

2003-2004, show-by-show: John S. Musarra

Cafe Puttanesca

A fun way to kick off the season! What can I say, it was a Leitner / Arcadia show...pretty well-trod ground by this point. The only technical hitches I recall were the introduction of wireless mics, and the sidelight/sightlines issue, but of course those turned out just fine.

Oh, there **was** that little hiccup opening night...but I'm reasonably confident that we've gotten that sorted out. I'm looking forward to making giant NO PHONE ZONE posters for the new Haas booth.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

My favorite show of the season, I think. It was my first time working with John Hoey, and it was a blast. It's a brilliant play, which helped make everyone involved enthusiastic about the work. The tech period was a particularly intense one, with Aaron fine-tuning things all the way through, and that was difficult on a lot of people, Hoey and Karin included.

This show also ended up being my favorite aesthetically, as well. Hoey did a fantastic job with the canvases provided him by David Gordon and Rosemarie Mckelvey.

As long as we get through next season without taking a production crew vote on what scenic elements should look like, I'll be a happy man.

Sideways Stories

Much more went right than wrong, but this one was still a toughie. It was the biggest show we've done in the Haas, I think, in terms of sheer amount of stuff in the air. All the conventional fixtures, strobes, practicals, video, scrollers, and the beautiful, beautiful Vari*Lite. I realized early on that Thom Hase was used to doing projects an order of magnitude larger than this, and so was here largely for the fun of the show. The rest of the design team also seemed to be pretty intent on joining in that fun. Whit certainly was, as was Jorge. That made the difficult tech moments much easier to get through.

The big downer of this show was the first day of tech, on which we ended up delaying the start of rehearsal by two hours, largely because of me not quite being ready. I got held up on two things, the cyc lights behind the set, and the hanging strobe practicals, which were necessary for start of tech.

The high point of the show, of course, was the Ben Dibble Dance Extravaganza.

Proof

A wonderful experience from an electrician's standpoint. A simple, very straightforward show, with a design team that, for the most part, knew exactly what it wanted. It seemed at times that Lewis Folden was on a slightly different page than Jerry Forsyth and Jim Christie, but they eventually ended up in the same place.

The simplest tech week I've ever been through, that's for certain – largely because everyone knew what they wanted to get out of it before going in. Jerry was literally done by the end of Saturday. We even ended up not doing a 10-out-of-12 on Sunday, just a regular 8 hour day, most of which was acting notes.

Because of all that, working with Jerry was a breeze. It's so much easier on me when I know that things have been well-planned, and that there's a clear goal and a clear path to reach that goal. Another good thing about Jerry is that he knows the limits of the space, and knows exactly how to push his plot all the way to those limits.

Tooth and Claw

Another new piece, which is always exciting, and always fraught with peril. I think we got more excitement on this one than peril, but there were times when it felt like it could go the other way at any moment.

I still don't know how I feel about working with Michael Philippi. His materials were extremely late, which was understandable, given the backups with the set and everything, but what I found to be inexcusable was his total lack of communication with me during that time. The first time I heard from him was the morning he actually started drafting the plot, more than a week after hang was scheduled to start. He 's obviously a good designer (and another person who knows the value of being sure to have fun while doing the job), and the final product was certainly a thing of beauty. Perhaps we just got him at a bad time.

Franklin's Apprentice

My least favorite show of the season, by a pretty big margin. The play itself was fun, and it did well overall, I think, but technically, it felt like we were wrestling a rhinoceros. Dan Conway, Jim Leitner, and Aaron just kept designing (and redesigning, and re-redesigning...) things all the way up to the very beginning of tech, and the result of that process of non-decisiveness was that there was a **lot** of stuff not ready for the first day of tech.

I spent nearly all of the first two days of tech in the basement, building practicals onto freshly-built scenic elements, instead of in the theatre where I belonged. I came to work at the Arden in large part to get away from situations like that. Jim Leitner and I designed all the lightning effects at the production meeting after the designer run-through, just on the spot, because even at that late stage, nobody knew what they were going to be. That's tough, and it doesn't help anybody.

Hard Times

It was a great experience working with Lookingglass. Great people, total professionals. Brian was an interesting designer to work with, this being the third time he's done the show, and his first time in Philly – he spent more time playing in the city than he did working on the show, and it turned out just fine. I never even saw the sound designer – he and I spoke once, on the phone, and designed the speaker plot together in about 30 minutes.

All of that, combined with the sheer sparsity of the plot and the fact that I had a board op for tech, made for what I think was the simplest show of the season for me, except possibly Proof.

Overall

One of my big themes from last year's report was better APA management – I'm happy to say that I definitely succeeded on that front. I feel pretty good that all of them left with enough knowledge of lighting and elec-crisity that they will be able to appreciate how those aspects influence the big picture of whatever job they all move on to next.

Another big thing from last year was my concern over doing more work this year with fewer people, and, I'm sorry to say, that concern was borne out. Adam is certainly a great help to Glenn, but I ended up getting saddled with all of the sound work -not that I minded, certainly!-, which just reduced my overall effectiveness, I think.