions to make to the world. They also discover that art and science are not as different as they think. Both men rely on their abilities to think beyond the traditional boundaries of their respective fields and to create where necessity makes room for invention. Just as Einstein and Picasso discover their connection to each other, the Singer from the future appears, whispering in their ears that the time to create has come. In a flash, Picasso dreams of his future painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (see fig. A.2), which will be his first work in the revolutionary style of Cubism. In the final moments of the play, the three men transport to the edge of the universe, where they see their names written among the stars. In this moment, they know that they will succeed in their endeavors to influence ideas related to the new century.

Like the three geniuses of the play, Martin felt inspired to create something new. In 1993, the opportunity arose, and Martin took it. He explains in an interview with *Believer Magazine* his inspiration to write the play: “I remember being in New York and seeing a comic play and I thought, ‘I should be able to do that. I’ve written screenplays and I’ve performed live.’ So I started fooling around, writing my first play, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*” (par. 8). On a break between movies, Martin sat down to write the play and felt surprise at how easily it came to him. The sense of peace he found in playwriting might explain his ease: “With a play I don’t have to be afraid that I just blew \$25 million of someone else’s money. When I write a screenplay, the premise is get in, get out, and don’t stop to say anything. But a play is anything you can get away with” (qtd. in Kroll par. 2).

Martin was also experiencing an emotionally rough divorce at the time of writing the play. As Martin explains, he needed a way to express something on a deeper level:

This play really changed my personal life. Without it, I would be, you know, still reading scripts, maybe writing scripts. I burned out on that, and the play actually revitalized my interest in screen writing, gave me a new perspective on it and a new way to do it in a way. It also kind of renewed my soul. You know, it gave me a boost in a place where I never thought I would get a boost. (qtd. in *Accent Magazine* par. 22)

Much like Einstein and Picasso in his play, Martin found that the timing was right, the inspiration was there, and the need to create the work was great.

Martin’s fascination with Picasso began long before 1993. As he writes on his personal website: “I went to the Metropolitan and there’s Picasso’s painting of the Lapin Agile [The Nimble Rabbit]. I thought of that picture’s journey from that little bar to the Met some 40 million dollars later” (par. 2). That seed of interest blossomed years later when Martin began to pen his ideas. As he wrote, the idea to create the character of Einstein suddenly occurred to him; Martin had not originally planned for the famous

scientist to be in the script. Martin researched Einstein's background and decided that it made perfect sense for him to exist in the world of the play. He finished *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* in a fairly short period of time and invited friends to do a first reading of the script and share their ideas. With top box-office stars Tom Hanks and Chris Sarandon voicing the lead roles, Martin felt encouraged by the informal reading and decided to pursue a nine day workshop of the play at the Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne, Australia. The workshop ended with two public staged readings. That same year, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* premiered at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois, as the inaugural production of the Steppenwolf Studio Theatre. The show received rave reviews and then enjoyed a successful nine-month run in Los Angeles at the Westwood Playhouse (now known as the Geffen Playhouse). It finally made its way to New York City where it played Off-Broadway at the Promenade Theatre in 1995. All of these productions received favorable reviews and in 1996 Martin earned the John Gassner Outer Critics Circle Playwriting Award for his work.

### *The Connection between Picasso and Einstein*

As Arthur I. Miller writes in *Einstein/Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty That Causes Havoc*: "Albert Einstein and Pablo Picasso, exemplars of genius, inspiration for generations of artists and scientists, are icons of the twentieth century" (1). By Martin choosing to include them in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, he amplifies the connection between the two historical men and the significance of their innovations. What makes their association even more interesting is that Picasso and Einstein both presented their new ideas and works within a few years of each other; in 1905 Einstein published his revolutionary Theory of Relativity papers and in 1907 Picasso painted his first Cubistic work, *Les Femmes d'Alger*. These inventions ushered in the twentieth century,

along with the ideas and standards of modern art and science. Miller captures their significance: “Relativity and *Les Demoiselles* represent the responses of two people—Einstein and Picasso, although geographically and culturally separated—to the dramatic changes sweeping across Europe like a tidal wave” (2). Before discussing the relationship between the two geniuses’ works, I must explain the historical meaning of each contribution.

Picasso’s painting, *Les Demoiselle d’Avignon*, changed the way the world looked at art. Before his revolutionary work, he and other artists still painted with one viewpoint in mind. Most art was an attempt to capture reality, though with the discovery of African art and the numerous developments in science, technology, and mathematics, “ideas were in the air and so was the desire for change” (Miller 3). In *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Picasso painted five naked prostitutes grouped together in different poses. What made the work so different was the simultaneousness of the viewpoints. Painted with a cube-like pattern, the women appeared multi-dimensional. Through this famous work, Picasso re-imagined the women’s images from multiple perspectives, making their sum the complete understanding of the object. His ideas shocked the artistic world, and immediately a new movement called Cubism developed which spread and remained vital until Surrealism gained popularity in 1919.

Almost at the same time, Einstein initiated a scientific revolution with the publication of his papers on relativity. These papers essentially recognized that the speed of light remains constant in a vacuum, which makes it an absolute physical boundary for motion ([www.allaboutscience.org](http://www.allaboutscience.org) par 1). Einstein’s relativity concept also stated that objects moved slower and shortened in length from the point of view of an observer on Earth, which eventually led to the discovery of the “curved space-time continuum” (par.



2). Previous physics rested on Newton's ideas, which hypothesized that gravity worked through empty space. Einstein's theory clarified Newton's idea by showing that as objects continued to move in a straight line in space-time, we observed the motion as acceleration because of the curved nature of space-time (par. 4). This development, like Picasso's work, caught the attention of people all over the world, and still maintains power even today. As Miller explains it in his book: "Page for page, Einstein's relativity paper is unparalleled in the history of science in its depth, breadth, and sheer intellectual virtuosity... It remains an excellent source from which to learn relativity theory" (193).

In looking at the power of both men's contributions, one must understand the value of their connection. According to Miller, "in the intellectual atmosphere of 1905 it is not surprising that Einstein and Picasso began exploring new notions of space and time almost coincidentally... Picasso and Einstein believed that art and science are means for exploring worlds beyond perception, beyond appearances" (4). With ideas about the fourth dimension crossing the world, Picasso and Einstein worked in two different fields exploring essentially the same ideas about perceived realities, viewpoints, and dimensions. Undoubtedly, both men felt that their fields lacked answers, and they sought new ways of exploring space and time. This same point seems to be at the core of Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. As he inverts the ending of the play with the Singer's entrance, he completely destroys all notions of single dimensionality, changing all of the pre-conceived notions built by the world of the play up to that point. Through this format, Martin depicts a Modern world as seen through the prism of an emerging postmodern viewpoint.

### Picasso at the Lapin Agile in Martin's Canon

To understand *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* better requires an examination of the play's characters, plots, and themes within the context of Martin's larger body of work, including his screenplays, books, and stage plays. This proves a difficult task as Martin has such a wide range of works in so many media. Undoubtedly, Martin's works all carry a sense of the comic spirit. To understand this better, one must articulate exactly what defines "comedy." According to Northrop Frye's essay "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," "the structure of the play in turn depends on the category of the play; if it is a comedy, its structure will require a comic resolution and a prevailing comic mood" (171). Although I will elaborate the comedic style of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* in detail in the next chapter, a widespread comedic spirit permeates most of Martin's works, including his screenplays (*The Jerk*, *¡Three Amigos!*, *Roxanne*, *L.A. Story*, *Bowfinger*), books (*Cruel Shoes*, *The Pleasure of My Company*, *Pure Drivel*), and stage plays (*Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, *WASP*, *The Zig-Zag Lady*, *Patter for the Floating Lady*, *The Underpants*). Almost all of the works in Martin's canon follow Frye's definition of comedy, which he formed through extensive study of plays written throughout history. Frye explains what most typically happens in comedy: "a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted in some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will" (163). Usually a movement occurs, according to Frye, from one kind of society to another, with the newest form crystallizing around the hero. All of the hero's actions focus on overcoming his obstacles, and when he achieves his goal, a ritual or ceremony marks the occasion. Although Martin tends to take artistic freedom with this basic formula, often coloring his

works with contemporary themes, unexpected twists, and deflated comedic endings, he certainly has a proclivity for employing traditional elements of comedy.

The first part of the comedy formula is the pursuit of a woman by a man. Without a doubt, Martin's works almost exclusively explore relationships between men and women. He has a clear fascination with relationships between opposite sexes, though he does not appear to have one particular stance on the material. Instead, Martin investigates through his writings the different relationship choices people make and the effects of those decisions. In *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Martin explores several male-female relationships, including those between Picasso and Suzanne, Picasso and Germaine, Germaine and Freddy, Einstein and the Countess, Schmendiman and the Female Admirer, and Germaine and the Singer. The most prominent male-female relationships explored center around the love triangle formed between Suzanne, Picasso, and Germaine. This triangle is further complicated by Germaine's relationship with Freddy, which appears unsteady at best.

The first relationship of the triangle, between Suzanne and Picasso, is based completely on lust. Picasso's romantic demeanor and artistic abilities invigorate Suzanne. She loves the idea of being his muse. Though she pretends to be heart-broken by Picasso's inattention, she thoroughly enjoys the cat-and-mouse game they play and the way that Picasso titillates her. In this relationship, Martin explores a shallow, lust-filled interaction between a man and a woman, and in this case, how the man dominates the woman.

Another complex relationship explored involves Picasso and Germaine. Although Germaine pursues Picasso sexually, she is unsatisfied but uses the relationship to feel powerful. Upon examination, the relationship between Germaine and Picasso is different

from the one between Picasso and Suzanne. Although both are sexual, Germaine evinces an intense longing to have something deeper with a man. It is clear that Martin is interested in what is occurring between Picasso and Germaine, even if he never fully resolves it. In the end, Martin's play focuses on the investigation of relationships and not the explanation of how they function or how they get resolved.

The same could be said about several of Martin's other works. *L.A. Story*, one of Martin's best-known films, focuses on a young man led by a magical freeway sign to pursue the woman he loves. Unfortunately, the woman takes a weekend trip with her ex-husband to see if they can work things out. Martin's main character, depressed about the situation, decides to spend the weekend with a girl he barely knows to keep his mind occupied. Unknowingly, the two couples book adjoining rooms in a hotel, and each couple hears the other couple having sex. The next morning, the main characters find each other outside their rooms and realize what has happened. At first they feel betrayed, but soon they realize that the sex meant nothing and that they really love each other. *L.A. Story*, then, follows Frye's basic comedic formula, resolving the love story with a happy ending.

*Shopgirl*, Martin's novella-turned-screenplay, ends satisfactorily but not with the happy ending expected. This movie portrays a young woman named Mirabelle in her quest for requited love. She has two men in her life, and though she loves the older man, she cannot be with him as he does not love her back. Finally, she finds love with the younger man, whose journey to maturity has made him perfect for Mirabelle. Again, Martin appears to enjoy the journey of the male-female relationships without necessarily making a particular point on the matter.

Martin's farcical adaptation of Carl Sternheim's *The Underpants* takes yet another perspective on relationships, and like *Shopgirl*, tells the story through the eyes of the female protagonist. Louise, the main character, accidentally shows her underpants in public, and now four men want her. In a passionless marriage, Louise decides to have a secret affair with one of the men. She desperately wants to feel love, and thinks that sex will help her. When the object of her affection sleeps with another woman, Louise realizes that he only wanted a sexual relationship with her and not true intimacy. Through this, Louise discovers her inner-strength, and that the ability to love has always existed within her.

*WASP*, Martin's one-act play published in 1996, explores relationships between genders in yet another way. Set in the 1950s during the height of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, the play satirically exposes stereotyping, emotional repression, and gender inequality connected to the period. This work, along with the rest of Martin's canon, provides an example of the author's affinity for exploring connections and disconnections between the two genders. Martin does not appear to use the writings as a venue for morals or messages; instead, he seems to have more interest in the investigation.

Besides fulfilling Frye's comedic formula, Martin's works also have archetypal characters discussed in "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy." The first and most prominent is what I label as the "Outsider Man." This character, usually the hero of the comedy, exists outside of accepted society, and the plot focuses on his actions to create a new social order that centers on him. The "Outsider Man" typically lives as an underdog, and the audience sympathizes with him even though he appears flawed. Both Picasso and Einstein in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* embody the "Outsider Man" character type. The

characters, though famous later in their lives, are on the cusps of their brilliant careers in the play. They are still undiscovered, which shows in the place that they choose to spend their time: an unimportant, bedraggled bar for artists and free-thinkers. Paris' highest and most prestigious social circles do not accept them; instead, they fling the character to the outskirts of Montmartre, virtually penniless and nameless. Martin shows how these outsiders, Picasso and Einstein, overcome their shunned existence by presenting their gifts to society. Einstein explains in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*:

Let's say Picasso here is a genius. The century is just flying along in space and it whizzes by Picasso here and it picks up speed and it flings itself off in a new direction. Like a comet veering toward the sun. The century is just zigzagging along, bending and curving, influenced by the powerful gravity of people like Picasso. (45)

At the end of the play, Picasso and Einstein see their names written in the stars, and they realize that their contributions will make a difference in the twentieth century. The play ends with the other characters gathering to toast the men, thus forming a new society that accepts and honors them.

Martin's *The Pleasure of My Company* also highlights the journey of a man outside of accepted society. In this novel, a highly intelligent man named Daniel Pecan Cambridge struggles with his extreme phobias. He cannot cross the street unless he is at a crosswalk, he knows exactly how many steps it is to the Rite-Aid, and he must have 1125 watts of light burning in his apartment at all times. To most people in society, Daniel does not even exist because his deep fears preclude him from being social. He often looks out his apartment window at the world, the perfect image of a man stuck outside of society. As the book progresses, Daniel helps a young woman and child seeking shelter from an abusive man. The young boy teaches Daniel how to relinquish his fears, and as he does so, he discovers love with a Rite Aid pharmacist. At the end of the book, Daniel

has a poignant moment where he looks back at his old apartment window from the street and realizes that he is part of a new society, one that includes his girlfriend and their new baby girl.

Martin investigates this character type through several other works, sometimes taking the character to the extreme level of rejection. The “Cyrano” character in *Roxanne*, who desperately loves a woman he fears will shun him for his oversized nose, embodies the shunned man. Martin’s character “Navin” from *The Jerk* also stands outside of society until he invents eye glasses that perch on the bridge of the nose. At that point, Navin’s fame and fortune rise considerably, only to be lost again when people sue him over a defect in the glasses. All seems hopeless until his family joins around him and shows him their true love. All three of the main characters in Martin’s *Three Amigos!* exemplify the ousted man, as they all once enjoyed fame but now experience rejection by the film industry. These ex-stars use their acting abilities to save a small Mexican village from an evil dictator, thus redeeming their honor and gaining esteem in the eyes of the village. In all of these works, clearly Martin understands and intentionally includes males deemed unworthy by society who, through their journeys, reverse their fates and become the heroes of new societies.

Martin also writes with a clear fascination for the power of creativity. In almost all of his works, the main characters explore and express themselves creatively, which generally becomes a turning point in their journeys. In *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Picasso’s moment of recognition is clear. The Singer reveals *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* to him because Picasso has opened himself up to the moment of inspiration. Through the play, Martin reveals the importance of preparing for moments of insight.

Martin also reflects the idea of creativity in other works, including Navin's glasses invention in *The Jerk*, and the ex-movie stars' hair-brained schemes to save the town in *Three Amigos!*. *The Pleasure of My Company* also reveals Martin's interest in the creative spirit as Daniel brilliantly invents complex number puzzles to help him make order out of chaos. In all of his works, Martin shows a profound desire to explore the human capacity for creativity, which he explores particularly in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. As Martin celebrates the three geniuses of the play, he ideally invites the audience to reflect on their own capacities and to seek their own moments of inspiration.

#### *Picasso at the Lapin Agile and Contemporary Theatre*

Critics have compared Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* to one contemporary play in particular, Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*. Comparing these two plays proves important as one can identify stylistic and thematic parallels, which in turn help overall understanding of each play. First produced in 1974, *Travesties* was revived at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1993, the same year that Martin wrote *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. In many ways, the plays appear similar in format. First, they both depict meetings of important historical men. In *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Einstein, Picasso, and Elvis meet one extraordinary 1904 evening in Paris. In *Travesties*, Lenin, Tristan Tzara, and James Joyce all meet in Zurich in 1917. The playwrights of both works, however, have no documentation to prove that these gatherings ever took place. They are completely fictionalized, and neither Martin nor Stoppard appears concerned with capturing an historical event. Instead, the writers take complete artistic liberties in the depictions of the historical characters and the events that take place. The question to ask at this point: what can we learn from this choice? Although we cannot completely know the playwrights' intents, it appears that Stoppard and Martin want to use the characters as



conduits for bigger ideas and concepts about art, literature, science, sociology, aesthetics, and humanity. They do not desire their works to read as historical accounts, but rather as fantastical opportunities to study humanity on a grander scale. Neither of the plays are specifically “about” their main characters; that idea is too small for their scale of study.

Although the plays appear to have similar formats, the two authors have completely different writing styles. According to critics, Stoppard’s writing abilities shine in *Travesties*. The characters’ words take the form of dialogue, puns, limericks, or vaudeville songs. These linguistic forms also merge with specific dialogue from Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As Stoppard’s characters Carr and Tzara argue over Gwendolyn, another character in the play, they break into *Earnest*-inspired conversation:

CARR. That was extravagant of you, since the ticket does not belong to you. It is made out in the name of Mr. Jack Tzara, and your name isn’t Jack, its Tristan.

TZARA. No, it isn’t. It’s Jack.

CARR. You have always told me it was Tristan. I have introduced you to everyone as Tristan. You answer to the name of Tristan. Your notoriety at the Meierie Bar is firmly associated with the name Tristan. It is perfectly absurd saying your name isn’t Tristan. (45)

Martin wrote *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, on the other hand, completely in dialogue format, making it a bit more realistic than Stoppard’s *Travesties*. Martin uses the character’s dialogue to express their ideas, while Stoppard’s characters stumble over the dialogue without the ability to ever fully articulate what they mean. In this way, *Travesties* takes linguistic unraveling a step beyond *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, making Stoppard’s play borderline absurdist. This type of work shows that life has no meaning, especially through the loss of language. Theatre of the Absurd is typically associated with Samuel Beckett works and the existentialist movement of popular in the mid-1900s. As Stoppard’s play continues, the dialogue interrupts and restarts often, with Tzara

speaking in a nonsensical Dadaist manner and all of the characters breaking into rhyming, illogical poetry. In this way, Stoppard completely disassociates meaning from language. At the end of *Travesties*, an intentional ironic twist solidifies the loss of inherent meaning and the play devolves into chaos.

Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, however, does not follow the path of absurdism. Unusually hopeful, the work is not nihilistic like most absurdist plays. Although the dialogue is quick and playful, using carefully constructed puns and illogical twists, it is never lost to complete annihilation. In fact, Martin's thematically-structured play requires that the entire work be brought together through language in the final moments of the play. When hope is revealed to the characters during their moment in the stars, Martin's positive message to the audience comes through: great potential exists in humanity.

### *Critical Reviews*

In order to provide framework for Baylor University's production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, one must assess previous production reviews. These evaluations, made by professional theatre critics, highlight the strengths and limitations of any given text, ideally allowing the director to understand the differences between problems in the script and those that arose out of a specific production.

Although almost all reviewers agree that Martin's play is highly entertaining, the most prominent critique of the play claims that it lacks a clearly defined plot. Russ Hunt's review of the 2001 Theatre New Brunswick production makes this point:

It wasn't long before I began to wonder, even in the midst of some pretty funny dialogue, what was at stake here, what anyone wanted and couldn't get or what we, as an audience, were supposed to be expecting or hoping for. Although the play had many of the makings, it didn't seem to have what we've agreed they need ever since Aristotle: a plot. It became

apparent that what we were going to get was, well, more clever laughs.  
(par. 5)

He also writes that “even though I was admiring the performances of the secondary characters, I was beginning to worry about what Steve Martin was demanding of them... had Martin been a better stage crafter, this could have easily been a five- or six-character play” (par. 6). Other critics agree, including Vincent Canby of the *New York Times*. He writes that “Martin’s play is more like an extended sketch from the long-ago golden age of ‘Saturday Night Live.’ Although there are plenty of good gags, it sometimes seems as if no routine is too obvious or irrelevant to be met at the Lapin Agile” (par. 6). Canby goes on to address other concerns, including his belief that Einstein steals focus from the main character in the play despite Picasso’s name in the title, that the end of the play loses focus, and that the breakdown of the fourth wall convention (the invisible wall separating the audience and the actors) confuses the audience.

As mentioned above, several reviewers compare Martin’s play to Tom Stoppard’s *Travesties*. Hunt writes that “the bottom line is that Steve Martin isn’t another Woody Allen—and certainly not another Tom Stoppard, in whose tradition of clever historical drama *Picasso* was obviously written.” He adds, however, that “it’s still a pretty fine soufflé of an evening” (par. 2). Canby of the *New York Times* states that the two plays appear similar in format but are different in just about every other way: “‘Travesties’ is a high comedy... ‘Picasso at the Lapin Agile’ has the carefully cultivated slapdash manner of the television comedy of today, when nothing that stands half a chance of getting a laugh is judged impertinent” (par. 6). Jeremy Gerard’s critique of the off-Broadway Promenade Theatre production also points to the similarity between *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *Travesties*:

Martin's gift for punnery and zingers—not to mention farce and polemic—can only shadow Stoppard's, but it's real enough [...] 'Picasso at the Lapin Agile' has the virtues, seldom seen these days, of an old-fashioned matinee comedy: there are plenty of laughs, a little romance, a little nostalgia—and it makes the audience feel smart. Nice trick. (par. 6)

All three reviewers point out that Martin's play represents a completely different type of theatre from Stoppard's. However, they all seem to agree with Canby that “when [Martin's] on target, which is most of the time, his comedy is very good fun” (par. 9).

Martin's use of language and wit garners praise from all critics. Even Canby admits that “among the commonplace gags, Mr. Martin has also created a number of moments of real humor and wit... Mr. Martin's manner is to so mix the sublime with the ridiculous that they can't be disentangled. Yet he knows how to write” (par. 15).

Kathryn Osenlund concurs, writing in her *Curtain Up* review that “Martin has a ball with the dialogue and he throws around a lot of funny material, both lightweight and nearly bordering on profound” (par. 5). Most critics find the exchange of dueling pens between Picasso and Einstein in the middle of the play to be Martin's wittiest moment in the play. As Osenlund states, “it's understandable that this play has broken attendance records. But it was a play before its time in '93. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is a perfect little play for the start of the new century” (par. 8).

Of course, every play has inherent problems. No play reaches perfection, and though some reviewers expressed concern with the structure of the play, no critics labeled it a complete failure. In fact, even the reviewers who made negative comments about the work had to admit that there were positive aspects to Martin's writing, including his witty banter. Although a director cannot always specifically address writing issues within the work, there were a few concerns expressed by critics that must be taken into consideration while mounting a production. With the noted lack of plot and mix of

outrageous characters, there were a few productions critiqued for their frantic, disorderly pacing. Perhaps the directors of those productions tried to have high energy on stage to make up for the winding plot. In contrast, some productions received positive reviews in the lighthearted, graceful comedy played by the actors. In these reviews, the productions did not appear to force what Kathleen Foley calls a “pell-mell pacing” (par.5). Instead, the ensembles approached the work with ease, keeping a controlled but tight pace. The astute director takes these reviewers’ comments into serious consideration in order to avoid the mistakes of previous directors. By acknowledging potential pitfalls in the script and previous productions at the beginning of the process, the director is better prepared to deal with them as they arise, and hopefully to overcome them.

### *Conclusion*

Steve Martin is arguably one of America’s greatest writers, comedians, and actors. Growing up in Garden Grove, California, Martin encountered many influences that shaped his life, including his experience working at Disneyland and his tumultuous relationship with his father. He decided early in his life that he was going to pursue show business, teaching himself various skills—playing the banjo, singing, dancing, and acting—even though he admits that he lacked the natural talent for them. This penchant for creativity helped Martin through his stand-up comedy and movie careers, and finally led him to write his first play in 1993, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. This comedy, a success in both New York City and Los Angeles, received both praise and criticism for various elements of the play and its productions. The next chapter will provide a brief plot synopsis of the play as well as a breakdown of the play’s dramatic structure, style, given circumstances, characters, and themes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *An Analysis of Picasso at the Lapin Agile*

#### *Introduction*

In forming the directorial framework for a production, the director must study the play in detail. This intellectual preparation is essential to finding the core of the play, which in turn helps the director in creating a well-conceived production. For *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, the analysis process proved difficult due to the dearth of established critical analyses of Steve Martin's works. This provided, however, a freedom of interpretation associated with the lack of scholarly publications. This chapter will present an action analysis of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as well as a concise investigation of each of its features, including the play's dramatic structure, genre and style, given circumstances, and characters.

#### *Action Analysis*

According to James Thomas' book *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, "the easiest and most accessible grasp of a play is through an analysis of the events of its plot" (2). *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* runs about ninety minutes with no intermission. The script does not indicate any scene or act breakdowns, but to me, the action of the plot naturally partitions the play into three big sections. In the first segment, before Picasso enters, Martin uses the characters' action to set up an argument that will become the spine of the play: what is creativity?

The action begins with Freddy the bartender opening the Lapin Agile for the evening's business. Soon after an elderly Frenchman named Gaston enters, Einstein

makes his appearance. He introduces himself to Freddy and Gaston, who do not believe Einstein when he reveals his name. Freddy suddenly understands the confusion and explains to Einstein that he has entered the play too early. To illuminate this statement, Freddy grabs a playbill from the audience and points out the problem: “You’re fourth. It says so right here. Cast in order of appearance. I knew you were fourth. I knew it when you walked in” (10). Satisfied with the clarification, Einstein promptly exits into the restroom just as the bar waitress Germaine enters, apologizing for her lateness. Gaston simply replies, “You’re not late. You’re third” (11). Germaine does not hear Gaston as she is busy taking a shot of liquor at the bar and starting an argument with Freddy, who is not only her boss but also her boyfriend. As suddenly as he exited, Einstein reappears for the second time through the front door and rushes through his previously-stated lines in order to get the play back on track. When Germaine tries to clarify that he is at the wrong bar, Einstein and Gaston tartly respond, “Don’t ask” (12).

Suddenly, Suzanne enters. A beautiful woman, Suzanne seeks a man named Picasso. When Germaine asks Suzanne if she knows Picasso, Suzanne lustfully replies, “Twice” (12). Suzanne then goes on to explain that he is a painter, which begins a discussion between Suzanne, Freddy, Germaine, Einstein, and Gaston about the sheep painting hanging in the bar. Each character has a different interpretation of the painting, some realistic and some symbolic, as well as of the drawing Picasso scribbled on a piece of paper for Suzanne. As they muse over the art, Einstein states philosophically: “There you go. Four more opinions. I wonder how many opinions the world can hold. A billion? A trillion? Well, we’ve just added four. But look, the drawing stays the same” (15). As Suzanne shares a detailed description of how Picasso seduced her twice, Freddy, trying to calculate tabs, gets stumped on a math problem. When Einstein quickly

answers the problem without thinking, Freddy presses him to tell him more about his life. Einstein happily discusses the book he is writing, explaining that in order for it to have impact, only one person must read it: Max Planck, a German physicist. This sends Freddy on a quest to stump Einstein by asking him to analyze long and complex stories that contain increasingly difficult math problems. When Einstein promptly answers, Freddy misquotes him, sending Einstein into a laughing frenzy: “Y end parenthesis x? (*Laughs heartily.*) OH...THAT’S FUNNY!” (25). As Einstein roars with laughter, everyone joins in, though it is quickly apparent that no one understands why they are laughing.

As Einstein’s mirth diminishes, Freddy, still finishing his business calculations, asks for a reminder of the day’s date. This question leads the group to converse about the twentieth century, with everyone guessing its possible highlights. Germaine’s conjectures map the future perfectly: “I see air travel becoming common, with hundreds of people being carried in giant airplanes” (26). She continues, “There will be a brief craze for lawn flamingos. Vast quantities of information will be stored in very small spaces. Cruelty will be perfected. By the end of the century, smoking in restaurants will be banned” (27). Germaine’s hypotheses leave the crowd unimpressed, but everyone agrees wholeheartedly with Freddy’s ridiculous remarks: “Led by Germany, this will be known as the century of peace. Clothes will be made of wax. There will be a brief craze for automobiles but it will pass” (27). He finishes with the most ludicrous statement, prophesying that “the Wright brothers will be long remembered for the invention and manufacture of a low-calorie fudge” (27). As the guessing game ends, Picasso’s art seller, Sagot, enters the bar. Vibrant and energetic, Sagot shows off by matching paintings to their creators as well as discussing the value of certain types of art, especially



Picasso's. The characters in the bar suddenly realize that they all have a special interest in Picasso arriving at the bar, each for his or her personal reasons. Just as they toast Picasso, the artist himself arrives at the bar, declaring, "God, I feel good! How lucky for you! To be talking about someone and then in they come" (32).

Picasso's entrance marks what I have deemed the second section of the play, which presents the argument over the definition of creativity. Picasso immediately engages Einstein in a battle of wits over the values of art and science. Gaston is so awestruck at the mastery of their battle that he breaks into song: "WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN..." (37). This abrupt outburst ends the dispute, and as Sagot leaves, he promises to return with a camera later to take a group photo. "A night like this must be preserved on film," he proclaims (38).

The middle section of the play intensifies as Picasso, challenged by Sagot to do something about the sheep painting, quietly states, "The idea is coming. THE idea is coming" (38). Since no one knows what Picasso is talking about, Freddy picks things up by telling a bad and lengthy joke about pies. Einstein tries to explain the joke to everyone while Picasso attempts to woo Suzanne again. She is soon won over and agrees to meet Picasso later in the evening. As Suzanne exits, the men discuss who might be the third person in the genius triptych: Einstein, Picasso, and who else? Just as they offer suggestions, a slick salesman named Schmendiman enters the bar, declaring that he is a genius inventor. After a fast-paced and zany monologue about his creations and ideas, Schmendiman exits almost as soon as he entered, and Picasso and Einstein are left to argue over which of them will have the greatest influence on the new century. Finally, the men discover that they are seeking the same thing: to achieve the impossible and change the way people envision the world. At this point, they call each other "Brother!"

and hug (49). Germaine rolls her eyes at this turn of events, accusing the men of only doing physics and art in order to meet women, which they vehemently deny. Just then, the Countess strides in and sweeps Einstein off his feet with her intriguing talk about physics. They decide to spend the evening bar-hopping, and soon thereafter leave the Lapin Agile. Freddy also exits in order to catch a man about an unpaid bar tab. When Picasso asks Gaston if he also needs to leave in order to relieve himself, he starts to reply in disagreement but quickly changes his mind upon further consideration. Picasso and Germaine are now left alone in the bar.

Surprisingly, the two characters kiss passionately and then begin a lovers' quarrel. Germaine claims that Picasso is a womanizer, but then admits that she is using him for her own personal reasons. A post-romantic by her own definition, Germaine confesses that what she really wants is a simple, reliable "country boy" (54). Freddy and Gaston quickly reenter as does a female admirer looking for Schmendiman. She leaves dejectedly after realizing that he's not there, which embarrasses Picasso since he thinks that he can get any woman he wants.

The arrival of the visitor from the future marks the transitions to the third section of the play: the answer to defining creativity. Entering through the restroom, this visitor, a singer from the fifties, wears blue suede shoes and talks with a thick country accent. Just as he is about to reveal his identity, Einstein and the Countess return to the Lapin Agile, drunk and confused. As the Countess discovers: "Not only is space curved, so is Paris!" (57). The Singer explains to everyone that he sings songs about love, which makes them all sigh in admiration. Sagot re-enters with his camera to take a picture of the group, and not surprisingly, so does Schmendiman. The characters huddle together for the picture, but are delayed due to their inability to find a word to say together before

the flash. Schmendiman finally comes up with the word “cheese,” which they all agree upon, and Sagot takes the historic picture (61).

Just as the flash goes off, the Singer reacts to the sheep painting hanging over the bar, claiming that it looks like “five weird women” to him (62). This statement stops Picasso in his tracks, since he has declared all evening that he feels a great idea coming to him. In prodding the Singer with questions, Picasso discovers that the visitor from the future has a message to give him, but only if he is “open to receive it” (62). When Picasso states that he is ready, his famous painting *Les Femmes d’Alger* suddenly replaces the sheep painting. Picasso stands amazed, saying: “I could dream it forever and still not do it, but when the time comes for it to be done, God I want to be ready for it, to be ready for the moment of convergence between the thing done and the doing of it, between the thing to be made and its maker” (62).

Moments later, the entire bar disappears to reveal a backdrop of stars in the sky. Einstein, Picasso, and the Singer revel in the glory of shooting stars that spell out their names across the heavens. The Singer declares that the stars remind him of “Vegas” (66). At that moment, the entire group offers a toast to the twentieth century as Freddy reveals his understanding of the Singer’s statements: “He means that in the twentieth century, no movement will be as beautiful as the movement of the line across the paper (*Points to PICASSO*) the note across the staff (*Indicates the SINGER*) or the idea across the mind (*Indicates EINSTEIN*)” (67). Everyone agrees with this profound statement as they offer their toasts, which ends with the characters declaring, “To the twentieth century!” (68). As the lights fade, the Singer offers one last thought, “Isn’t it amazing how the play fit exactly between the time when the lights came up, and the lights went down?” (69).

### *Dramatic Structure*

Along with studying the plot development, the director must comprehend other elements of the work's dramatic structure, including the inciting incident, point of attack, main dramatic question, climax, and major repetitions. The inciting incident, which points to what sets the action of the story on its course, is important to study in order to fully understand the play. The inciting incident generally happens before the play begins, opening up and clarifying all choices made in the play. In *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Picasso's giving of a drawing to Suzanne, telling her that he often visits the Lapin Agile bar and hopes to see her there soon marks the inciting incident. This drawing, which Suzanne brings to the bar, becomes the main point of discussion in the first section of the play, building up to Picasso's entrance. Without the drawing, Suzanne might never have entered the bar and initiated everyone's interest in Picasso, which means he could have still come to the bar but without his arrival holding any particular significance. Picasso's drawing proves important later as it relates to his discovery in the end, and his perpetual quest for inspiration. That said, the plot does not pick up in the story until all of the characters come to The Lapin Agile, making the point of attack Freddy's opening of the bar that night. The inciting incident and point of attack set the foundation of the play which leads to the main question that must be answered through the course of the action: How will Pablo Picasso become "Pablo Picasso"? This question pushes the play to the end, at which point the plot climax answers it.

As the play begins, the audience knows that the content will be about the great Spanish artist Picasso, but they find out quickly that it is set in 1904, before Picasso made his mark on the world. He is not Picasso as we know him today. Before he enters the play, Suzanne explains that when Picasso introduced himself to her, he declared that "he

thinks that it means something in the future to be Picasso. He said that occasionally there is a Picasso and he happens to be him” (16). As the play progresses, Picasso mentions several times that he feels on the verge of something great, but that he cannot quite grasp it. The revelation of Picasso’s first Cubist painting finally answers the main dramatic question. *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* will set Picasso apart from other artists, making him one of the most renowned innovators of the twentieth century.

Often in contemporary plays, the plot climax and theme climax occur separately, though generally close together toward the end of the play. The plot climax is identified as the point at which the action reaches culmination, or a breaking point. The rising action leads up into the plot climax and the resolution follows it. The theme climax, on the other hand, is the point at which the major themes of the play are strongest and clearest. Knowing that the painting revelation is the plot climax, the themes of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* reach their culmination when the three iconic figures—Einstein, Picasso, and the Singer—see their names written across the universe. At this point, the themes flowing through the script come together in one beautiful moment to attest to the power of creativity. The three geniuses had talent, passion, and drive. They were able to change the course of history with their inventions, and in this moment, the invitation for the audience to do the same is palpable.

A few major repetitions in the play support its themes and ideas. One major repetition in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* are the references to the sheep painting on the wall, which belongs to Freddy. Each character takes time to discuss the pastoral painting’s value and meaning, which builds to Picasso’s great revelation. Freddy, Schmendiman, and Picasso repeatedly reference Picasso’s fascination with blue, which highlights the importance of his move from his blue period to the rose. This same applies

to Einstein's frequent mention of the fourth dimension, which eventually brings Picasso and him together as they realize they are working toward the same idea. One of the main points often discussed in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is the twentieth century and what it will mean to the characters as they journey through the new age. The characters often try to figure out what events will transpire or who will make the greatest impact on the century. As Picasso tells Einstein in the play: "Picasso, Einstein, Picasso, Einstein. My only regret is that we'll be in different volumes of the encyclopedia" (51).

### *General Synthesis of Genre and Style*

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* seeks to stir audience members to aspire to their own greatness through the celebration of three iconic figures of the twentieth century. To understand precisely how the playwright achieves this, the director must investigate the play's genre and style. Upon this foundation, the director can build the rest of the play's framework, which affects every element of the production process from the design aspects to the work with the actors. Thorough analysis of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* has led me to conclude that the play is best described as a traditional comedy with elements of postmodernism.

In assessing the play as a traditional comedy, I refer to Northrop Frye's essay "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy." Mentioned earlier, this work outlines Frye's understanding of the basic formula found in most comedies. Frye's assessment of comedy should not be seen as a blueprint by which all writers concoct their plots; instead, they are merely his evaluation of the most elemental qualities that many comedies share, from Greek to contemporary. Although comedic plays through the centuries are about many different ideas and themes, with a whole host of unique characters and plots, the underlying formula that makes the works "comedies" exists, according to Frye.

Frye describes the basic comedic formula in the following way: a young man, the hero, wants a young woman. As W.H. Auden writes in his essay *Notes on the Comic*, “sexual desire, because of its impersonal and unchanging character, is a comic contradiction” (307). Some type of opposition blocks the hero’s goals, and the action of the plot centers on his attempts to overcome the obstacle. The rising action moves toward breaking until near the end of the play when an unexpected plot twist enables him to have his desire. The overcoming of these barriers provides the comic resolution, and at this point, a new “pragmatically free society” centers around the hero (Frye 169). The idea of “happily ever after” abounds in comedies, often meaning that the hero remains left underdeveloped in the belief that his real life begins after the play ends. The audience’s response to the happy ending of comedies consists of a general “this should be,” which proves a social, not moral, judgment (Frye 167). As L.J. Potts describes in *Comedy*, “It is not the business of comedy to inculcate moral doctrine. Its business is to satisfy a healthy, human desire; the desire to understand the behavior of men and women towards each other in social life, and to judge them according to their own pretensions and standards” (56).

Picasso, the protagonist and hero of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, does not desire a woman (although it could be stated that he lusts after *many* women) as much as he longs to paint an inspired work that will secure his greatness. In this way, he replaces the heroine in Frye’s formula with a new object of affection: art. In the play, Picasso meets great obstacles while creating his work. He comes to the bar seeking an artistic muse, but consistently finds distraction in philosophical arguments with Einstein, lovers’ quarrels with Suzanne and Germaine, and inane attempts to inflate his own ego. Just as Picasso becomes more and more desperate to achieve his dreams, an enormous plot twist occurs

when the visitor enters. This visitor, a Singer from the future, gives Picasso a message that inspires his Cubist painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*. This discovery, or *cognitio*, for Picasso is a common aspect of comedies. Towards the end of the play, the characters in the bar toast the hero, along with Einstein and the Singer, as they form a new society around them to celebrate their contributions to the world. At the young age of twenty-three, Picasso is only on the cusp of his career, and the audience understands that there is much more of his life to come. The comic resolution leaves the audience satisfied, feeling that the play ended justly and that the characters received exactly what they deserved.

Within fulfilling Frye's formula, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* also contains archetypal comedic characters "whose chief function is the amusing of the audience" as they help bring about the comic discovery (Frye 165). One of these main character types is the hero, or protagonist. Although Picasso is a braggart who uses women for his own needs, Martin depicts him as an extremely likable character. Watching the play, the audience knows that Picasso achieves his dreams, so the joy of the play lies in investigating his inspiration.

Frye also mentions the typical parasite character, which dates back to Greek and Roman works. In *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Schmendiman fills this role as he tries to link his achievements to those of Picasso and Einstein. Schmendiman, like most parasites, wants wealth and glory but does not want to work for it. He does provide much entertainment for the audience with his quick dialogue and whimsical antics. According to Frye, the parasite "has no business to be at the final festival but is nevertheless there" (166). Although no characters invite him to be in the picture and toast at the end of the play, Schmendiman strides in, pulling as much attention as possible. Picasso's art dealer,



Sagot, provides another example of a parasite in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. He admits to selling Picasso's paintings for twice what he pays for them, and enjoys boasting about his schemes to get rich.

Another comical stock character, according to Frye, is the buffoon, embodied by Gaston. Martin created Gaston, the cantankerous, elderly man with a strong foreign accent, as his comic relief character and punch-line deliverer. The witness, a character to whom Frye refers as the one "with special knowledge" also appears in the play (166). This character reveals information at the pinnacle of the play which leads to the hero's discovery. In *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, the Singer arrives via time travel to share a message with Picasso from "the one who whispers in your ear every time you touch the pencil to the paper" (62). Together, all of these archetypal characters—hero, parasite, buffoon, and witness—help solidify the play's definition as a comedy, either through their fulfillment as a function of the play or in their comedic spirit.

Repetition provides the final element of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* that sets it as a traditional comedy. Henri Bergson in his 1911 essay "Comedy" calls repetition the "jack-in-the-box" element; the harder and more often the "jack" is shoved down into his container, the more exciting his leap will appear. For comedy, the script builds repetitions so that eventually the joke or idea springs out of its containment, causing the audience to laugh (105). Frye explains in his essay:

In a tragedy—*Oedipus Tyrannus* is the stock example—repetition leads logically to catastrophe. Repetition overdone or not going anywhere belongs to comedy, for laughter is partly a reflex, and like other reflexes it can be conditioned by a simple repeated pattern. (168)

The principle of repetition, therefore, becomes the foundation of comedy, and Martin's work contains plenty of it. Recurring jokes, references, punch lines, physical humor, and entrances of stock characters all contribute to the play's sense of repetition. One of the

greatest qualities of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is in Martin's ability to set up a comical moment that either receives a punch line forty minutes later or replicates several times throughout the play as a comic device. Gaston's need to relieve himself in the restroom every few minutes, the constant referral to the sheep painting hanging over the bar, the incessant sexual humor, the various anachronistic references, and Schmendiman's bursting entrances provide just a few examples of comedic elements in the script used over and over to create humor. All of the play's repeated lines, ideas, and action (which are reiterated multiple times and borders on the absurd), portray *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as a play meant to entertain the audience and bring them a sense of the comedic spirit.

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is not only a traditional comedy but it also contains characteristics of postmodern drama. Defining postmodernism can be a difficult task, so I will first discuss the Modern world, which helps in understanding what "post" means. Through the late 1800s and early 1900s, many people around the world fixated on Modernist principles, believing in the power of humans to create and redefine their environments through the aid of technology and scientific knowledge. The Industrial Revolution spurred much of this mindset. Many people during this period focused on the progress of humanity, determined to keep obtaining knowledge and moving forward. World War II and other events slowly eroded these modernist principles. Annette Saddick, in her 2007 book *Contemporary American Drama*, explains the evolution from modernism to postmodernism:

A more fragmented and dislocated individual emerged to usher in what from the mid-1970s onwards became known as postmodernity; a historical phase where there were no certainties, no origins, and no absolute position from which one could safely view the world. (6)

These views influenced texts written during the period, and in return, the works themselves pushed the ideas of the movement. Saddick continues:

Characteristics of postmodern literature and drama include a focus on the instability of meaning and the inadequacy of language to completely and accurately represent the Truth, along with an irony and playfulness in the treatment of linguistic constructs; an acknowledgement of the past and a sense that literary creation is never truly original, but owes a debt to what has come before; a lack of any hierarchy or boundaries in the treatment of 'high' and 'low' culture; and an eschewing of the notion of an origin or essential 'core' in terms of identity. (6)

In examining *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, one can see the existence of these ideas. The author, through the play's characters, dramatic structure, verbal usage, and self-referential and satirical style, creates a world in which meaning is fragile, irony dominates, and identity is relative.

One way in which Martin shows these postmodern ideas is through the play's parody-like tone. In *Theory/Theatre*, Fortier explains: "the postmodern is much more an artistic style, recognizable by its self-reflexivity—its self-awareness—and irony, especially in its relations to the practices and objects of the surrounding culture and the cultural past" (176). Set in the Modern period, Martin's characters resemble characters often seen in Modern drama: the idealistic seeking to support the bohemian revolution, the "Modern" woman looking to re-define herself, the business man using the idealists as a means to profit, the harmless secondary characters who sit to the side and make running commentary on the play's action, and the male leads searching to fulfill their destinies and make a name for themselves. Martin's play, however, heightens these typical "Modern" character types and makes them desperate to the point of absurdity. An example of this is Germaine, the female character who desperately wants to change her situation in life but lacks the resources to do so. Martin's version of the character works desperately to prove to Picasso that she only uses him for sex, though she undermines

herself by swooning twice at the sight of the Singer. In essence, she embodies all Modern women in all Modern plays, played with a high degree of exasperation. The characters in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* are in no way meant to come across as “realistic” characters, living in a real environment. They directly address the audience, which breaks down every convention of realism developed in Modern drama; in a way, the characters often feel as if they are “winking” at the audience, like they are in on the same secret as them. Freddy’s speech about leaving the bar for a longer amount of time required exemplifies the postmodern parody idea perfectly.

Martin also subverts and questions traditional ways of seeing the world, a truly postmodern concept. Martin uses the sudden change in art and paintings to question the audience’s perception and break traditional expectations, through the prism of postmodern techniques. For example, although the play has plenty of irony and self-referencing, the time and place of the play is clearly established as a Modern French bar, a haven for emerging artists and scholars. The logic and structure of the play leads the audience to believe that the boundaries of the play’s world do not reach beyond what they see on stage. However, when a visitor from the future suddenly enters the bar from the bathroom, miraculously transforming the sheep painting into Picasso’s Cubistic work, audience expectations are shattered and the previously established boundaries of the play are questioned. Finally, the breaking away and disappearance of the set to reveal the universe denies any last illusion of the stage as a closed world. As the three main characters revel in the glory of this new world of infinite space and possibilities, the audience is invited to rethink conventional perceptions. Martin challenges the audience to view the Modern time period from a postmodern perspective and to reexamine current ideas about art, science, and music.

Lastly, Martin invites the audience to share in making the meaning of the performance. Unlike some postmodern works, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is not pessimistic or even nihilistic. Hopeful ideas and themes abound within the work, although the script never forthright explains them. Instead, Martin allows the audience to take what they want from the experience without forcing one particular meaning on them. As the three main characters—Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis—bask in their universe moment, the audience sees them through a multiplicity of viewpoints as the characters speak almost on top of each other. Through their dialogue, one particular statement stands out: “I want to...” (65). They hope for things to come, but it is up to the audience to realize that the men did accomplish their dreams, and that through the celebration of their creativity, we too can seek new ways of looking at the world.

### *Given Circumstances*

#### *Geographical Environment*

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* takes place in a small bar called “The Lapin Agile” in the Montmartre section of Paris, France, in 1904. An actual bar renowned as a haven for artists, musicians, and free thinkers, Picasso frequented the establishment often. His painting *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass* (1905) suggests Picasso’s intimate knowledge of the place. Originally named “Cabaret des Assassins,” The Lapin Agile changed its name in 1875 after a local artist named Andre Gill painted the bar’s sign with a rabbit jumping out of a saucepan. Local residents began calling it “Le Lapin a Gill,” which evolved into “Le Lapin Agile,” or “The Nimble Rabbit” ([www.virtualtourist.com](http://www.virtualtourist.com)).

Martin’s decision to set the play in this precise location proves important. The intimate bar championed the ideals of the bohemian revolution, which most importantly

rejected bourgeois values like materialism, strict morality, and the pursuit of wealth (www.mtholyoke.edu). Members of the Parisian bohemian culture sought to flaunt their marginality, often refusing to own any private property. They also disregarded socially acceptable behavior, indulged in lengthy discussions about art, literature, and society, and experimented with drugs and sex. The Lapin Agile did not invite the wealthy, high-class members of society; instead, the bar attracted local artists and intellectuals seeking to create manifestos and incite revolutions. Unfortunately for Freddy, the bar owner in the play, most of the visitors to the bar cannot pay their tabs, though he allows them to drink as he supports the bohemian culture. When Sagot pays for his drink in the play, Freddy says with surprise, “Finally a customer” (29).

### *Economic Environment*

Economic factors serve a large role in the play, though in different ways. Primarily, the bar clearly does not attract the upper crust of society. Most of the characters in the play are relatively broke as they do not work for money; instead, they seek other measures of success. Freddy, however, feels concern about money to a degree. He attempts to run a business, but his need to make a living does not fuel his actions. He never kicks anyone out of the bar for not paying, and shows surprised when someone recompenses him. Sagot and Schmendiman are the only ones in the play looking to achieve wealth, but as secondary characters, they represent people outside of free-thinking society.

### *Social Environment*

Social pressure plays a large role in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. While the main characters—Einstein, Picasso, and Elvis—do not seeking economic gain through their

contributions to the world, they are striving for personal glory in the eyes of those around them. The characters use their inventive works as a means of expressing themselves and drawing attention. Social pressure forces them to labor over masterpieces that they believe will change the scientific and artistic worlds. The leading men also use other people (especially women), places, and experiences in their immediate social surroundings as muses for their own personal gains. When the stars rearrange themselves to spell out their names across the heavens, Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis feel satisfaction that they will achieve the social greatness that they so desperately seek.

### *Character Analysis*

Martin's characters all serve a function in the play. Mainly, the characters are mouthpieces for Martin's ideas, including his interest in the principles of modern art and science. His playful manner with the historical figures keeps the play from becoming an attempt to capture history, and as stated before, the characters serve as comic devices rather than as real people. However, the stock types in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*—hero, heroine, parasite, buffoon, witness—are unique in their own way. As Frye explains in his essay, the “stock type is not the character but it is as necessary to the character as a skeleton is to the actor who plays it” (172). Most of the characters, even though they serve as comic functions, have layers of depth that include ambition, obstacles, morals, willpower, and resolutions.

### *Pablo Picasso*

Picasso is the play's central protagonist. The play's title features his name, the action of the play focuses on his arrival and activity at the bar, and he is the only character to grow during his journey through the play. Picasso propels the play from

beginning to end, and when he discovers *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the main dramatic question of “Who is Picasso?” is answered and the play’s plot climax is fully realized.

Picasso’s over-arching objective in the play includes painting a unique work of art that will result in his personal fame and glory. As a twenty-three year old artist, Picasso stands at the beginning of his career, virtually an unknown. When he enters the bar, he states one of his goals for the evening in his first line: “I have been thinking about sex all day. Can’t get it out of my mind” (32). He spends much of his time in the bar pursuing Suzanne and Germaine: kissing them, drawing for them, dancing with them, wooing them with his words, and making promises to them he never intends to keep. They are his muses. He feels passion for both the visual arts and women, whose interconnected relationship he cannot untangle; he needs his works to lure women and, in return, requires the opposite sex to inspire his art. Picasso’s hunt for women, however, becomes one of his obstacles as it easily distracts him from his main goal.

As the play continues, Picasso periodically appears on the verge of discovering something profoundly artistic, saying, “Something’s afoot. The moment is coming; I can feel it” (32). His ego continuously defers attention from his art, this time in relation to his arguments with Einstein about the value of art over science. Picasso challenges Einstein to a battle as they each struggle to prove their own significance in the course of history. As Picasso draws a quick sketch, Einstein inscribes on the napkin a formula that he believes “touches the head” as much as Picasso’s work “touches the heart” (37). As Picasso and Einstein continue to struggle to prove their personal triumph, they uncover a great secret: that they are both seeking the same thing.

PICASSO. So you’re not just describing the world as it is?

EINSTEIN. No! We are creating a new way of looking at the world!

PICASSO. So you’re saying you dream the impossible and put it into effect?



EINSTEIN. Exactly.  
PICASSO. Brother!  
EINSTEIN. Brother! (49)

From this point on, the artist and scientist regard each other as both creators in their own rights, and they agree that they each have much to offer to the world.

As the play reaches its climax, the time-traveling Singer shares with Picasso *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*, which will become Picasso's first Cubist painting. In this moment of inspiration, Picasso completes his journey and realizes his triumphant fate. He will achieve fame through his art. At this moment in the play, Picasso experiences a new self-awareness: "I am dreaming for the billions yet to come, I am taking part of us that cannot be understood by God and letting it bleed from the wrist onto the canvas... And it can only be made because I have felt these things: my lust, my greed, my hatred, my happiness" (63). Picasso understands that he can only be a creator because of his life experiences and because he was open to insight.

#### *Albert Einstein*

Einstein assumes the second largest role in the play, and most importantly, as Picasso's foil. Without Einstein, Martin could not have explored his thoughts on the connections between art and science through the script. When Einstein arrives at the bar, his main objective is to prove that his soon-to-be-published Theory of Relativity will revolutionize the world and make him renowned. Although the others doubt his genius, Einstein stands by his belief that he will soon become a prominent scientist of the twentieth century.

Picasso challenges Einstein on whether his theories will truly have an effect on the world, but Einstein's willpower is strong and he feels convinced that he will achieve his dreams. After much debate, which distracts Einstein from pursuing his personal

goals, Einstein and Picasso realize that they should appreciate each other's inventive spirits and that they both have the opportunity to make a name for themselves.

Similarly to Picasso, Einstein is distracted by the opposite sex. He flirts with Suzanne and is enamored with the Countess when she arrives at the bar. When the Singer appears and the men are transported into the vast universe, Einstein remarks to the others that it would be a miracle if "the stars rearranged themselves and spelled out our names across the heavens" (65). When the event occurs, the young scientist revels in his success, knowing that all of his determination and creativity will one day make him one of the most celebrated men of the twentieth century.

### *Germaine*

Germaine, the bar waitress and Freddy's girlfriend, is not an historical character. However, she plays an important role in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*'s development as she creates conversations with other characters and helps build the plot. True to the bohemian mindset of the time, her ultimate aspiration in the play is to be free and available to wherever the next wind of inspiration blows. Germaine considers herself the "modern" woman, which in 1904 meant that she could empower herself through the intellect and through sex. She is in a dead-end job with a dense, insensitive man and longs to take back control of her life. This situation for most women in the early 1900s would appear hopeless. For Germaine, though she cannot do much to control her overall circumstances, works to have power over as much as possible in the immediate world. She knows that in the culture in which she lives, ideas change often, and if she remains open to possibilities, the next sensory experience is soon to come.

When Germaine first enters the bar, she and Freddy argue until Germaine pretends to give in: "Are we going to fight? Let's not fight, Freddy. Let's be in love like

yesterday. (*She kisses him*) So tomorrow I can say, "Let's be in love like yesterday" (11). When Freddy breaks away to get back to work, Germaine mutters under her breath, "I love you, even though you give me nothing" (11). She wants to speak her mind, but an obstacle for her is that she lacks courage. Later in the play, Germaine and Freddy dispute over Germaine's views on romanticism, which Freddy call "neo" but Germaine declares are "post" (39). These post-romantic views are really the mindset of the Modern period. This time, Germaine does not back down from the argument, and even though the dispute is cut off prematurely, she brings it up again later for another fight.

Germaine continues to defend her ideals and actions throughout the play, especially when she and Picasso are alone in the bar. They are lovers, and even though Germaine tries to convince him that she is using him, her diatribe against him as a "womanizer" reveals her hurt. As much as Germaine tries to prove her ability to live for the present, her deeper desires for true love rise to the surface, as she exposes through her statement: "But really? What I wouldn't give for a country boy?" (54). The visit of the country singer completely strips Germaine's tough exterior. She swoons twice in his presence. Germaine's willpower proves weak as she lives focused on her immediate circumstances and not the past or the future.

### *Freddy*

Freddy is a simple man trying to earn a living. He lacks self-awareness of his identity, however, and throughout the play he desires nothing more than to prove to every character that comes in the bar that he is as smart, funny, or talented as them. As the owner of the free-thinkers bar, Freddy wants everyone to know that he deserves to be there.

As the play begins, Freddy's intellect is threatened by Einstein, who shows off his mathematical skills with flair. Freddy then tests Einstein's abilities, asking him difficult math questions in an attempt to belittle him. When Einstein reveals that he wrote a book, Freddy scoffs him: "Yeah, well, we're all writers, aren't we? He's a writer that hasn't been published and I'm a writer who hasn't written anything" (22). Unfortunately for Freddy, he cannot demonstrate Einstein's faults. Freddy's ego is fed, however, when he predicts the highlights of the twentieth century and everyone lauds his ideas.

After Picasso's entrance, Freddy's need to stand out is heightened. In a desperate attempt to amaze the other characters, Freddy sets up a long joke that, unfortunately for him, ends terribly. Einstein adds insult to injury by explaining the joke scientifically, though he appeases Freddy by telling him that the joke is funny in what he considers an "ice box laugh" (40). In the final moments of the play, Freddy has a moment of clarity, explaining the relevance of Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis in the twentieth century. The other character applaud his insight, and Germaine enjoys a moment of pride in her boyfriend.

### *Gaston*

Gaston is the aged, irritable Frenchman who visits the bar every night. Now that he is "newly old," Gaston longs for the days when he was young, virile, and could chase women (Martin 10). More than anything, Gaston wants to invigorate himself by hanging around the youthful characters and demonstrating to them that he is an expert on everything. He flirts with the ladies, interrogates the young men, and adds his thoughts to everyone's conversations, including discussions on art and science, predictions of the future, and toasts to the new century.

Unfortunately for Gaston, he cannot overcome his age. Often, in the middle of a discourse, Gaston's need to relieve himself in the restroom interrupts. At times, he is forgetful, cantankerous, and set in his ways. Gaston age may keep him from pursuing what he wants, but at the end of the night, he is grateful to have experienced something exciting.

### *Suzanne*

Suzanne, a young woman of nineteen, is one of Picasso's lovers. A strikingly beautiful woman, Suzanne knows how to use her attributes to attract the opposite sex. She comes to the bar in order to find Picasso and flirt with him so that he will make love to her. As she enters, Suzanne recalls how Picasso seduced her: "He was speaking Spanish, which didn't hurt, I'll tell you. Well at that point, the word 'no' became like a Polish village... Unpronounceable" (17). Suzanne desperately needs the attention of men to make her feel beautiful and valuable, which Picasso undoubtedly does when he is with her. His charm and talent titillate her, and she feels special as one of his muses. Though Suzanne tries to feign indifference upon Picasso's arrival, she has little willpower against him, proving herself to be completely at his disposal. Picasso makes her feel beautiful, and when he agrees to meet her later that evening, Suzanne revels in the success of her efforts.

### *Schmendiman*

Charles Dabernow Schmendiman is a young man with a dream: to achieve fame for his inventions. He enters the play just as the other characters attempt to figure out the third person in the triptych with Einstein and Picasso. Selling himself like a used car salesman, Schmendiman enters the bar to promote himself to the other characters. He

claims that his inventions, an inflexible building material and a dunce cap, will make him memorable for all eternity. He considers himself to be a genius, saying, “Talent is the ability to say things well, but genius is the ability to well, say things!” (44).

Schmendiman serves as a strong contrast to Picasso and Einstein, who want to achieve greatness through hard work. Schmendiman really represents advertising, which in his mind works as well as actually selling something of worth. Schmendiman does discover the right word to say before the picture is taken: “Cheese” (61). Unfortunately, Schmendiman appears foolish during the toast to the century as he cannot think of anything innovative to add: “The pelican’s a funny... (*Again SCHMENDIMAN can’t think of anything. Sits down*)” (68). He may find success in the short-term, but Schmendiman’s inventions will never amount to those of Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis.

### *Singer*

Toward the end of the play, a visitor from the 1950s wearing blue suede shoes arrives. The Singer, a young man in his twenties, speaks with a Tennessee accent and discusses his shows in Las Vegas. He appears genuine, sensitive, and even a bit sheltered to the other characters. After all, he enters a bar but asks for tomato juice. Although Martin does not specifically call him “Elvis,” it is clear that he could be no one else. Martin never mentions why he does not name the character, but in a sense, such an iconic figure requires no introduction. He is immediately recognizable. The Singer travels to this bar on this particular evening with one intention: to inspire Picasso with a message. After the Singer reveals Picasso’s future painting, the musician and painter ruminate on their moments of “perfection” (63). In a flash, the bar disappears and all of the characters revel in the grandness of the universe. Seeing their names written across the heavens, Einstein, Picasso, and the Singer envision exactly who they want to be and what they

hope to accomplish. For *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, the Singer adds a relatable touch as the American genius. Martin uses the character so familiar to American audiences to bring the play as close to home as possible. To most Americans, Einstein and Picasso are foreign geniuses, practically untouchable. Their sense of familiarity with Elvis makes the ideas of creativity seem more achievable to the average man. Undoubtedly, the Singer play's a crucial role in the development of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, and without him, there would be no big twist to the play's ending.

### *Sagot*

Sagot, Picasso's art dealer, is an energetic and opinionated man. He comes to the bar with the main intention of finding Picasso. Sagot sees Picasso as a means to an end, and he needs Picasso to create brilliant work so that he can profit from it. While Sagot waits for Picasso, he enjoys assigning value to art inside the bar, which helps establish him as a credible dealer to the other characters. He hopes that by belittling their taste in art he can make them worship his abilities. Sagot has very little intention of selling art to the characters in the bar, as anyone in the Lapin Agile probably has very little money. Sagot does not have a particular passion for art, but he loves to make money and appear erudite. Sagot feels no remorse for selling Picasso's paintings at twice what he pays for them, which proves his lack of desire to adhere to bohemian ideals. Unfortunately, to keep Sagot's business alive, he needs more work from Picasso. His only goal at the bar: to do whatever it takes to get Picasso to paint something valuable.

### *Conclusion*

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is a postmodern comedy that tells the journey of Picasso from an unknown artist to a great figure of the twentieth century. As the play

begins, the other characters build the anticipation of Picasso's entrance. They all have a vested interest in seeing him even though he has not achieved fame. After Picasso enters, he feels a great sense that his moment of inspiration is near, though interaction with the other characters continually distracts him. Just as Picasso and Einstein agree to appreciate each other's creative spirits, a singer from the future arrives to bring Picasso a long-awaited message: Picasso's future Cubist painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*. At the end of the play, Picasso, Einstein, and the Singer stand at the edge of the universe and bask in the knowledge that they will be remembered as three great men of the twentieth century. Martin's choice to use Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis as the main historical figures proves an interesting point: these three men chose to deny accepted boundaries in their fields, rethink material through new perspectives, and pursue their passions even as obstacles arose. Through *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Martin's message is clear: even one person can change the world, but everyone must be ready and willing to work hard once the inspiration strikes. The following chapters will take an in-depth look at how Baylor Theatre collaborated in the mounting of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and how the ideas compiled here influenced the work of the collaborative artistic team.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Production Design Process

#### *Introduction*

This chapter describes in detail the design process for Baylor's production of Steve Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. A truly collaborative process, every element of the production had to be conceived and created by the director and a team of designers working on scenery, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup/hair. All of these elements had to be unified to make a cohesive production that not only helped tell the story of the play, but also complimented the overall concept of the production. This chapter will provide insight into how this goal was approached, what challenges appeared along the way, and how everything came together in production.

The role of the director is very important in the design process. Theatre requires a collaborative spirit; it simply cannot be done alone. The director's task is a balancing act in regard to his or her contribution to the design of a production. The director must not only inspire and guide the designers toward a particular vision of the world of the play, but he or she must also facilitate the ideas of the entire artistic team, including actors, stage managers, production managers, build crews, and run crews. This can be a challenging mission for the director. He or she must champion a specific concept while allowing the designers freedom to explore their own artistic visions. For this reason, the overall design concept must have a strong internal structure in order to support a variety of approaches to the realization of the ideas.

The design process for Baylor's production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* was exciting and challenging. The design team consisted of a mix of seasoned faculty

designers and novice undergraduate designers. This combination proved both rewarding and difficult at times. While the faculty members felt inundated with the stress of doing back-to-back mainstage shows, they had more experience than the younger designers. The students, though less professionally qualified than the faculty members, maintained a palpable enthusiasm and energy throughout the entire process. As we moved through the design process, my work as the director was learning how to maintain a balance between the two types of designers. I needed to trust the seasoned faculty designers while pushing the designers-in-training to meet the production's challenges. In retrospect, this became the most difficult part of the design process, though much of it went smoothly and efficiently, leading the production manager to compliment me on how well everything worked out. In the final analysis, everything came together to create a unified production, and I learned a great deal along the way.

### *Choice of Venue*

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is a flexible play that can be staged in many types of theatres. Productions have been mounted in large, open spaces as well as small, intimate ones, though they are generally performed on a proscenium or thrust-type stage due to the physical demands of the set. Although the play, upon first glance, appears to be perfect for a small, black-box theatre setting, there are several limitations to such a space. Most notably, Martin's instructions in the play to break away the set and send the characters out into the universe would be extremely difficult, if not impossible in a small theatre. Likewise, the play seems to push against production on a large proscenium stage, which is too expansive and distant for the play's spirit and style. For this production, Baylor Theatre faculty member voted to mount it in the Mabey Theatre, which worked out well.

The Mabee Theatre, a two hundred and forty-four seat theatre with a thrust stage, provides a large playing space while creating a certain amount of intimacy between the actors and the audience. The seating sections in the theatre are only five rows deep, with the exception of two eight-row sections. For this reason, the audience could sit close to the action, which helped with the comedic spirit of the piece. The choice of the Mabee Theatre also allowed the design team to fully incorporate a set that could completely disappear in less than ten seconds. The thrust stage helped heighten the metatheatrical quality of the play, as the actors were able to walk right up to the audience and engage them, just as Freddy does on the first page of the script when he asks an audience member to borrow their program. The audience patrons could see fellow members during the production, which produced the intimate spirit found in most black-box productions. Finally, the choice of the Mabee Theatre helped remind the audience that *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is bigger than just its story. The play is about humanity, and when the set broke away to reveal the vast universe, stars literally drenched the stage and the audience, giving everyone a sense of floating in space. Within the Mabee Theatre, the themes of the play were heightened as the audience was drawn into the world of the play. Like the ideas developed by Einstein and Picasso about the value of multiple perspectives, the thrust theatre forced the audience members to enact those ideas. With the audience on three sides, a member on one side would definitely view the play in a different manner than a member in another place. By keeping the audience intimate and surrounding the stage on three sides, the play's boundaries, physically and thematically, blurred between the actors and audience, creating a sense of unification and amplified connection.

### *Initial Directorial Interpretation of Picasso at the Lapin Agile*

To aid in the design and pre-production process, the director will often pick a metaphor to express his or her directorial interpretation of the play. This metaphor can assist the director in a discussion of ideas and concepts with the designers without overstepping boundaries and manipulating the artistic process. The metaphor serves as an effective way for the director to inspire an artistic vision while allowing the design team to explore their ideas at the same time. It can also prevent any misunderstandings about the design and overall concept of the play by keeping the design team on a particular track. For *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, I chose Picasso's painting *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass* as the initial metaphor for my artistic vision.

Since Picasso painted a piece inspired by the actual location and time period of the play, I believed that the painting held the key to the overall directorial concept. Although the painting appeared a bit more somber compared to the light and quick humor of the play, the idea behind the piece worked. This painting served as a strong contrast to Picasso's painting revealed at the end of the play. Knowing that Picasso painted these works only years apart, the journey between the two pieces fascinated me. Another factor in choosing the painting as my directorial metaphor was that I knew this particular work inspired Martin to write a play about Picasso. According to Martin, he saw the painting in a gallery and wondered about its journey from creation to display in a museum a century later. Soon thereafter, Martin took that thought and explored it through *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*.

As I examined *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass*, I realized that the colors in the piece were very much in tune with my initial concept of the play. I was interested in translating the deep, rich hues of red, gold, brown, and purple to the designs. These

vibrant hues captured the essence and energy of Parisian bars at the time and place of the play. Picasso purposefully avoided pastels, sticking to strong colors to embody the rich diversity of night life in the small and quaint bars of Montmartre, Paris. I believed that these lively and inviting colors could easily transfer to the stage through scenery, lighting, and costumes.

Upon further examination, I observed the mixture of the hard, angular lines in the harlequin's costume and face with the soft, flowing lines of the feathers in the woman's dress and hat. I also noticed the whimsical sway of the Harlequin's hat as well as the roundness of the glasses on the bar, the guitar, and the woman's arm. The mixture of lines in Picasso's painting captured the overall essence of Martin's play, which juxtaposes sharp, witty humor—mostly one-liners—with the free-flowing comedy of the characters and their individual journeys. I knew that the various lines of the painting could easily be incorporated into the play's design. I did not envision the Lapin Agile as a bar with uniform, standard chairs and tables; instead, I wanted a variety of physical elements with different heights, shapes, and lines. I also felt that the designers could incorporate the lines into the costumes and hairstyles.

The painting also contained a variety of textures I thought useful to the design of the show. These textures ranged from the hard, smooth wood of the guitar and bar to the soft, light feel of the feathers on the woman's dress and hat. To me, a variety of textures were important in the production, as the play itself is multi-layered. I knew that the idea of texture could translate well into Baylor's production through the various design elements, and I looked forward to seeing how the designers could implement the inspiration into their work.

Picasso's painting *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass* provided the perfect initial design metaphor. Since Picasso actually painted it at the time and place of the play's setting, I felt the importance of the connection. The work also carried the essence of how I felt that the play should be approached as far as color, line, and texture through design. In my first meeting with the design team, I presented Picasso's painting to them. The designers responded favorably to the piece, and the metaphor became the ideal springboard for the design of the play.

### *Scenery*

The scenic designer lays the ground plan for the rest of the designers by establishing the world of the play. Since *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* calls for only one set, the scenic demands for the play appear deceptively simple: the interior of a bar in Paris around the turn of the century. The misleading quality is that while the set represents only one location, the entire bar must disappear to reveal the whole of the universe. Also, several projections must appear during the course of the play, including a sheep painting that morphs into Picasso's revelation work *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Before I met with the scenic designer, I knew that the set demands were going to create a challenge and that we had to plan every detail of the design from the beginning.

Working in collaboration, the scenic designer and I met early in the semester to develop ideas that would meet the demands of the script and theatre space. We discussed all of the scenic requirements of the text and how best to create the world of the play. We conversed about Picasso's painting *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass*, which served as a useful guide. The scenic designer and I also explored in depth the power of the Cubist movement and how the script reflects those ideas. The modern art movement

historically began with Picasso's painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which the character of Picasso discovers near the end of the play.

During our second design meeting, the designer mentioned the ingenious idea of letting the set design reflect the impressionistic world that dominates the play. He believed that his design would call attention to the characters' need to capture reality through art, called Impressionism, which was shattered by Picasso's Cubistic works. In this way, the set could amplify from a design aspect the action of the script. Although I felt nervous about his idea at first, the designer created sketches and drawings for the entire production team to examine. Quickly, I realized that the play allowed for such creativity even though other productions usually did it in a more straightforward, realistic manner. As the designer's sketches showed, the bar would have a strong back wall to anchor the set and give it dimension while a half-circle bar area center stage would provide nice space for movement. The tables and chairs set in the open playing space would provide concrete physical objects for the characters to use and move around. The designer left a fair amount of open playing space center stage, which proved important since we were using a thrust stage. As the designer continued to build his designs and models, the details in his work showcased his ideas. The stage, made to look like it had a wooden floor, would be painted to appear impressionistic with touches of diverse color and brush strokes. The designer duplicated this effect on the back wall and then topped it off with a whimsical black cut-out of the Parisian skyline. Even the bottles, tables, and chairs would carry the painterly, multi-stroke effect, unifying the set and properties and making a bold statement (see fig. B.1).

The set could not be totally artistic, however. There had to exist a behind-the-scenes practical element to it as well. We had to consider the limitations of the Mabey

Theatre in the development of the stage design. Since the text calls for the set to disappear completely in the final pages of the script, the designer had to plan and measure the bar in detail to ensure that it could exit the stage quickly and efficiently. The entire scenic unit was put on a pulley system so that a machine could move it rather than stage hands. Although the theatre space has a partial fly system, a black scrim curtain could not be lowered in front of the set due to limited space. Instead, the build crew had to build an intricate trough system to hold the scrim until stage hands lowered it by hand. We had to time everything perfectly when removing the set; otherwise, the trough would catch on the wall or the pulley system would not operate properly and the whole effect would be lost on the audience. Developing and building this system was extremely difficult due to the lack of time and space. When the build crew completed the set, the stage hands had to run the changing sequence repeatedly in order to become comfortable with the changeover, and even then it did not run smoothly every night.

Another question that had to be answered was how to best project Picasso's Cubist painting. The revelation of the work is the climax of the play's action, and it had to be handled with care. Despite trepidation on my part, the designer's plan worked to perfection. Using a mirror on the back wall, the projector (which sat on the back of the set), sent the image to the mirror, which reflected it onto the large middle wall of the set, just above the bar. The designer planned this technique well, but as the set moved away to reveal the universe, the stage hands had to turn off the projector while the entire set moved off stage. We then had to figure out how to keep the projection of the painting on the set for the entire show as called for in the script. When I first mentioned this problem to the scenic designer, he suggested that we hang a second projector from the front of the theatre above the audience. This projector would be rigged to immediately project the



image of the painting on the scrim as soon as the set disappeared. This solution, however, unleashed a multitude of problems concerning lighting, especially as the lighting designer feared that the projection would cast too much light on the stage during the universe reveal. Everyone in the design team brainstormed to find an answer to the second projector problem, but unfortunately it became clear that nothing would work. The lighting designer and I tried to solve the dilemma by adding an overlapping cube pattern design on the stage floor to emphasize the Cubistic style. We discovered that this lighting effect diminished the need for the second projection, much to everyone's relief. With the problem solved, the production team refocused on their work as a stressful moment in the design process ended.

Choosing the paint colors for the stage floor presented the final challenge in realizing the scene design. Usually, the designer picks paint with ease, but with so many colors used in the production, selecting the colors that would blend appropriately proved difficult. My thesis advisor and I both approached the scenic designer about muting the colors more to match the model. We feared that the colors painted appeared too bright and that they would distract from the overall effect of the show. Also, the costume designer showed concern that her color palette did not match his brightly-painted floor the way that it had for his scenic model. Fortunately, by working together created a floor that pleased almost everyone, at least to a certain degree. Overall, working with the scenic designer was a great process, and our collaboration resulted in a beautifully mounted and functional set (see fig. B.2).

### *Lighting*

The task of the lighting designer is to balance the needs of the play with his or her own design concepts. For this particular production, I gave the lighting designer a fair

amount of artistic freedom due to the playful nature of the overall design metaphor. Since the designer was a student, I wanted her to explore her potential while learning from the process. For this reason, as I met with the student, I tried to listen to her thoughts on how she could contribute to the production through her lighting plan. She showed excitement about working on the piece, and I welcomed her enthusiasm. I felt nervous about the fact that her faculty mentor was going to be gone for the entire production process due to an extended maternity leave; however, the student seemed to have a level head on her shoulders, and at the beginning of the process, she turned in all of her design work ahead of schedule.

Her lighting scheme, in keeping in line with the overall impressionistic concept, was to evolve through the play from a blue to a rose palette. This color shift would occur primarily in the general lighting washes on the stage. In this way, the lighting mirrored Picasso's journey from his blue to rose periods. Although the designer planned the concept with detail, I felt initially unsure of having so many light cues. Since the set was colorful and unique, I felt that the other areas of design should support the scenery and not compete against it. After bringing this idea up with the designer, she assuaged my fears by convincing me of the subtlety of her lighting design. While I trusted her intuition at this point, I did make one important request. As a comedy, the play's production needed bright lighting on the actors' faces. The designer assured me that when we began technical rehearsals, she would do whatever requested of her to adjust cues, increase intensity, and give me what I deemed appropriate. So, I decided to let the lighting designer have complete artistic liberty.

One thing on which we saw eye-to-eye was the entrance of the Singer. In this sequence, we both wanted bright light and fog to blow through the bathroom door from

which the Singer entered. The effect would give the Singer a strong silhouette, making him mysterious and exciting. The cue worked brilliantly, with lots of lighting specials and beautiful rose-hued cues bathing the stage (see fig. B.3). Overall, the designer's work from the Singer's entrance to the end of the show pleased me, especially when the set moved away and star-like lighting effects flooded the stage (see fig. B.4).

Unfortunately, as is customary with lighting design, I did not see the entire design until technical rehearsals. Once the designer began to cue the lights, I knew instantly that I had allowed her too much artistic liberty. The washes did not appear cohesive and not enough warm light lit the actors' faces. To my surprise, although the designer had promised me an understated look, most of the cues were jarring and pointless. Also, I found her rather attached to the design and reluctant to make any changes. Although we went from cue to cue, each with the request for more warm light on the actors, she lacked the experience to give me what I needed. One cue that I specifically requested to occur in a precise manner was the revelation of Picasso's painting. For some unknown reason, she lit the stage in bright rose colors and cube patterns, which not only overwhelmed the actors and set but also led the audience's attention away from the central focus of the play: Picasso's reaction to the painting. For this cue, I stood my ground and requested that we build the cue together. I wanted a completely different look than the one she had given me. I wanted the cue to reveal the stage in complete blackness except for an intense spotlight on Picasso. To me, simplicity was the best choice for this particular cue. The designer revolted against my idea. We finally compromised by shining a spotlight on Picasso with the cube pattern softly washing the rest of the stage. Exhausted by this battle, however, I gave up hope on fixing the rest of the show's problems.

Thankfully, my faculty mentor came to the first dress rehearsal and, sensing my distress, demanded that the designer make the necessary changes within twenty-four hours. The next day, he and I met with the lighting designer to inspect her work. She had made some significant and welcomed changes, including substituting the saturated gels casting a dark glow on the stage with lighter, warmer gels that illuminated the actors' faces. I never felt completely pleased with the way the lights turned out for the show, but they did not ruin the production. Overall, I learned a lot through the process. In the future, if a designer brings me a cue sheet with one hundred potential cues for a show that only requires ten, then we will have to work together at that time to simplify the design. Once the show goes into technical rehearsals, the pressure is high, time is limited, and the designer feels attached to his or her work. In a way, I am glad that I had to deal with this situation under the watchful eye of my mentor and not on my own in the professional world. Through it all, I learned much about working with lighting designers and I can only hope that the young, novice designer took as much away from the experience as I did.

### *Sound*

Not every design element in the production process proved as demanding and challenging as the setting and lights. The sound design, developed and implemented by another student designer, turned out appropriate and playful. Since the play was not confined to only one style of music, the student mixed various musical types together to create one single, over-arching sound design. For the pre-show music, the designer and I picked some songs from a few French-inspired CDs that I brought him. Although I assured him that the musical content of the CDs just showed an example of what I wanted for the production, he liked the music and chose a host of accordion-infused French

songs. The designer planned the pre-show design to create a whimsical, French-inspired atmosphere for the audience as soon as they walked in the theatre space. Also as part of the pre-show plans, the designer and I agreed to have the actor playing the French character Gaston record the pre-show announcement. The heavy accent of the character added to the music, increasing the fanciful, French feeling of the world of the play. The comedic spirit of the announcement also helped prepare the audience for the tone of the play.

Since there were only a few sound cues in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, the designer worked diligently on specific ones, including the toilet flush played every time a person exited the bathroom. He placed a sound speaker in the set's bathroom for the cue, making it seem as if the characters flushed an actual toilet immediately offstage. The toilet sound cue also prepared the audience for the Singer's entrance, as he also came through the bathroom door. The sound designer created a fifteen second cue for the event that played at the end of the toilet flush. It started with a low rumble and built in intensity to the final flush sound just as the door swung open. In performance, the cue always received a laugh. For curtain call, the designer used a well-known Elvis song (a nod to the Singer character) that captured the essence of the play through its lyrics: "a little less conversation, a little more action." With the design coming full circle from the French-inspired accordion music to Elvis' rock-and-roll music, the sound of the play mirrored the action occurring on stage. The design worked well, and thanks to the postmodern qualities of the play, such a design made perfect sense.

### *Costumes*

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is an ideal play for a costume designer as there are only eleven costumes required. This allowed the designer to create detailed costumes

appropriate to the characters and well-executed. To assure that the costume designer and I agreed on the characters, we met early to discuss each character individually and reveal how they fit together to create an ensemble. After our initial meeting, the designer constructed posters on each character filled with her research. This gave us plenty of fodder for discussion before the designer sketched her primary costume renderings. Early on, we talked about the impressionistic quality of the set and how the costumes should fit within the world of the play. For a while, we tossed around the idea of taking the impressionistic quality of the set further by building the costumes out of white fabric and then painting on them. After much deliberation, the designer and I decided that the painted costumes would compete with the other design elements and take away some of the textural quality needed for the play. The costumes, therefore, could help ground the characters and give them dimension while working within the color palette of the set. In this way, the costumes helped create the historical era of the play and the uniqueness of the characters while enhancing the set. The designer's color costume renderings turned out well. They showed the costume artist's ability to match period elements with characterization, as well as the playful style of the overall design concept. Many of the students who saw the renderings at the design presentation proclaimed that the designs were the best they had ever seen. The process of constructing the garments did not run as smoothly as hoped, however.

The first problem encountered in the costume building process was the designer's tardiness in ordering fabric from New York City. Although the costumer pulled most of the male characters' costumes from the stock room, the costume crew constructed the female characters' dresses from scratch without the help of patterns. The designer, a faculty member, ordered high-quality fabric from New York City to heighten the look of

the costumes. Although the idea seemed fabulous, the fact that the designer ordered the fabric fairly late in the process became a problem. The costume crew created mock-up patterns using muslin fabric to start the process, but they spent much time waiting for the final fabric to arrive. Once the material arrived, the costume designer and crew had to make up a lot of work in a short amount of time. The costumers built the costumes in time, but we could have avoided the race to the finish with a little more planning by the designer.

In the end, the costumes came together. I was not pleased with Sagot's coat, which fit the period but did not fit the color scheme. The designer had intentions of building a tailed coat from scratch using a beautiful green plaid material, but when she went to order it, the store had none in stock. This hurt her plans as she was already behind schedule. She had to pull a coat from costume storage, which then became the only black material on stage. To me, the coat stuck out and did not blend with the other costumes, but with the limited time I did not have much choice but to accept it.

One costume caused much undue stress and heartache for an actress. The designer built the costume of the actress playing Suzanne about three inches too tight around her waist. Although the female actresses wore period-style corsets to give them the right look, the costumes were not supposed to make them suffer like the women of the period. Each night, the actress spent fifteen to thirty minutes getting into her corset and skirt, since the corset had to make her waist twenty inches for the skirt to fasten. The actress' stress increased two-fold by having to change her blouse on stage. In the script, as soon as Suzanne enters, she changes her top in front of everyone, including the audience. Unfortunately, the actress could not practice the costume change until dress rehearsals. She could remove the first blouse with ease, but the second one did not work

so well. To cover the awkwardness of the moment, another character improvised lines. Even though he made the audience laugh, the difficult costume change disrupted the tempo of the scene and affected the overall rhythm of the performance. In retrospect, I should have cut the change or demanded that the costumer make the second top much earlier for the actress to have time to practice with it. Luckily, the actress got better at changing her costume each performance, and the actor who covered her change developed more and more humorous moments.

### *Makeup and Hair*

The makeup and hair design was handled by the costume designer, who delegated the responsibilities to a makeup crew for the run of performances. In the same way that she designed the costumes, the designer researched hair and makeup fashions of the historical characters and time period, then blended those ideas with her own artistic choices. Since the theatre was a fairly intimate space, only one male needed to wear makeup to give a slight aging effect. All of the actresses wore natural-looking makeup with the addition of rosy cheeks and lips. One faculty member suggested exploring the pale, garish makeup effect found in Impressionistic paintings, but I feared the choice would distract from other design elements and potentially change character readings. Although the play allowed for experimentation, I felt that the extreme makeup might be work against the intimate nature of the play.

For hairstyles, the designer asked the male actors to grow their hair long so that she could more easily develop different styles. All of their hairstyles worked well, even though we had to dye the hair of the actor playing Einstein to match his dark moustache. The women in the cast also grew their hair long so that the designer could style it in line with the historical period. Some of the actresses wore their hair in a Gibson Girl style,



but the young woman playing the Female Admirer wore hers only half-up, with a big pink bow and bouncy curls. The actress playing Suzanne wore a wig as she had short, fine hair that did not work with the play's style.

In hindsight, I would have changed the request for the actress playing the Countess to dye her hair red. Although the script calls for the character to have red hair, the actress had beautiful, waist-length hair that had never been chemically-processed. At the first dress rehearsal, I cringed when I saw the oversized hat made for her (which she never removed during the show). The hat covered eighty percent of her hair and defeated the purpose of the lengthy and costly dye process. No one ever saw her beautiful, long, red hair. The actress maintained a good attitude, but to this day, I wish that I had changed the text instead of the hair.

### *Conclusion*

Working together, the collaborative team and I developed a strong design concept that each designer explored through his or her individual designs. While the process started out smoothly, it hit some rough patches during the technical rehearsals. The designers and I handled the majority of the problems professionally and efficiently, but we could not address every one. The limitations of time as well as the lack of design and directorial experience caused many problems. Working with designers is a balancing act, and I learned a lot about communication and clarity of vision through this production process. I now understand how important it is to speak up at the beginning of the pre-production process rather than to wait until a designer has created a design and become overly attached to his or her work. I also learned the value of giving an experienced designer artistic freedom; the designer may create something unique and vital for the show that the director could never have dreamed on his or her own. In the end, most of

the designs for *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* appeared aesthetically unified, offering strong production values and creating an interestingly theatrical world.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Production Process

#### *Introduction*

One of the most important roles that the director plays in the production process is as the acting coach. From the pre-production process to the final performance of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, I worked to create a safe environment for the cast that balanced structure with freedom. I wanted the actors to feel liberated to explore their craft within a healthy set of boundaries. This chapter will explore my strategies as a director for Baylor's production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. I will discuss the auditioning and casting processes as well as my work with the actors in rehearsals, technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and finally, in performance.

#### *Directorial Strategies*

I made it clear from the beginning that while I had a concept for the production, I did not have every detail of the play specifically determined. I had a strong vision, but I invited the actors to share their thoughts and ideas in hopes of achieving true collaboration. This way the cast could feel invested in the play and by the end of the process, they would feel a sense of ownership of the work.

I also stressed the idea of working together as a team as part of a larger mission: to enjoy creating art. At the first rehearsal, one actor asked me if I permitted him to have fun throughout the process, which really surprised me. Apparently, this actor had worked with other directors who had given explicit instructions not to enjoy the rehearsal process. My philosophy is quite different and I quickly told the cast that if we were not doing

theatre because we loved and took pleasure in the work that we should go home. Of course, I mentioned having fun was not the only goal in mounting the play. I admitted that putting the production together would require strenuous moments and hard work. In the end, however, I wanted the actors to look back on the production process with a sense of pride for all of their accomplishments. This did not mean that we would not strive to create a strong production; we just had to champion the importance of the process as well as the product.

### *Auditions*

Auditions are a crucial part of the rehearsal process because a good director knows that casting is half the work. By choosing a well-balanced cast of talented individuals with good chemistry and a great work ethic, the director can set the production on a positive path early in the rehearsal process. Likewise, a disjointed cast with a mismatch of actors can bring disastrous results. Going into auditions, the undergraduate actors at Baylor University showed much enthusiasm for the play; interestingly, most had never encountered the play before auditions. I discovered that a few of them studied it extensively in an acting class, so I looked forward to seeing what they would offer at auditions.

Since the play was the last show of the season, auditions were held at the end of February, two weeks before spring break. This proved advantageous for the actors as they received scripts early to begin working on their characterizations and dialects. I chose five different dialects for the production, including French for Gaston, Spanish for Picasso, German for Einstein, Southern for the Singer, and Standard American English for the rest of the characters. Previous productions of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* have used a host of dialects, ranging from Standard American English across the board to

different dialects for each character. Martin's playfulness in the script allowed me to choose the dialects I felt the play needed. I selected the dialects corresponding to the native tongues of the historical characters, and French for Gaston because his lines are funnier that way.

The auditions took place in the Mabee Theatre, one of the three stages in Baylor's Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center. The space proved perfect for auditions as it was the same theatre used in the production. This location provided me ample opportunity to see the actors' use of space and their understanding of working on a thrust stage, as well as their commitment to characterization. The initial auditions occurred on the first night, which progressed to callbacks the following night. For auditions, I asked the actors to work with cuts from the script instead of memorizing monologues. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is an ensemble-oriented play, so I wanted to see chemistry between the actors, which monologues do not offer. I broke the groups of actors into sections of six people, with each section auditioning in fifteen minute increments. The actors arrived into the theatre one group at a time, and I randomly paired them up to read from two page-long sides of the script. Fifteen minutes provided me with enough time to see different actors read together multiple times. After auditioning approximately eighty students, I narrowed the callback list to fewer than five people per role with the exception of two roles. I called back seven actresses for each of the two roles in order to give everyone an opportunity to read, especially since more female students auditioned than male.

Callbacks ran smoothly, thanks to the organized list I made. I started with the groups reading for Einstein, Picasso, and the Singer. I called back some of the same actors for multiple roles, so I knew that it would behoove me to focus on the more demanding roles first. Also, since cast chemistry plays a major role in an ensemble-

oriented show, casting the main roles proved crucial. Since the callbacks ran efficiently, I was able to see small groups of people at a time. This worked well in that I wasted no one's time and I could see all of the actors read multiple times. I started with listings of actors that I wanted to read together, and after everyone performed, I mixed the groups around to observe different pairs of actors' chemistry. Since the actors worked with the same scripts used in auditions, I expected them to have some familiarity with the text. Thus, I looked especially for actors making strong character choices while creating relationships with other characters. Major qualities I was hoping to find were: (1) that the actors could confidently fill the space, (2) that they looked the part and could create nuanced characterizations, and (3), that they understood the comedic timing of the script. I felt certain after callbacks that I could cast all of my roles except one: Germaine. I had a few actresses in mind, but I did not have a strong sense of which one of them could confidently perform the character. The next day, I conducted a second set of callbacks in the theatre with two female students and after only fifteen minutes with them, I knew that I had found Germaine. Overall, the audition process ran efficiently thanks to the talent exhibited by the actors and my ability to organize a large audition.

### *Casting*

My first considerations in casting centered on the historical characters of Picasso, Einstein, and the Singer. I discovered in auditions that I had several choices for the roles, which made me happy. Final casting for the parts came down to a deliberation of several qualities, including each actor's physical appearance, vocal quality, ability to take direction, work ethic, reputation as an actor, and level of experience.

I wanted to cast the role of Picasso first as he plays the central protagonist. I looked for several qualities in casting the role. First, I knew that the actor had to appear

handsome, preferably with brown hair and a strong stature. The actor did not only have to look the part, however; he also needed to possess an acute sense of comedic timing and an understanding of how to play the role with audacity and vulnerability. The actor ultimately cast in the role impressed me with his courage to take risks. Although he had not perfected his Spanish accent, the actor raised the stakes by using his accent to the best of his ability. Very few actors even tried the accent in auditions, so already he made himself stand out. The actor also commandeered the role by balancing cocky, womanizing qualities with simplicity and authenticity. These were important features to developing a strong characterization of Picasso, and precisely what helped the actor land the role.

Next, I looked to cast Einstein and the Singer. These actors also needed to have physical qualities related to the historical characters, as well as an understanding of the internal energy attributed to each character. The actors auditioning for the role of Einstein read him in several different ways, and although the actor that I ultimately cast did not nail the character perfectly, I knew that with a little direction he could handle the role. I found casting the role of the Singer easy. The actor chosen impersonated Elvis with an amazing flair and sense of fun. He had strikingly similar physical attributes to those of Elvis, and his charisma in the role was palpable. In the final analysis, the dedication and hard work I received from these three actors was strong and I feel confident that I cast them well.

Once I chose the three iconic characters, the casting of the rest of the male ensemble went smoothly. Since I had thoroughly analyzed the play before auditions, I came into the process with clear directions for the non-historical characters, which are fairly open to interpretation. I knew that I wanted a strong guy with jock-like qualities to

play Freddy. The characterization needed to be gruff, dense, and competitive. The actor who won the role portrayed these features well, and when I gave him direction, he immediately internalized it while keeping a great sense of comedic timing. What interested me most about him was his ability to bring the character to life through stage business and an energetic personality. The role of Gaston concerned me greatly before auditions. I feared that none of the undergraduate students could handle playing the character's age, but fortunately the actor who won the role personified Gaston with a good amount of age, grump, and charm. The actor had played several older male roles beforehand, so I knew that with a little training he could effectively play the vocal and physical aspects of the character. He also read the role with a French accent, which helped him stand out. While he did not have the perfect dialect, the actor let me know that he could learn it quickly. The actor cast as Schmendiman embodied the character's explosive energy and I looked forward to working with such a hardworking and talented actor. Once I chose Schmendiman, casting Sagot proved easier as I wanted the two roles to be played with distinct and contrasting energies. The male actor cast in the role of Sagot fit my mental image of him perfectly, and since I had enjoyed working with him on other projects, I knew he would be a great choice for the play.

Casting the female roles was easy except for Germaine. Suzanne, Picasso's young lover, needed to be a beautiful actress who understood how to use her looks, charm, and womanly guiles in her characterization. The woman who won the role surprised me with her strength and passion as the character, and I happily cast her knowing that she had a dedicated work ethic. The actress cast as the Countess read for the role of Suzanne well in auditions, although she interpreted the character differently than I did. A talented actress, the actress did not fit the role of Suzanne, so I cast her as



the Countess. For the character of the Female Admirer, a bit part in the play, I cast a young woman who had the right mix of classic beauty and girlish charm. In performance, the actress worked so well in the role that she received the largest amount of laughter and applause even though she was on stage for less than a minute. The only casting choice that I had difficulty filling was the role of Germaine, the headstrong and sarcastic neo-romantic. Since I could not decide whom to cast in the role, I had private callbacks with the top two actresses in contention for the part. Each of them embodied different characteristics of Germaine's personality, but neither could command the theatre space. Consequently, I gave them direction to see if they could achieve the goal with a little guidance. The actress ultimately cast in the role took my direction quickly, which assuaged my fears and proved to me that she could effectively play the character. In the end, I looked forward to having her in the cast as well as the rest of the ensemble. Everyone in the department remarked on what a wonderful job I did in casting the play, which pleased me immensely.

### *Actor Preparation*

Once the actors were cast, the hard work on the show began. As the director, I wanted to make the rehearsal process as smooth and efficient as possible. In order to do so, I established guidelines for the actors to let them know what I expected from them. After our first read-through of the script together, I explained to the cast four basic regulations that I felt encapsulated the foundation of a professional working environment. I did not try to establish the rules for the sake of showing my domination; instead, I tried to appeal to the actors' reasoning skills. I expressed to them that the policies made complete sense for actors trying to achieve a higher art and create a professional working environment.

First, I asked that everyone arrive to rehearsal on time. I explained that punctuality was important for their sake as much as everyone else's. True art, I expressed, cannot be made at a moment's notice; it takes time to prepare the mind and the body for creation. Therefore, the actors should strive to arrive promptly, if not early, in order to be thoroughly ready. Second, I asked the actors to respect the theatre space, which included cleaning up and caring for the work environment. I did not request this simply because I like order. I revere the sanctity of the theatre space and believe that art cannot be created in chaos. Third, I reminded the actors to value the work of the designers, stage managers, tech crew, and everyone else involved in the production. By honoring the production team, the actors could earn their respect and help make the production environment professional and enjoyable. I wanted the cast to remember that the theatre does not revolve around them; instead, it takes many people on and behind the stage to produce a good show. Finally, I invited the actors to respect their position in the production process and not to take it upon themselves to direct other actors. Unwanted advice generally creates discomfort and sometimes even hostility between actors, which can result in divided camps and overall cast dissension. Instead, I strongly encouraged the actors to come to me and share their thoughts about the process. This way, the actors could collaborate in the development of the production under my guiding hand.

As I proposed these concepts for the production process, I received positive feedback from the cast. Through my experience in theatre, I have learned that inspiring actors takes a lot more effort than dictating to them, but that the ultimate payoff is much more positive in the end. As I reflect, I am immensely satisfied with the work ethic of the cast and their overall commitment to professionalism. I think that setting the right tone

for the rehearsal process worked in my favor and that the final product was more successful because of the rules I established early in rehearsal.

### *Rehearsal Schedule*

Baylor's production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* had five weeks of rehearsal, starting March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and ending April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008. Technically, the rehearsal process lasted only four weeks due to the loss of a week at Easter. Having auditions before Baylor's spring break worked well, allowing the actors cast to begin working with their scripts before the first rehearsal. I did not require the actors to memorize their lines over the break, as I feared they would fall into vocal rhythms and acting choices that might hinder them in the long run. Instead, I asked that the actors achieve familiarity with the script and start making character choices that could be explored in rehearsal. In this way, the cast could return ready to work and discover the play organically without preconceived ideas.

To ease the process, I broke down the four weeks of rehearsal into sections so that we could move through the process as smoothly as possible, including staging rehearsals, work-through rehearsals, run-throughs, and finally, technical and dress rehearsals. To aide in our understanding of the larger dramatic units of the play (which has no scene or act delineations), I broke the play down into twelve large units. These were divided naturally by the play's structure and movement, and the units helped me call certain actors to rehearsals instead of everyone at the same time. I gave the night off to those not called for a particular rehearsal. I have discovered that respect for everyone's time makes them happier in the end; it gives them purpose when they are at rehearsal and time off to memorize lines, finish school work, or rest when they are not required. Working in this way, the actors and I blocked the play's twelve sections in the first week, worked through

those sections in the second week, and finally ran through the entire play in the third week. After the initial three weeks of rehearsal, the cast and I were ready for the challenges of technical and dress rehearsals.

### *First Rehearsal*

The production process usually begins the same for every company. First, everyone fills out paperwork such as medical forms and contract agreements. Next, the cast reads through the entire play together, and then the director and stage manager present their production guidelines (mentioned earlier). Last, the director and cast discuss the style and world of the play, the functions and qualities of each of the individual characters, and their overall plans to approach the production. Generally called “table work,” some directors and casts spend several days discussing the world of the play and the characters living inside of it. For *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, however, I felt that we needed only one rehearsal sitting down at a table. With such an action-based play, I believed that the cast and I could discover it much better on our feet, working the play out moment-to-moment.

The most important element that I wanted to discuss with the cast at the first rehearsal was the comic spirit of the play. The comic sense, as defined by John Dolman in *The Art of Acting*, consists of seven psychological principles:

1. A confident, easy ability to function on two planes at once, as artist and instrument.
2. A strong, but subtle feeling for thought sharing as opposed to exhibitionism.
3. A keen sense of humor.
4. A lively sense of projection.
5. A delicate sense of timing.
6. A sharp sense of contrast.
7. A reasonable amount of restraint. (120)

Thankfully, I cast performers whom I believed possessed the necessary comic sense required to play the humor. Some of the actors had a better sense of comic technique than others, but I knew that all of them had it to a degree, and I hoped I could teach them what they lacked. Dolman's first and third points were most important for the actors to understand from the beginning. The actors in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* had to grasp the idea that they had two purposes on the stage: to truthfully play their characters within the world of the play, and to recognize and comprehend the humor in the play so as to invite the audience to laugh at certain times. To discover the comedy, the actors had to search the text and discover incongruities of situations, characterizations, and dialogue.

The other principles expounded by Dolman were just as important as these two, but I felt they were skills we could sharpen through technique within the rehearsal process. I summarized the other five into the most significant direction that I could give the cast: trust the comedy in the script. After the read-through together, I asked the cast if they believed in the humor of the play, to which they emphatically agreed. I then stated that if the script appeared humorous to us just by reading it, then the comic spirit existed and we needed to trust it. We did not need to over-emphasize the comedy and exaggerate every moment or gesture. As John Gassner explains in *Producing the Play*, "Nothing will make a comedy seem as unfunny as exaggeration. An actor who is obviously trying to be funny quickly loses the audience." (429) Instead, I invited the actors to apply a variety of comedy techniques to focus the audience's attention to the humor, which would allow the audience to discover the comedy on their own. These included, but were not limited to: pausing for laughs, signaling the punch lines through controlled action, varying the timing, and developing nuanced characterizations that maintained the integrity of the play. The actors responded well to this discussion of the comic spirit of

*Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, and although I knew that we would have to work on honing our comedic skills throughout the entire rehearsal process, I felt that we had already begun the journey.

After discussing how to play the comic spirit, I led the actors through exercises that I hoped would inspire them to make choices about their characters. I began with Stanislavskian exercises, typically the most basic approach to understanding any play. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is not the type of play most often connected to the Stanislavski system, but since the actors knew the technique best, and it places so much emphasis on studying the text, I decided to begin there. I asked each actor to write down his or her character's over-arching objectives, obstacles, and tactics used to achieve his or her goals. I gave them plenty of time to dig into their scripts and when everyone finished writing, we went around the room and discussed each character individually with everyone sharing their ideas. I learned a lot about each character from the actors' input, which contributed to my overall interpretation of the play.

With the first phase of the rehearsal over, I next asked the actors to think beyond the confines of what we would call "inside-out" acting, or acting that starts in the mental processes and then moves to the physical. Instead, I encouraged them to explore exterior "masks" like dialects, props, costumes, and physical/vocal choices that would lead them to explore their characters from the outside-in. Using a technique made famous by Stella Adler, a famous American acting coach, I led the group in animal characterizations. In this exercise, the actors compile everything they know about their characters and then choose an animal that best embodies those characteristics. This work had multiple aims: first, for the actors to eliminate their "social" masks and inhibitions; second, for them to explore and discover themselves vocally and physically; and third, for the actors to start

making bold choices. I encouraged the actors not to get stuck on getting it “right.” Even if they chose an animal, investigated it, and then discovered a problem with the choice, at least they had made a choice that led them to finding a stronger one. The actors’ response to the exercise pleased me immensely. Many mixed several different animal behaviors together to develop new creatures that encompassed everything they thought about their characters. I gave the actors time to explore their choices physically and then discuss them with the group. Sometimes, we found deeper relational connections between characters as we discovered that one person had prey-like qualities while another was like a predator. Overall, Stella Adler’s animal exercise proved useful in helping the actors explore their characters in a new way and make bold choices from the beginning. I knew that *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* would require a lot from the actors physically and vocally as part of the expression of its humor. Once we finished the first rehearsal, we were ready to work on the stage and begin storytelling through blocking.

### *Staging Rehearsals*

My approach to staging is a mixture of strategic planning and organic development. Prior to each blocking rehearsal, I created a movement chart to help point out the existing structure of the play while leaving room for creative exploration. I examined the script in detail to determine the best way to use the actors to create interesting compositions and strong stage pictures. My main objective: effectively tell Martin’s story and reveal the relationships between his characters. Starting with this foundation, I then collaborated with the actors to incorporate their ideas and impulses. Sometimes the rough blocking charts worked brilliantly to inspire the actors and tell the story well; other times, we had to stop, revisit the script, and investigate another approach. Most of the time, once the staging was loosely in place, the actors felt free to

explore within the boundaries of the movement, creating nuanced acting that became both interesting and powerful.

Working in the Mabee space dictated much of the staging, as it is a three-quarter thrust stage. Before blocking rehearsals began, the stage manager and I taped the outline of the bar on the floor so that the cast and I could see how much space we had. Since we did not use the vomitoriums for entrances and exits, we needed to know the exact amount of space available around the bar as all entrances and exits would be from upstage right and left. I also felt it crucial to have all of the on-stage seating areas, including the tables and chairs, present from the beginning of the rehearsal process. I personally went to the set storage area and picked all tables and chairs used in the production. I valued the importance of their size, shape, and placement to the blocking process as they helped to create dynamic levels, spacing, and floor patterns. I knew that they would also be used in establishing the comic spirit, as the actors could use movement in and around the furniture pieces to hit punch lines or draw focus.

One problem that I had to solve in the blocking process was the actors' tendency to enter the stage and remain in one specific area for long periods of time. I also encountered the opposite problem, that of some actors constantly moving about the stage with no sense of purpose. I worked hard to keep the actors open to the audience seated on three sides of the stage. It was especially difficult for the actors to stay open while seated at the four tables located around the perimeter of the stage. I had to give the actors specific motivation to move about the bar so that the audience members could see them from all angles and depths. As *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* progresses through the script, almost all of the characters enter the stage, increasing the importance of clean and strong blocking so that the audience could easily follow the action of the play. As we worked



on the staging, it became apparent that the actors needed to work together as an ensemble while creating fully-realized characters on stage. The actors recognized the importance of staying focused on the rhythm of give-and-take between themselves and other actors, knowing when to demand attention on stage and when to focus it on others. They had to accomplish this in order to play the comic spirit of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* effectively, and as we moved past staging the play into work-through rehearsals, we refined the technique as much as we could.

### *Work-through Rehearsals*

Work-through rehearsals are crucial to a play's success. During this period, the cast must spend hours working through the script, exploring their characters and perfecting their performance. Thankfully, my cast memorized their lines earlier than the schedule required. This gave us more time to develop the characters fully and assured me of everyone's commitment to the success of the play.

Continuing with the "outside-in" acting techniques mentioned earlier, I gave the actors external "masks" from the first blocking rehearsal. For four of the actors, dialects served as masks: Spanish for Picasso, German for Einstein, French for Gaston, and Southern for the Singer. With the help of a faculty dialect coach, I encouraged the actors to use the accents as conduits to developing their characters.

For the non-historical characters, I employed various rehearsal props and costumes to engage them physically. For Sagot, I brought in a top hat and cane from the first rehearsal to encourage the actor to emphasize the character's ease and showman-like qualities. Unfortunately, the actor struggled with the props and found them more of a hindrance than help. For Freddy and Germaine, we used glasses, bottles, towels, aprons, and other props from the beginning of the rehearsal process. These objects served to help

the characters practice their stage business and fully develop their characterization. All of the actresses wore rehearsal corsets, skirts, and heels to help them practice 1900s period movement. Many of the men wore sports coats and leather-soled shoes in order to develop their characters' physical makeup. Gaston's cigarettes influenced him physically and vocally, and Suzanne's purse, drawing, and wine glass all contributed to the development of her character. Overall, working from the outside-in worked well for *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as the Stanislavskian system could not serve the process alone. Once we finished this section of rehearsals, we prepared ourselves for the next phase: run-through rehearsals.

### *Run-through Rehearsals*

A week before the production opened, we began running through the play in its entirety, a critical part of the rehearsal process as all of the individual sections of the play had to come together cohesively and soundly. Run-through rehearsals also helped the ensemble discover the pace of the show from beginning to end. To ensure the actors' focus before the runs, I led the group in vocal and physical warm-up exercises. Through these, I invited the actors to release all of their outside stressors in order to engage fully in rehearsal. Physical stretches helped the actors warm up their bodies, which later assisted them in continuing the acting techniques mentioned earlier. After the physical work, different actors led the cast through vocal warm ups. After the group completed the physical and vocal exercises, we played a game to energize the cast and emphasize teamwork. The sound-movement wheel proved the best exercise. Everyone stood in a circle and each person made an elongated vowel sound with a head movement to match. Then, everyone in the circle repeated the same sound and movement. Once we got around the circle, we did the exercise again with consonant sounds matched to shoulder

movements, onomatopoeias to hip movements, and finally, lines from the show with full-body movements. This game not only energized the cast, but also forced everyone to play off each other, explore fresh line readings, and focus on working together as an ensemble. In all, the warm-ups provided a crucial time to prepare the actors for the challenges of each run-through rehearsal.

The rehearsals during this stage of the process not only allowed the actors to work on the show, but also permitted faculty members to view rehearsals and offer fresh perspectives. The run-throughs also gave the designers an opportunity to see the show before adding their design elements. As faculty members met with me after rehearsals, I felt pleased to hear them express their excitement over our accomplishments and their advice in solving our problem areas. Almost everyone who came had a variation on the same notes: bolder character choices and cleaner pacing. Since the play was a comedy, I knew that pacing was of utmost importance. Some guidance from my husband helped clear up the issue. He encouraged the actors to have sharper movements directly on the punch lines and not to move through them physically. The actors needed to finish the punch line, take a quick beat, and then move. This made it easier for the audience to catch the jokes without pushing the comedy. Through it all, with the help of the notes from the faculty and my husband, the actors and I polished the show as much as possible before moving into technical rehearsals.

### *Technical and Dress Rehearsals*

Technical rehearsals can be one of the most challenging periods in a play's rehearsal process. They can suddenly jolt the momentum built through the rehearsal process with the addition of all of the technical elements, including scenery, lighting, sound, and properties. Per protocol, we did not add costumes until the dress rehearsals,

though I did see them during the technical rehearsals. Technical rehearsals also proved a challenge as the role of the director changed immensely. Up until this portion of the rehearsal process, I led the production. Once technical rehearsals begin, however, a transition occurred, and I had to give control of the show over to the stage manager, who ran the show during performance. I still had a voice over the artistic aspects of the production, but I no longer took charge. To help ease the transition, I explained to the cast that the stage manager now had control, and that they needed to respect her authority. It proved difficult at times to let go, but the stage manager and I handled the transition well, and, overall, she ran the show professionally and efficiently.

As we worked through the technical rehearsals, the technical elements drew much of my attention. I knew that this would happen during this part of the rehearsal process, which is why I determined to get the play polished before we began technical rehearsals. I still worked with the actors on certain moments and timing, but for the most part, I completely turned my focus onto adding in all of the design components. Once we completed this stage, I knew that I could refocus on the actors and help them through the dress rehearsals into performance.

### *In Production*

The final step in the production process is performance in front of a live audience. Generally, in the professional world, the director departs after the first performance, leaving the stage manager to run the production. Since this was an educational setting, I had the opportunity to observe the entire run of the show, which provided me with a fruitful experience. With comedies, the success of the show is easily measured through the audience's reaction, which astounded me for our production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. I could not believe how much they responded to the performances, which resulted

in standing ovations for almost all of them. For most of us involved in the show, as I predicted, the play no longer made us laugh. We were too familiar with the material. So when the audience responded warmly, we suddenly remember the strength of the play's comedy. Still, for the first few performances, I took a few notes during the shows and gave them to the actors. This gave me the opportunity to keep working on moments even after the play opened, which is rare in the professional world. Most of the tweaking during the run was the delivery of punch lines. There were no major changes; we just fine tuned little moments. I found great satisfaction in seeing and hearing the audience's reactions every night, knowing that we had worked so hard on the production for four weeks and that we had created something that the audience found enjoyable.

### *Conclusion*

The production process of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, from casting to performance, offered a powerful example of a group of theatre artists collaborating together to create a unified and dynamic theatrical experience. Although difficult moments and interesting challenges arose along the way, hearing some of Baylor Theatre's faculty members say that this was one of the strongest graduate thesis productions done at Baylor made me proud. The play also received favorable reviews in the school and local newspaper. According to Carl Hoover in the Waco Tribune Herald, "Baylor Theatre's 'Picasso at the Lapin Agile' shows a smart use of time and space... Timing is crucial for that to work and director Beki Baker's cast operates like clockwork in a Newtonian universe" (par. 1-2). He continues: "The play's set among the Lapin Agile's bar and several tables, but the action is smartly spread throughout so a largely talky comedy doesn't seem static—a good use of space... smart, funny, and nicely-executed, Baylor's 'Picasso' offers comedy for the mind in an age dominated by comedy

about the body” (par. 3, 6). Overall, the efforts of all of the theatre artists involved resulted in a play that moved people aesthetically, emotionally, and cerebrally. Hopefully, the production inspired the audience to believe in their own abilities and to pursue their dreams. The final chapter of this thesis will focus on my critical self-evaluation as a director and what I learned through this production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Production Evaluation

#### *Introduction*

Self-reflection is crucial to the growth of an artist. Textbook learning can only teach a director so much; field experience is the real classroom. While directing *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, I learned a great deal about the role of the director, including how to collaborate with designers and actors, how to handle challenging situations, and how to improve my directorial skills. In this chapter, I will focus on three areas concerning my work as the director of Baylor University's production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. First, I will examine the overall work of the designers, assessing how the designs served the needs of the play while effectively creating atmosphere and communicating themes. Second, I will analyze the work of the actors, investigating their individual abilities to tell the play's story while effectively embodying the characters. The final point of assessment will evaluate the production as a whole. This section will scrutinize whether the work of creating the production was a truly collaborative act, while specifically focusing on my strengths and weaknesses as a director. My evaluations will take into account feedback received from audience members, critics, professors, student actors, and the design team.

#### *Design*

The design elements of a production, when effectively combined on stage, help create the world of the play. At the same time, the designs, including scenery, lighting, sound, and costumes, must serve the production's requirements detailed in the script and

developed by the design team and director. A wise director appreciates the impact of the designers' work on the overall quality of the production, as well as on the lasting impressions left on the audience. In general, the development and execution of the designs for *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* were successful, even though a few challenges arose along the way. For the most part, the design elements created the comedic and whimsical world of the Lapin Agile bar while heightening the theme of creativity.

The scenic designer effectively crafted the play's setting, enhancing the script's basic requirements with an aesthetic flair. A minimalist myself, the designer captured my attention with his powerful, colorful set renderings, pushing me to expand my understanding of the texts and to take risks in staging the play. Although Martin establishes a strong central location through *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*'s stage directions, the designer experimented with color and texture on the walls, floor, bar area, tables, doors, bottles, and chairs. The painterly quality created on every detail of the space heightened the importance of the movement from Impressionism to Cubism. The presence of creativity lived on the stage as it does in the script. The detailed environment and openness of the space allowed for the creation of strong compositions and striking stage pictures. The actors moved around the chairs, tables, and bar area with ease and energy, which helped them tell the story through their character's movement and nuances. Although the stage itself had many limitations, including the size of the backstage area, the designer effectively employed techniques in his design that allowed the bar to disappear completely within seconds in the final moments of the play. Several challenges arose through the process of mounting the set, including the choice of paint colors and the second projection written in the script, but both were met with somewhat agreeable compromises. Some of the hues, especially the blue ones, still came out a little



too bright on the stage floor, but in the end, the set for the production looked aesthetically beautiful and inspiringly imaginative. In hindsight, I would have directed the stage crew to practice the shift sequence more in order to ensure that not one element detracted from the extraordinary quality of the setting.

Unfortunately, the lighting did not meet my expectations. I strongly believe that lighting plays a crucial role in theatre, especially in creating moods and directing the audience's attention to the action of the play. The designer's challenge was to balance her interpretation of the play's themes with the major needs of the production. For *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, a postmodern comedy, the lighting needed to appear bright and simple, especially with the detailed and extravagant set design. The lighting designer, a novice student, devised the lighting to evolve from deep shades of blue and green, typically designated as cold hues, to warm rosy pinks by the end of the play. This shift mirrored the character Picasso's transition between his Blue Period and Rose Period. Although she led me to believe that the lighting would be subtle, almost unnoticeable, the varied hues swallowed the stage and drew attention away from the set and the actors. The lighting also appeared uneven across the stage, diverting the audience's attention away from the action. One particular cue created by the lighting designer best reveals this issue. During the revelation of Picasso's painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, the designer bathed the entire stage in vibrant pink hues and cube-like patterns all over the stage floor. This was the most authentic, pivotal moment of the play, and as short as it was, all attention needed to be on Picasso, not the rest of the stage. The designer revolted against my ideas to change the cue, although she eventually gave me a compromised look. With the help of my faculty mentor, the lighting designer and I were able to achieve a more subtle look by the time the play went into production. However, I never

felt completely satisfied with the results. The lighting was spotty and distracting, and it did not help tell the story of the play or create its atmosphere. In general, the lighting designer over-designed the production, and I take responsibility for not discussing the issue with the designer earlier in the process. Some of the more effective moments of lighting in the production included the Singer's entrance and the pre-show look.

The sound designer, also a student, did not have as challenging a role to fulfill as the lighting designer as there were only a few cues in the play. Through his hard work and undeniable skill, the sound designer developed cues that established the world of the play while effectively employing a comedic and postmodern tone. The French-inspired pre-show music, which echoed the quirky and quick-paced style of the show, helped set the feel of the production for the audience. The transition in the sound design from the pre-show music to Elvis' song at the end reflected the journey of the script. The designer best showed his abilities through the creation of a sound cue for the Singer's appearance, which played on previous cues. The designer's careful consideration of the placement of each sound added to the polished design, with particular cues coming from certain speakers placed around the theatre. From the beginning of the show to the end, the sound designer's work complimented the action of the play while emphasizing its themes. The design also reflected the creative, postmodern nature of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, working against the need for realistic sound and allowing the work's whimsical, playful qualities to shine.

The costuming of the production was exceptional, including the hair and makeup designs. Costumes are critical to the audience's perception of character, and they also contribute to showing the time period of the play. Like the other designs, the costumes had to appear true to the time and place of the play, while also capturing the mood,

tempo, and overall quality of the characters. The costumer designed and built striking costumes with incredible detail, manifested in color, texture, and style. All of the costumes were exciting and vibrant on the stage, working well within the setting of the play while not competing against other design elements. Although the color palette ended up a few shades off from the floor colors, the characters believably fit within the setting. The only particular costuming problems that arose during the production were Sagot's unfortunate coat and the change of blouses made by Suzanne's character. The designer made the second blouse very late in the process, allowing the actress playing the role only a short amount of time to master the changeover technique. The costume change actually turned into a humorous bit due to another character's improvisational dialogue, but overall it slowed the pace of the show. In the future, I will instruct costume designers to provide necessary costume pieces in advance so as to ensure the actor's ability to handle them properly.

### *Acting*

My directorial strategy in working with my cast was to create a safe environment for the actors, one that allowed them to take risks, while balancing structure and freedom. I wanted the actors to feel free to explore their craft within a healthy set of boundaries. I knew that I had to earn the actors' trust early in the production and to invite their collaboration often. Primarily, I worked to inspire the actors to take ownership of the work in an effort to reach their full potential. I felt pleased with the casts' development of the sense of ensemble. Overall, I enjoyed directing the actors, and I would cast any of them again if the opportunity arose.

From the beginning, the actor playing Picasso developed his role with ease. He not only had the right look for the role, he embodied the various layers of the character

with great skill, including Picasso's charm, wit, passion, ego, and sensuousness.

Although he did not have a strong accent in auditions, the actor worked with dialect tapes and a dialect coach before rehearsals officially began, which helped him develop his character quickly. We agreed that the character of Picasso could not be separated from the Spanish accent, and I think that this choice worked in the actor's favor. The actor also established from the beginning of the process his developed sense of comedic timing. The cast could sense his pacing and followed his leadership.

The actor playing Einstein had a more difficult journey of discovery through the production process. At the auditions, I knew that the actor would have to do a lot of work physically and vocally to achieve the role by performance. However, I had worked with him before, and I knew that his work ethic was superb. When the rehearsal process began, he had already studied the German dialect and learned most of his lines. This allowed him to begin his character work from the first rehearsal, which made him stronger by the time the show opened. The acting technique that the actor and I worked on the most was in subtlety of performance. Although the play is a comedy, the actor had to learn to match his acting style to that of the other actors. At the beginning of the process, he played Einstein too broadly and over-the-top with exaggerated movements and vocalizations. In essence, he worked too hard to "show" the audience when to laugh. I encouraged him to stop illustrating his actions to the audience and to really try to complete his goals on stage. For example, he did not need to "show" the audience that he was trying to see Suzanne's character changing her blouse. Instead, he needed to really try to catch a reflection of Suzanne. This request was not a total shift of character for him, as I believed that he had already established good character choices. He just needed to focus his actions and play them as achievable goals. At first, the actor seemed deflated

at this note, but as we discussed the idea more, the actor understood the goal and his performance worked brilliantly.

The actress playing Germaine had a similar journey. To cast the role, I had two separate callbacks, and the final decision came down to her and one other actress. I chose the female cast in the role as I believed that she innately connected to the undercutting, comedic quality of the character. I enjoyed the sense of dark sarcasm that she brought to the role, though I knew that she would have to conquer her on-stage timidity to nail it. We worked tirelessly on her ability to control the theatre space, critical to the success of the ensemble and the show's pacing. For the first few weeks of rehearsal, I gave her constant notes about her vocal projection and the softness of her voice. After she first received my comments, the actress would immediately fix the problem. Inconsistency then became the issue, as the actress could not tell when she was loud enough, and she lost many of her lines and moments. As we approached the opening performance, I sensed the actress beginning to develop boldness, breaking out of the shell that was holding her back. Even though I could not depend on her as much as I could on the other lead actors, the actress gave good performances and received much praise. I believe that she proved the best choice out of the casting pool available, and her work ethic and growth through the process satisfied me.

The actors playing the following smaller roles—Singer, Suzanne, Gaston, and Schmendiman—were cast because they immediately nailed the roles at auditions. Each of the actors understood the comedic spirit of the play from the beginning, so the challenge of their roles was to fine-tune the characters' nuances and to make them feel part of the ensemble. The actor cast as the Singer blew away the competition at auditions. I had also considered the actor for the role of Picasso, but he did not fully

express the womanizing qualities of Picasso like the actor who won the role. He came across almost too likeable and naïve on stage. Undoubtedly, the actor cast as the Singer had the strongest Elvis impersonation in the department. Over time, he developed the Singer's voice and body movements to just the right level; not too exaggerated, but still a clear impersonation of "The King." The only question we had to answer through trial-and-error was if he should carry a guitar on stage, or at least have one slung on his back. The actor, a talented musician, wanted to have the guitar, but we discovered that the guitar inhibited his physical performance. After a few rehearsals, we cut the guitar, allowing the actor freedom to explore the character more fully.

The actress cast as Suzanne surprised me at auditions with her understanding of the role. The actress layered the role with characteristics like sex appeal, giggly girlishness, and a bit of playing the "blonde." I did not think that she had as finely-tuned a comedic sense as the others, but with the size of her part, I felt confident that we could work on her characterization in detail. There were times in rehearsals when I struggled with giving instructions to help the actress command the role, but her training in realistic acting inhibited her from making bolder choices. I think that she could have played up the "sex-pot" quality of her character even more, though she did not seem to understand the level to which I felt possible. Also, the issue with her costume caused her much anxiety and hindered her from growing through the performances. In reflection, I should have given the actress a clearer image of what the character could be and played with some acting exercises to get her there.

With the actor playing Gaston, I knew that he was the only one who could play the role. I did not think of him as a particularly strong actor before casting him, but at auditions, the role seemed right for him and I looked forward to working with him on his

characterization. His sense of humor worked well in the part, which was important as most of his lines were punch lines. His ability to understand the physicality of the character, however, became an issue during rehearsals. Playing an older character is difficult for young actors, and he did not quite understand that he needed to play a specific and not generic age. In playing an older role, the actor must determine what precisely is hurting him physically: gout, arthritis, pinched nerves, bad knees, poor vision are just a few examples. The actor only seemed to match a slouched position with old age. Even though we worked on this, I do not think that he fully command the role physically. Also, another issue with the actor appeared during run-through rehearsals. The character, on stage almost the entire play, delivered lines only intermittently throughout the dialogue. At times, the actor seemed to lose his concentration and focus entirely on his character's activities instead of staying connected to the ensemble. Upon reflection, I could have reminded him more often about the importance of remaining centered on the action around him.

The actor playing Schmendiman played the role superbly. During auditions, I asked the actor to read for several roles, at which point it became obvious that he could only play Schmendiman. When we began rehearsals, I felt that he had changed his interpretation of the character completely. For several rehearsals, the actor and I worked on defining the character's energy, and once he understood it, he nailed the role. At times, he had too much energy on stage, and I wish that he had slowed down and relaxed just a little, even if his character had high energy. I believe that as the actor obtains more experience performing, he will learn how to remain loose and calm within himself, even as he plays uptight, high-energy characters.

For Freddy, the actor in the role had the challenge of creating a characterization that matched the others around him. I liked his body type, voice, and sense of comedy from the beginning, and I believed that he cerebrally understood what I wanted from his work. For the character, I imagined a dense, jock-like quality with a sense of competition. Although the actor played the timing well, I do not believe that he developed the characterization to its full potential. As a professor noted, it appeared that the actor played himself on stage. The character Freddy became more of a “straight man” type of character, swallowed up by the larger-than-life characters around him. Basically, the actor needed to make some bolder decisions about his character, even if the script did not explicitly state them, and play the choices all of the way.

For the actor playing Sagot, I could not have given him more images and ideas, even physical props, to help him with the development of the character. For a character fairly open to interpretation, I made strong decisions about him before I even cast the show. The clearest decision I made involved the importance of differentiating between Sagot’s and Schmendiman’s energies. While Schmendiman had a high, buoyant quality, Sagot needed to have just as much energy, but more streamlined and aloof. Although the actor showed me his ability to do this in auditions, like the actor cast as Schmendiman, he changed his reading of the character in rehearsals. I tried to use images to help him achieve the character, but they did not help him. Then, I gave him a top hat, cane, and gloves, but no physical props seemed to assist his exploration of the character. He could not relax enough on stage to use them properly, and they became a hindrance. I even went on stage during a rehearsal to show him exactly how to use the cane, but he could not relax into the character enough to be in control of himself physically. At a certain point in rehearsals, I finally accepted that he was not making strong decisions on stage



and that I needed to meet with him privately. I met with him one-on-one to basically get him to make any decision at all and go all the way with it. Upon reflection, I feel that perhaps the actor had an under-developed sense of comedic timing, which hurt his ability to make proper choices that could grow through the process.

### *Director Self-Evaluation*

I chose to direct *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* as my thesis production because I knew that it would challenge my abilities as a director. In general, I learned many useful lessons during the process, and feel overall pleased with the production. I know that I still have much to discover as a director, and I view my thesis production as only the beginning of my journey as a theatre artist. Like the audience watching *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, I too feel Martin's invitation to explore the power of the creative spirit, and I plan to pursue that idea with humble determination.

Going into the production process, I felt that my strongest directorial asset was my ability to create a strong rapport with the actors. My years in undergraduate school pursuing a performance background, including my time working summer stock at a professional theatre, prepared me for directing actors. As I like to think of the process, when I am directing I have to understand completely and be able to play all of the characters in my head, even if I am not performing them on the stage. My experience in acting helped me develop a strong vocabulary to assist the performers in their processes. It also gave me a true understanding of the importance of valuing the process, and I learned as an actor what I respected or disrespected in working with different directors. Thus, in working with my cast on *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, I focused on true collaboration with them while leading them with a guiding hand. Everyone got along well, and from their comments to me after the show, the actors were all very proud of the

process and product. I accomplished my main goal; the cast felt proud ownership of the production. A strength that I discovered through the mounting of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* was that I have a good feel for the pacing of comedy, and that I need to trust my instincts in this area. Comedy is a difficult form of theatre, and not every director understands the comedic spirit. With my years doing improvisational comedy and comedic stage plays, I have learned many techniques for performing comedy, and I need to trust myself to employ them effectively.

I also knew going into rehearsals that I was a strong staging director. I have a good feel for effective blocking, and I think that my structured/organic staging process works well. I have always valued a well-staged production as I firmly believe that the use of the stage tells the story of the play as much as the dialogue and characterizations. The only moment of blocking that haunts me now was the choice to have the final moments of the play, including the toast to the new century, with the actors in a semi-circle center stage. I realized what a weak stage picture that moment was once we started dress rehearsals, but by this point I felt that unable change anything, mainly because of the lighting situation. The lighting designer had created a very specific cue for this moment, and I felt out of energy to make substantive changes. I staged the rest of the show, however, with excellence, and I have learned that even inside my strengths I can have moments of underwhelming work.

My work on *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* also pointed out areas in which I am directorially weak. I knew before starting the process that my lack of experience in working with designers intimidated me. I did not have a strong design background, and with my acting experience, I did not have much interaction with the technical side of theatre. Also, as a graduate student working with seasoned designers, I felt nervous

about taking a more hands-on approach. I did a fine job of inspiring their design concepts and that we had excellent dialogue over different ideas, but I never felt like I was in control of the process. I honestly figured that they knew more about design than I did, so I did not have the authority to step in and direct their decisions. The problem arose that some of the designers needed to be reined in, though I lacked the courage to do so. I knew from the first meeting with the lighting designer that she was over-designing the production. She had planned over fifty lighting cues, when I knew that the show only needed a few simple ones. I was intimidated by my lack of lighting experience, so I let her have free control over the design, which led to major conflict during technical rehearsals. Her design failed, and I take much of the responsibility for that, as I should have led her with a stronger hand from the beginning. I learned a lot from working with the designers, and I now understand that I must have clearer communication with them from our first meeting.

Another area of weakness I discovered: I tended to let smaller issues in acting slide until they became major points of concern. As mentioned earlier, the actor's reading of Sagot in auditions worked, but as soon as we began rehearsals, I felt that he had completely changed his characterization. In essence, he became more like the Schmendiman character than Sagot. At first, I just kept giving the actor more props in an effort to find the one that would work for him. This was a technique I had learned from my years as an actor, and I believed that it would help him discover his character. I also tried to conjure images for him in an attempt to learn his "acting" language. When neither of these methods worked, I became unsure of how to direct the actor, and I did not give him enough input. As the production grew stronger for the other actors, I noticed that the actor playing Sagot quickly became a weak link in the show. I had left

him to flounder on stage with less direction than the others. As the opening performance neared, I realized that I needed to meet with the actor for some coaching, which helped him at least make a decision about which path to take his character. Unfortunately, I did not feel that the actor reached his full potential. From this directorial experience, I noted that I need to focus more on the struggling actors, even if they have smaller roles, as the ensemble is only as strong as the weakest member.

### *Conclusion*

Taking time to reflect on a production process is pivotal to the growth of a director. Through the mounting of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, I discovered much about my own directorial techniques, including my areas of strength as well as weaknesses. Examining the work of the designers and actors, the collaboration of all of the theatre artists involved played out well. There still existed room for growth in the implementation of the designs and the creation of nuanced characters, but I believe that what I learned from the experience will help me lead future designers and actors with stronger vision and communication. According to the response of the audience and critics, the production was a success, and I feel proud knowing that my work as the director facilitating the collaboration helped the productions achieve its goals.

By drawing out *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*'s themes of creativity and the human spirit through direction, design, and acting, the production team created a compelling and powerful production. The work provided a postmodern, comedic look at a fictional meeting of three great masterminds of the twentieth century, including Picasso, Einstein, and Elvis. Ideally, just as the play celebrates these three important figures of the past, it also empowers and invites the audience members to pursue their own creative potential.

Through *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Steve Martin essentially reminds all of us of the limitless possibility of the human mind, body, and spirit.

## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

### Examples of Picasso's Work



Fig. 1. *In Lapin Agile or Harlequin with a Glass* (1905)



Fig. 2. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1907)



## APPENDIX B

### Baylor University Production Photos



Fig. 1. Pre-show Setting



Fig. 2. Full-Stage View



Fig. 3. The Singer's Entrance



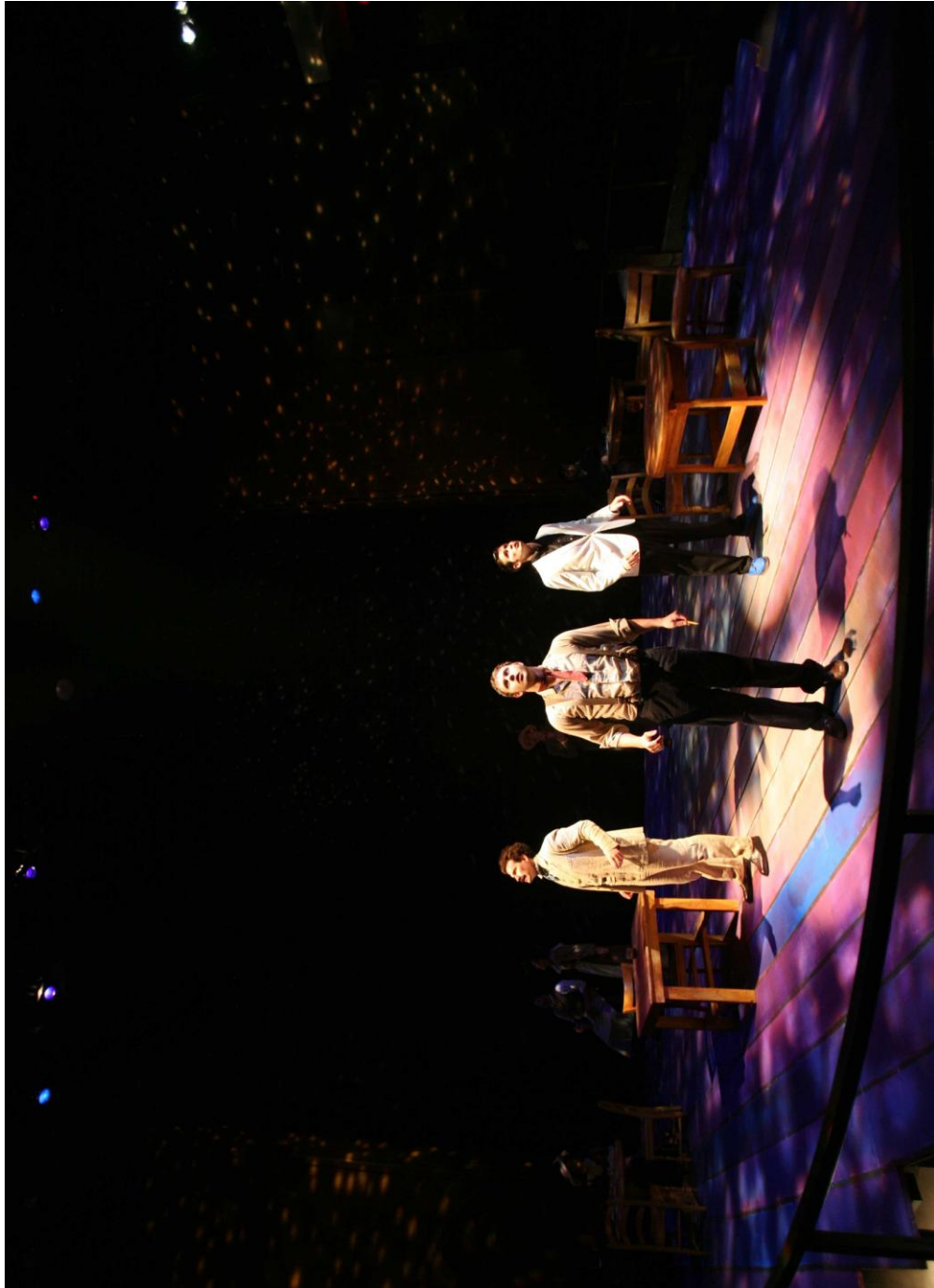


Fig. 4. Edge of the Universe

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