

Creating Trust in the Collaborative Theatrical Environment

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As a Lighting Designer I work on creative theatrical productions with a design team whose size is based upon the scale of the production. A larger more complex production will have more members than a simple production. This theatrical artistic team at The University of Virginia Department of Drama is comprised of: the director or choreographer focused on the performers but ultimately responsible for all decisions of the production; the lighting designer, who creates the environment for the performance; the scenic designer, who creates the physical world for the production; the costume designer, who creates each character's appearance by choosing clothing, hair, makeup and accessories; and the sound designer, who creates the auditory supplements for the performance. Depending upon the production, there also could be assistants to each of these designers such as a projection designer, who creates visual images projected to the stage; a music director, to teach the cast and musicians any music for the production; a dramaturge, researcher for the production; and shops with support staff for each designer. For a lighting designer, this support staff is the master electrician who is responsible for hanging each light and ensuring it works through the help of the electricians hired for the project. Ultimately, the design team is responsible for making choices about the production and communicating these choices to the shop and support staff in order for the choices to be realized.

My job as a lighting designer is to set the lighting for the performance through specific choices including: where each light will be hung; how it will be focused; what color the light will be by choosing a gel of specific hue and saturation; and what pattern, created through the use of a gobo, will be in the performance. This information is conveyed to the master electrician in the form of a light plot. Once the plot is hung and circuited, I will focus each light, of which there could be a few dozen to a few hundred, to illuminate the predetermined area. From here, lighting cues may be written before the technical rehearsal,



the rehearsal where design elements are added with the performers, or during these rehearsals. In writing cues, I will choose which lights are used at each specific moment, often through experimentation, and how much time each light will take to turn on or off. As a designer, I create a plot that meets the goals established during the design process that is adaptable if changes are discovered through experimentation or when problems need to be solved. In order to achieve a successful design, a trusting, collaborative environment where everyone involved in the production is accommodating to the necessary changes from these experimental discoveries is required. Only in this way can the design team create a cohesive, visually unified production.

The challenges that may arise will fall into one of three categories: conceptual, technical, or textual. Conceptual challenges arise when an idea of how to incorporate a large theme into the whole production needs to be solved. This form of challenge is very common in dance and devised theater productions that are bound by a script but can also arise in theater production, such as University of Virginia's *Rhinoceros* where the design team was attempting to make the theater more present in the visual plane of the audience. Conceptual challenges must fit within the story being told by the production through movement or with text, but the text itself can provide story challenges for the design team to overcome.

University of Virginia's productions of *Elephant's Graveyard* and *Museum* posed this type of challenge by being written in very specific ways. *Elephant's Graveyard* was written with short moments of direct address to the audience and *Museum* asked for audience to walk on stage prior to the performance. In order to address any of these challenges, each one needs to be understood how it will be accomplished technically. Some productions, which pose less conceptual and story challenges, will pose technical challenges in how they will be completed. University of Virginia's productions of *Crazy for You* and *You Can't Take It With*

*You* are both examples of technical challenges due to the movement large scenery in *Crazy for You* and the new theatre constructed for *You Can't Take It With You*. While challenges are posed on a regular and continual basis, some challenges require the design team to work closer together in order to create a cohesive solution. Through trusting collaboration amongst the design team, solutions can be found to any challenge.

From working on a variety of theatrical and choreographic projects, I have learned that the role of a designer, particularly a lighting designer, is not only to create interesting stage images but images to support the story being told by the director or choreographer. If I merely create interesting lighting, the final visual when combined with the other designs would not be unified production. Since each piece of dance choreography is typically a new choreographic work, the exact story being told by the piece may be continually changing and may not be discovered until late in the process. While working on a continually changing project may seem to be a daunting task, understanding the elements used to create the conceptual ideas, knowing what is technically achievable, and an understanding of the story are vital to being a successful collaborative theatre artist in a changing environment.

While at the University of Virginia, I have worked closely with the dance program under the direction of Artistic Director Kim Brooks Mata for each of their dance concerts as the lighting designer and technical supervisor. For Kim's Fall 2013 concert piece, *Liminal State*, the first part was a dance for camera piece, a piece that existed only as video, and the second portion was comprised of live dancers onstage with moments of video on white panels to divide the space (Figure 1). She approached me with the panel idea so that I could assist in finding the fabric that would allow the piece to be performed as envisioned. Once I found the two panels of fabric of differing translucency, she was able to create the piece as initially conceived. While the technical challenge of programming and sizing the video

footage was still ahead, we determined that the desired look was possible and allowed the project to move forward. Tackling one challenge at a time is important in order to understand how each decision will affect following decisions. Once the panel material was selected, I was able to take into consideration how they would interact with light. I determined that hanging a system of light specifically for this piece was going to be required in order to light the dancers while not excessively lighting the panels.

Similarly, Erika Choe's piece *Small Memory* from Spring 2014 utilized two black panels upstage to divide the cyclorama, the large white fabric piece used at the back of the stage as a lighting surface (Figure 2). Without knowing if this would be possible, she approached me with a research image for confirmation that something similar could be achieved. From working with her and understanding how she intended the panels to be used in the piece, I was able to determine where in the space they would be hung and then how they would affect the lighting. Additionally, she chose to have the piece start with the dancers on the edge of the stage, close to the audience members. Chosen by Kim as the first piece in the concert, how the main drape was integrated into the piece became a challenge. With no discussion before the technical rehearsal, I prepared for what would be the most challenging solution, the main drape being opened as part of the piece. As this was the most extreme of options, I suggested we try it first because the concert could easily start with the main drape open and not be used in the piece. Once tested, the drape did support the story and did not hinder the choreographic story. By being prepared for the most extreme solution, I was able to achieve any solution to this challenge.

The decisions to use the panels of fabric in each of these pieces were design choices that influenced other decisions. For *Liminal State*, I made sure that each light hitting the panels created a line parallel to the floor and in *Small Memory*, when the cyclorama was first

illuminated was decided in collaboration with the choreographer. Rather than seeing the panels by lighting the cyclorama from when the main drape revealed the stage, the cyclorama was slowly lit near the end of the piece in order to keep the panels hidden against the dark cyclorama until the end of the piece. In each of these pieces, the choreographer decided what would be added to the open performance area before choreographing the piece. This is considered the design stage and is often, but not always, where conceptual problems are solved. Based upon the design team's decisions during this phase, it will help to influence my lighting design decisions.

As a lighting designer, I believe there is a scale upon which I operate. In the first option, I would serve as an observer gathering as much information as possible from the information presented to me in the movement, music, costume choices and script without discussion with the director or choreographer. From here I would make all the decisions about the lighting, how it will look, what color the lights will be, and where the lighting will create focus for each moment of the piece. For Kim Brooks Mata's piece *(en)during reverie* (Figure 3), this was the process that developed due to our busy schedules, reduced communication with one another and previous experience working together. She allowed me to create lighting based upon the information provided to me through the choreography, music, and costume choices knowing that with my background in dance I would understand the story and make artistically reasonable choices.

The second option for creating the lighting is to allow the director or choreographer to make primary lighting choices and serve as the technical liaison to execute those choices. For Emily Chen's piece *please leave your shoes at the door*, this was the process and it turned out beautifully. Having a clear vision of the role lighting would play in her piece, the student

designer worked to achieve this vision more than creating a free-formed design. Most often lighting design is a balance between applying my artistic vision and meeting the director or choreographer's expectations. Clear communication between the design team will allow for the decisions being made by each collaborative designer to achieve the goals of the production in a clear and cohesive manner.

A third possibility for a lighting designer is recreating a previous lighting design created either by another designer or themselves. Dinah Gray's piece *Carving Light from Earth* was originally staged in Fall 2012 for the dance concert in the Helms (Figure 4). It was restaged for the Fall 2013 dance concert in the Culbreth Theatre (Figure 5) after being performed as part of TechnoSonics XIV: Motion, an evening of live music and dance. TechnoSonics XIV: Motion, held in the Ruth Caplin Theatre in October 2013 and the first dance performance in this new venue, received little technical support and was focused on the music being performed by the musicians with dance choreography as visual accompaniment. In order for the audience to see the dancers, I installed three simple light systems for each choreographer to create a look for their performance with lights on the musicians for the whole evening. The sole purpose of these systems was to illuminate the stage space. *Carving Light From Earth* was restaged because the music was created through collaboration with University of Virginia Professor Matthew Burtner who serves as Associate Director of the Virginia Center for Computer Music who presents the yearly TechnoSonics performance. After being performed in TechnoSonics, *Carving Light from Earth* was included in the Fall 2013 Dance Concert and I recreated my lighting from the Fall 2012 performance as closely as possible. When productions are prepared for more than one presentation, which is the case for professional performances performed on tour, clear

documentation of the artistic vision are made in order to communicate these ideas at subsequent performances.

The American College Dance Festival Association (ACDFA) hosts an annual conference for collegiate dancers. This conference allows the dancers and choreographer to receive feedback from dance professionals serving as adjudicators as well as other college students and faculty. I have worked to document six pieces from the University of Virginia as they prepared for their journey to this festival. None posed a larger challenge than choreographer Katie Schetlick's Fall 2013 piece *Thank you for staying*. Based upon (--v--)<sup>^</sup>, a piece choreographed for TechnoSonics XIV: Motion, the choreographic themes and ideas were inspiration for *Thank you for staying*.

*Thank you for staying* started with the dancers discovering themselves on the performance stage where they began performing movement phrases from (--v--)<sup>^</sup> then these phrases got expanded and replicated until the dancers became lost in the movement; ultimately the dancers found the basic phrases from the start of the piece. Katie's initial idea for presenting the piece in the Culbreth Theatre was to use audience members standing around the performance area to create a human boundary around the stage space. By having some audience members closer to the performance, all audience members would become more aware of their relationship to the piece, specifically the dancers. After considering the length of the piece, the difficulty of getting the audience members onto and off of the stage for the performance, the possibility of not having enough audience volunteers on each night, and the requirement that these audience volunteers stand for the whole piece, using audience members to achieve this look was unreasonable. The alternative option of using dancers from other pieces was discussed, but this would not create the same relationship between the

audience and the onstage observers because the dancers as onstage observers would appear as being staged. After considering all of these points, Katie decided that onstage observers would not be used for this piece.

Katie's next conceptual idea for presenting the piece was to not use any masking. This would expose the entire theatre, including the offstage space not typically seen by the audience, and create a different environment from the dance previously seen with the black legs masking stage left and stage right, borders masking the lights, and illuminated cyclorama masking the backstage wall; all of these being standard masking for a dance concert. While the amount of backstage space visible to each audience member would vary based upon the distance to the stage and the distance from center, the backstage would need special consideration for this piece. Dancers from other pieces were not permitted to be backstage during this piece and dancers from the previous piece used an alternate route back to the dressing rooms. Prior to flying out the legs, borders, scrim and cyclorama, all of the run lights were turned off to create darkness before the piece; typically the light from these sources would be blocked by the masking. The crewmembers were required to stay towards the proscenium and out of the sightlines of audience members before the legs were flown out. The crew achieved all of these technical considerations. In addition, dancers simplified the crew's work by turning off lights to achieve a full blackout. This moment of collaboration involved the choreographer, dancers, crew and myself to achieve the bare stage environment.

Writing cues the day prior to the technical rehearsal for the piece at my convenience was coincidentally during their final rehearsal before technical rehearsals. This allowed me the opportunity to see the lighting with the performers in the space while Katie worked with

the dancers to refine the moment and spacing. I began with the choreographer's request to start with work light at the top of the piece by utilizing the work lights of the theatre for the first moment of the piece. I slowly added theatrical lighting with little color saturation as the piece progressed with the lighting continually increasing in intensity. All of these cues existed below the audience's threshold of perception. Unless audience-members were specifically looking for the cues they were hardly noticeable because of how gradually the light change happened. To end the piece, the dancers left the stage through the upstage door leaving the audience looking at a bare stage. The final light cue, designed to start once the dancers were offstage, turned the lights off slowly but noticeably in the reverse order of how they turned on.

The evening before the scheduled technical rehearsal, Katie emailed me about a new conceptual ending of the piece. Rather than having the dancers leave the stage, a single curtain would descend to trap the dancers in the space. Having not expected such a request, but understanding the desired effect and taking into consideration what was available and which curtain would look the best, I found an alternative solution; one that Katie likely did not realize was possible. Using the three most downstage borders, which typically mask the lighting, the same effect of trapping the dancers could be achieved. With each border being ten feet tall and a stage opening of only twenty-five feet, positioned correctly the borders would overlap slightly to fully mask the entire upstage wall from the audience (Figure 6). With this change, the dancers no longer leave left stage but instead were slowly obscured by the borders (Figure 7). By working collaboratively with me by presenting me with her conceptual idea, Katie was able to solve the challenge of how to end the piece by allowing me to figure out what was possible technically. I let her decide if the visual created onstage fit the story she wished to tell for the piece.



As an experiment I did not change the light cues with the addition of the borders descending for the technical rehearsal. After showing this variation of the idea, it was deemed a success because it fully masked the dancers while gradually hiding the upstage wall. The only thing that needed changed was the timing of how the borders were descending, the lights interacting with the borders were not an issue but an element of the effect. The ultimate result was that the final fade of the piece did not involve the dancers, just the borders since the dancers were fully masked. By allowing the experimental use of the borders to be tested with the dancers performing in the space, the borders could be judged based upon how they fit into the pacing of the choreography.

The University of Virginia Dance faculty chooses two pieces each year to send to ACDFFA (American College Dance Festival Association). For each piece selected to perform at the festival, I work with the festival's light plot provided by the host school to translate the lighting design for their venue. When a choreographer's piece has used a lighting element not present in the festival's plot, I will work with the choreographer to come up with a solution. One such example was Erika Choe's piece *We, Rhythms in Canvas* which originally defined the central area of the stage for one section of the dance with a single down light with a hard, visible edge, to create a circle center stage. In the plot for ACDFFA, a similar light was unavailable. Erika was flexible enough to use the quarter stage down specials located halfway between center stage and the wings after I demonstrated the positioning using equipment at University of Virginia. These down specials were smaller, but created a visible boundary for the dancers that Erika worked with in rechoreographing this section. This piece was recognized as quality and was selected by the adjudicators for performance at the public Gala Performance.

With *Thank you for staying's* complex use of masking, discussion quickly began the with the site coordinator at George Mason University, this year's host school for University of Virginia's region, about the technical elements in the piece. With my technical knowledge, understanding the needs of the piece and ease of communicating the technical details of the request, I facilitated the conversation with George Mason. While they could confirm the ability for the soft goods to be flown out to expose the stage space, they could not say with certainty that the borders would be able to fly in to create the same illusion as at University of Virginia's dance concert or where the borders would be located. With the possibility of not having the borders fly in, Katie began to consider alternative endings to the piece. Being creative in how to define the piece, she thought of an effect we called the Grand Fade, turning all of the lights on at the top of the piece and slowly through the whole length of the piece fading the lights to black. While this was a new idea, it kept the conceptual idea of slowly obscuring the dancers.

As the conference date grew closer and clear answers were not coming from George Mason, Katie leaned more towards the version of the piece that did not rely upon the borders. With the date for the submission of technical details for each piece and the light cues already past, the conversation with George Mason continued to be about the border placement but included the conversation about possibly entirely changing the light cues and dropping the idea of the borders descending. When border placement did get released about two weeks before the conference, the third border was further upstage than was comfortable for everyone involved to take the risk of having it fly into the ground. If the border ended up below head height prior to the dancers being upstage of it, they would be trapped downstage and would need to sneak under the border to finish the dance. Additionally, the entire piece was shortened in order to meet the ACDFAs time requirement. This meant that in order for

the borders to create the same effect, they would need to either move faster or move for the entire length of the piece, changing the original feeling of the borders descending. This modification would also cause the third border to be at or below head height for a longer percentage of the total dance. These fears were clear indication that going to the Grand Fade would be the best idea for the AC DFA performance due to the limited technical rehearsal time for the performance and since I would not be present to help make decisions on-site.

Building upon the idea of the Grand Fade, I controlled how the lights faded in order to shift the color of the lighting and make sections of the dance either warmer or cooler. This would be the first time that the piece was staged with attention given to the color of the lights during specific moments of the piece. The goal was to create a mood shift with the lights in order for the piece to feel less like a prison, as it did to some audience members at University of Virginia's performance, by highlighting the emotional qualities of the movement. Without using the borders to reduce the visual field of the audience, the Grand Fade attempted to create a similar concept through a slow deterioration of the dancer's environment.

During the timed technical rehearsal at George Mason, the entire piece was unable to be rehearsed. As a result the performance was the first full run of the reconceived piece. Due to a programming error by George Mason's light board operator the final blackout did not take all of the lights out as designed. Fortunately, the student stage manager was able to recognize this and had the board operator manually create the blackout. While the performance was not perfect, the audience and adjudicators responded positively to the piece. According to Kim Brooks Mata, Sylvia Waters congratulated the choreographer and cast on "...the richness of the characters established from the beginning and the sensitive use of lighting." The adjudicators noted the lighting's integration into the choreography

rather than lighting applied atop the choreography to illuminate the dancers without enhancing the story of the piece.

Of the six pieces sent from University of Virginia to ACDFa over the past three years, this was the piece that had the largest change between the University of Virginia performance and the performance at ACDFa. Without strong collaboration with Katie about her intent for *Thank you for staying* and the changes she was making to the piece, successful adjustments to the lighting would not have been possible. For me, changing the lighting design was a scary experience because without my attendance at the festival, any issues to the lighting design, specifically how the color shifted in the Grand Fade, would require fixing without my help. While working collaboratively with Katie in order to solve the problems of the piece through experimentation and active trial, I trusted Katie to determine if the story being told was accurate to her vision. Through this collaboration, we were able to create a piece that worked and received a positive response from the audience.

While the choreographer is entirely responsible for the story being told in a dance performance, a script binds a theatrical design team to the story of the production. By analyzing the script, the design team is able to determine what conceptual and technical challenges will need to be overcome in order to achieve the goals of the production. One of the most basic considerations when analyzing a script is the location of the production. Some productions exist entirely in a single location, while others may have multiple locations and require scene changes in order to tell the story. By following the script, the design team has the basis from which all of the decisions will be made.

In the play *Museum* by Tina Howe, the author requested “the audience should be encouraged to walk through the exhibit before the play begins”. Customarily, an audience is required to stay off the stage as a safety requirement to prevent injuries to the audience

members or damages to the scenery. Embracing this unconventional conceptual idea, the design team attempted to create the most realistic environment of an art museum by finding other ways to break conventional theatrical practice.

I wanted to have the performance start with the audience still examining the artwork. Ideally we would skip the convention of notifying the start of the performance through the use of lighting and preshow announcement because lighting in an art museum is not typically turned off with visitors in the gallery. When told by the production manager that a preshow announcement was required, the challenge became how to present the announcement in a way that would be appropriate for this production. One suggestion from the production manager was to have an assistant stage manager make the announcement live, a solution that had been used on a previous production. This option, though workable, did not artistically make sense for *Museum* because the assistant stage manager would not be dressed as a museum representative and would be noticeably out of place to the design as a whole while giving the announcement. Without seeing another option to do a live announcement, the sound designer prepared the conventional prerecorded announcement.

Recognizing that shows typically do not invite the audience to the stage and understanding the audience would likely not know when to return to their seats, I suggested using one of the actors to solve this challenge. The actor could help protect the artwork while encouraging audience members to enter the stage for the preshow and then later inform the audience to take their seats without using a light cue. By having this onstage interaction, I suspected the audience would take their seats when required. Knowing the audience would still need to be informed of the forthcoming preshow announcement, the director suggested using the standard convention of dimming the house lights to half in intensity to notify the audience with a blackout to start the performance. I believed that

dimming the lights would break the concept of a realistic art museum and that treating the lighting as established by art museums would be more appropriate and make later light changes more dramatic.

Instead of dimming the lights at the top of the show I created a sequence of cues so the lights would appear to be turned off as if they were on a switch. After running this idea past the director and the sound designer, the sound designer came up with a sound similar to a breaker being turned off to reinforce the light cue. There were a total of four groupings of lights to be turned off and consequently four cues to reach blackout. These cues were called separately which allowed for the timing of the cues to be modified if the audience needed additional time finding their seats at any given performance.

The opening night performance was the first time audience was present onstage prior to the start of the show and the first time the idea of using a cast member to get the audience to their seats would be tested (Figure 8). Once the cast member, dressed as a museum guide, got the attention of the audience, they listened and returned to their seats where they waited for the start of the show. Looking back, this would have been the perfect opportunity to have her also give the preshow announcement and then the turning off of lights and prerecorded announcement would not have been required. This change could have been made if an assessment of how to create a more realistic art museum was done after this first test with an audience. For this reason, professional productions often have preview performances that allow an audience to experience and respond to a production that is still in the development process. Preview performances inform the design team and actors how the audience will respond to situations and allow for changes to be made if the audience is reacting in unexpected ways. In the University of Virginia environment, with limited run

engagements, the ability to make changes once the show has an audience is not standard practice.

In the script for *Museum*, there is direct reference to windows at famous art museums and one character's desire to create a museum of windows. The design team decided to use this opportunity to show off the Caplin Theatre's architecture by leaving the window shades open for the performance and installing additional imitation windows as part of the scenic design (Figure 9 and 10). There was no need for a theatrical blackout, complete darkness except for lighting required by law such as exit lights and aisle lights, at any point in the performance and therefore no need to close the window blinds designed to block the outside light. Ultimately, the light through the Caplin Theatre windows at nighttime was relatively small when compared to the light on the stage and helped to create a realistic feeling art museum at night. An additional change from theatrical convention was for the house lights to remain on for the entire performance. This allowed the audience to become a more present part of the show and an active participant in the story of the production. By allowing the audience to walk the stage and experience the artwork before the start of the show, they already were a character in the production by being a guest of the gallery. In order to incorporate their presence into the show, actors shared the audience space by using every entrance and aisle during the show. Additionally, the house lights in the theatre highlighted the architecture of the space without adding any additional light sources.

As part of the research to create a realistic museum for this production, the scenic design team and I took a trip to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. From this one museum, the wide variety of gallery details became a discussion point for how we wanted our museum to appear. For me, most interesting was the wide variety of lighting styles across the galleries. One prevailing lighting type in multiple galleries was track lighting (Figure 11a-c). Track

lights are placed in a track that is either part of the ceiling or installed to the ceiling with each light in the track focused to the artwork. This was particularly true in temporary galleries where artwork would be on display for a length of time and then switched with new artwork. With *Museum* taking place on the final day of an exhibit entitled: *The Broken Silence*, the space we were creating was clearly a temporary art gallery. Due to the windows above the acting area, a ceiling space was created below that became the perfect place to utilize track lighting.

The track lights became integral to the lighting design of the production because the arrangement of the space made it difficult for conventional theatrical lighting to cover the area beneath the ceiling and the tracks created visual definition of the space. For typical productions, non-theatrical fixtures are not used as a primary source for lighting the stage, but rather as set decoration in the form of lamps or signage. Without any other viable option to light beneath the ceiling, the track lighting was able to solve the problem by being the primary source of light (Figure 12 and 13). By collaborating with the scenic designer, how the tracks were hung was determined to create the most reasonable layout in relation to the scenic design.

University of Virginia's production of *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco posed scene transition challenges by being staged in the Helms Theatre, but a conceptual ideal of making the theatre more present helped to address these challenges. A curtain could not be utilized to mask the transitions required by this multi-scene production without blocking the audience entrance due to the limited space within this small, 150 seat black box theatre. Embracing the absurdist idea that this was a theatrical performance, all of the scenery and the backstage were viewable to the audience as they entered the theatre with the hope of the audience thinking "Am I in the right place for the performance?" This presentation made all the elements of the production more visible and reinforced the conceptual idea. During the



pre-show, the theatre appeared to be in fluorescent work lighting with the scenery haphazardly strewn across the room. The scenery was in fact deliberately placed and organized while the work lights were actually fluorescent tubes inspired by a modern day office work environment similar to the location of the second scene in the play. I planned to use the fluorescent lights for scenic transitions as a common artistic theme in the production. It was a calculated risk since fluorescent lights cannot dim and would require being turned on and off suddenly. The idea was easily changeable, however, if it did not work.

At the top of the show, the audience lighting dimmed slightly and was followed by a prerecorded preshow announcement. From here, music began playing for the transition to the top of the show; the actors and crew setup the stage space and the scene lighting for the first moment of stage lighting slowly faded up. Once the space was setup, the fluorescent lights turned off and the scene could start immediately. This process was repeated for each and every scenic transition (Figure 14 and 15). I believed this conceptual idea based on the technology of how the fluorescent lighting functioned would be better to show than discuss and as such I gave only a brief description to the design team prior to a demonstration in the technical rehearsal. By giving a demonstration of the effect, it could be judged on how it functioned in case my description of it was unclear to any design team member. If this idea failed during the demonstration, changing to another option would be possible. Upon the successful demonstration, I used the fluorescent lighting during preshow, intermission and transitions to remind the audience they were in a theatre because the lights illuminated not only the acting area, but also the grid structure to which lights and scenic elements were attached.

During a brainstorming session exploring how to further the conceptual idea of an ever-present theatre, hanging lights below the catwalk was suggested to me as a way to move the lights into the stage space and become more present to the audience. While this was not an initial idea of mine, I embraced it as my own in order to achieve the artistic goals of the conceptual presentation. Where inspiration comes to each designer can be random or even unknown to others, but if it achieves the goals of the production, the idea should not be discounted. Before deciding what lights to hang below the catwalks, the idea was discussed with the director and scenic designer to confirm the more present lights would match the aesthetic of the show and allow sufficient clearance for the mobile scenery. Keeping clear communication with the design team built trust in my ability to achieve the artistic vision. For the performances, the sidelight was hanging below the grid as a constant reminder that this was a theatre. By communicating with the design team and having collaborative brainstorming sessions to discuss possible solutions an unusual lighting position was able to enhance the conceptual idea of making the design elements more present to the audience.

The storytelling structure of George Brant's *Elephant's Graveyard* posed a unique staging challenge that was assisted by LaVahn Hoh's scenic design to mix the town, circus and railroad into one environment. Told in first person accounts of the true events in a real Tennessee town, the script lacked conversational dialogue between characters and utilized direct audience address to tell the collective story. These moments of each character revealing a portion of the story to the audience needed to be unified in a way that would allow the characters to tell the audience a clear story. With lighting's ability to create focus, I lit the entire stage with top light to allow all characters to be visible while creating focus on the speaking character with selective front light. In order to allow the characters not speaking to stand closer to the speaking character, I focused each of the lights with this

purpose to the size of a single person. With each light designed to highlight a single person, called a “special”, using them collectively to cover the larger scenes or a character moving across the stage was not an option. To light the larger scenes, I created a front light system to evenly wash the stage. For moments where a character was moving while directly addressing the audience, a follow spot was used to follow the character with light as they moved. By focusing the follow spot the same way as the specials, the moving characters were in the same quality of light as the stationary characters unifying the moments of direct audience address (Figure 16). While it is not typical to use a follow spot in a play, in this application it helped to unify the show by allowing each moment to exist in the same quality of light (Figure 17).

The pre-written light cues were integrated with the actor’s staging while running the show. Some moments designed to use a special were not lighting the speaking actor. This could have been due to my miscommunication during the planning process between the director, a light that was focused improperly, or an actor standing in the wrong place. While the goal is to have a perfect collaboration, occasions where communication is not as clear or things have been changed do occur. For each instance of the actor not being in light due to actor error or change in placement since my discussion with the director, an assessment was made for the best solution to illuminate the actor. Because I was a collaborator with the director of *Elephant’s Graveyard*, actors were asked to make adjustments, when needed, in order to simplify the work notes for the lighting team. With the director understanding that technical notes are prioritized based upon time available and significance in the show, it was sometimes easier to shift an actor than hang a new light.

Due to the flexibility and willingness of the director to make the necessary changes, the technical rehearsal process was smooth even when mistakes happened. On one such occasion as we rehearsed the final moment of the show, the lights were expected to fade to black but a programming error I made left the lights of the town windows illuminated (Figure 18). While not intended as a design choice, the image of the town continuing after the circus had left town was a powerful image to conclude the story and the director requested we keep it. From this discovery, allowing the light from the windows to fade last strengthened the ending of the show.

There are some shows that pose fewer challenges to a lighting designer. These shows, which I refer to as general illumination shows, ask the lighting designer to illuminate the performance and often require less creative thinking to achieve the goals of the production. One such example is *You Can't Take It With You* by Kaufman and Hart, as University of Virginia's opening production of the Caplin Theatre. Despite this, unexpected and unique challenges were encountered. While planning the production with firm performance dates for a theatre that was still under construction, conversations were held amongst the design team about what to do in case the new theatre was not completed on schedule. While the back up plan to perform in the Culbreth Theatre was not enacted, other challenges arose.

When the scene shop got approval to load in the set, it was discovered that the technical drawings used to design the scenery were not the same dimensions of the theatre as constructed. This error combined with a lack of time to redesign or rebuild the set meant the entire set needed to move downstage six inches in order to fit into the theatre. While this would have been a larger issue for another show, because this show occurs in the same

interior location for each scene, moving the set the required six inches downstage to fit into the theatre only required minor changes in how each light was focused.

Another challenge more directly affecting the lighting was that the new dimming and control system was not approved for use in time for focus. Despite not having approval to use the new dimmers to control and turn on the lights, focus had to be completed in order to stay on schedule for the production. This unusual technical challenge arose as part of working in a theatre under construction. My creative solution was to turn each light on for focus using an extension cord from approved constant power circuit. This allowed focus to proceed on schedule. Once the dimmers were approved, each light was assigned a dimmer and the board was programmed. This change to the common order of the lighting process went unnoticed by the rest of the design team. Thinking creatively and working with what was available did not hinder the lighting design process.

During the design process of *You Can't Take It With You*, the windows in the façade of the Caplin Theatre did not yet have blackout shades installed. Once the system was installed and in order to show off the capabilities of the new theatre, the design team decided to leave the windows of the theatre open until the start of the preshow announcement. However, due to the automated shades being one of the last items installed in the theatre, their operation was still being finessed during the week of the show's opening. Being adaptable and understanding technical glitches may not be worked out before the performance, the design team agreed if the shades were not able to work consistently, the shades would be closed before the audience entered the theatre in order to ensure blackouts were capable since shifts of both actors and props between scenes were required. The day of opening, it was concluded that the shades were ready to be operational and the audience got

to experience being in the theatre with the windows both open and closed. The design team's accommodation of the construction process and adjustability to how the audience experienced the new theatre was important because the functionality of the shade system was not certain until late in the process.

For University of Virginia's production of *Crazy for You* by Ken Ludwig, the biggest challenge for me was how to light the scene transitions of this musical. While some scene shifts must be performed in blackout to get actor off stage, such as those in *You Can't Take It With You*, scene changes have a magical quality if completed in light without audience seeing how the scenery is moving. The large size of the scenery in *Crazy for You* made it difficult during the pre-production process to predict if moving the scenery would be possible in light until the crew made their first attempt at moving the units as part of the shift rehearsal, the first step in the technical rehearsal process. Once it was determined that the crew could easily and reliably move the units, it was my challenge to create a fluid lighting transition between scenes. In order to not draw attention to the scenery, some lights turned off while the scenery was moving near the light source. Additionally, the lighting looks between the two scenes of the first magic transition were similar to create a consistent series of images. Embracing this feel for all of the transitions, there were minimal moments of blackouts during the show. During any transition where a set piece was flown out, there was always light behind the unit to quickly transition to the next scene.

For example in the song "Girls Enter Nevada", the girls were revealed in the desert town as the previous unit was flown out. This idea was proposed by the director early in the process to make the girls appear in the distance. As the scenery moved onstage, the girls would walk downstage and appear to be moving a further distance. During a meeting to

discuss this, the technical director said it would not be possible since the scenery was too large to be completely moved offstage. The director then prepared a different entrance for the girls.

At the first technical rehearsal, the girls entered the stage in a blackout and took their position after the wall from the previous scene was flown out. Once all of the lights were on, the girls began their scene. In order to have this transition match the look of the show, I requested the performers be positioned upstage of the wall and be revealed as the wall was flown out. By making this change, this moment became more like the director's original idea of having the girls appear in the distance. I then made them appear to come closer by adding front light (Figure 19). In embracing an experimental process during technical rehearsals, the design team can find solutions similar to initial requests. A team's adaptability and understanding of how to implement a simpler version of complex concepts when needed allows for the design to be taken to the greatest extent possible.

As the lighting designer for *Crazy for You*, I used an experimental process to create the final look of the show. This moment, a magical transition onto the stage of a lavish production, was defined through scenery as a white piece of fabric with a silver Mylar curtain to create elegance. Initially I thought this scene would be lit only with sidelight and follow spots because lights on the Mylar curtain would reflect back to the audience and make it less elegant. After creating this initial idea onstage, I experimented with leaving light on the cyclorama and discovered that by doing this, it created depth to the composition onstage and created a smoother transition from the previous scene (Figure 20). In contrast to *Thank you for staying*, the lighting transitioned as the scenic elements were flown in to prevent the Mylar from reflecting light into the audience. This more common practice of changing lights as

scenery moves influenced my initial reaction to the borders breaking the stark look of the bare theatre. By not adjusting the lighting as the borders were flown in for Katie's piece, the borders became part of the theatre as they slowly obstructed the view of the dancers.

The challenges when working on a dance production compared to a theatre production are similar but some differences are notable. The major difference for me when working with choreographers compared to directors at the University of Virginia is that the choreographers tend to be more willing to experiment during the technical process to make lighting an integral partner in the story telling of the performance. Understanding that more time may be required on complicated sections is important to achieve integrated lighting. This ability to spend time to make the lighting integral in dance may be due to theatre productions being bound by a script and needing to tell a predetermined story. But when the script is approached as a new production and conceptual ideas are embraced for specific moments, a fresh production is possible. The larger number of designers working on a theatre production may also hinder this incorporation of lighting because directors are less willing to take the time required during the technical process to integrate complex lighting elements into the show and more focused on the physical appearance of the performance. In a new collaborative environment, a designer's ability to achieve the conceptual ideas discussed may not be trusted due to previous experience of broken promises. Any design team member carries a reputation from previous work. This reputation can help the other designers understand each other's process. Consistently achieving or exceeding the goals on previous projects builds a reputation of trust in each designer.

I believe that from continued collaboration a trust was built between members of the dance program and myself. This trust allowed the choreographers to know that if an artistic



vision was possible and made sense for the choreography, I would make every effort to have lighting meet the needs of the artistic vision. One such example is Emily Chen's piece; *please leave your shoes at the door*. For this piece, each dancer performed in a down special with a visible circle of light on the stage. For the first technical rehearsal, the down specials in the plot were determined to be too far apart leaving too much space between the performers. Because this was an integral artistic idea of the piece and the space was available, additional lights were added into the plot leaving the original specials in place if another piece needed to use them. This lighting adjustment allowed the dancers to perform the piece without having to manage the large distance across stage (Figure 21).

I believe successful collaborations between the director or choreographer and lighting designer are built on trust. Only in this way can the director or choreographer trust the lighting designer as a collaborator to advise and help make ideas work. When working with a script, approaching lighting in new ways will allow the lighting designer to have the same experimental collaboration as in a brand new piece. If a lighting choice does not support the story being told, the choreographer or director should be able to discuss the lighting choices with the designer to describe how the lighting does not meet the artistic or conceptual vision of the production in order to make a better choice to meet the goal. I believe a lack of understanding about how lighting functions worries some directors, but by using open-ended requests to inspire the lighting designer with the themes of the production, unexpected and beautiful results can be achieved if time is given during technical rehearsals to experiment with lighting onstage. One such occasion was choreographer Janelle S. Peifer's request for a morning sunrise in her piece *even still*.. The students working to create the lighting for this piece did know exactly what this request implied, but worked to create lighting that was a slow build similar to a sunrise. Choosing to work in a purple and pink

color palette, the cues seemed too pink to me while programming before the technical rehearsal for the piece. Once the dancers were added in costumes the piece was simply stunning (Figure 22). Concerned the choreographer may not like the lighting choices, the students asked her for thoughts on the lighting. Her response was simply that there are many different sunrises and what was presented was perfect. For everyone involved in this piece, understanding the multiple options to create a sunrise allowed for the final look to be based upon what was available.

With lighting being influenced by scenic placement, paint colors, and costume colors, only once all the piece of the production come together can the visual design created onstage be understood. For this reason, costumes are worn when viewing the lighting with dancers, a luxury not provided in the theatre process. The consequence of this is that clear communication must be established specifically in theatre between the lighting designer and the costume designer, scenic designer, director and stage manager. The clear communication of color choices and how the space is being used informs the choices made by the lighting designer in choosing color and what lights to hang where.

For *Crazy for You*, one scene takes place in a darkened theatre and tradition dictates that a ghost light, a single bare light bulb on a stand, illuminates the darkened theatre. When a rehearsal report stated, “the ghost light is off at the top of the scene”, I inquired about the usage of the ghost light and how it was being used in the scene. They responded the ghost light was onstage, but never turned on. I assumed this incorrect and planned to use the ghost light as a functional practical. The stage management team only considered the ghost light as on or off, but did not realize the possibility of dimming the ghost light. By understanding the director’s artistic vision for the moment, I was able to understand that the communication

chain had become cloudy. Ultimately, I used the ghost light in the scene because I left the necessary equipment in place and communicated with stage management how to connect the ghost light to the dimmer in the technical rehearsal (Figure 23). After this miscommunication on the usage of the ghost light, I did not trust the written translation of lighting notes in rehearsal reports, particularly in relation to how lighting would function, and asked for clarification of any note that seemed contrary to prior discussions.

In contrast, when working collaboratively with other members of the design team, I do not always need to understand the full artistic vision of each moment. This often happens in the dance process from the trust that has been created. Katie's idea of using audience members as onstage observers was to momentarily obstruct the vision of audience members and highlight the fact that understanding all information onstage can be difficult through a single viewing. While this idea was not revealed to me until after the process was completed, I trusted Katie's visions and helped to create a similar effect with the borders flying in based upon her simple request. Conversely, as a lighting designer I do not always reveal every detail of my plans as the designer. In much the same way a costume designer may not discuss the specific button choices for each character's costume. If these small lighting details, such as how the fluorescent lights would function in *Rhinoceros*, were discussed before viewing them in the technical rehearsal, attention would be drawn to them and the reaction to their presence would receive a biased response. By doing this, I am allowing the other design team members, who will see the production multiple times during technical and dress rehearsals, to experience the subtle lighting design choices as an audience member viewing the production for the first time.

While it does take a great amount of energy to trust others from the start of a project, trust is important in order to have a collaborative working environment. By communicating clearly on a constant basis, understanding how the decisions being made will influence the entire production can be achieved. In an educational environment it can be difficult and tiring for a faculty director to continually work with a new group of student designers for each project, but there are safeguards in place for when a designer is having difficulty collaborating with the creative team. In the University of Virginia educational setting, each student designer is working under the guidance of a faculty member specializing in the specific area of design. The design faculty member should have a flexible role in each production in order to participate as needed to fulfill the vision of the production or clarify communication between the director. This may require the faculty member to serve as a mediator between the designer and the director if a common language is not established to discuss the design. By serving as a mediator, the faculty member will be able to bridge communication gaps between the student designer and faculty director. Communication is a learned skill and, on some occasion, communicating effectively to define artistic ideas is challenging when a common background does not exist between the design team.

I believe creating a common language among the design team is essential to communicate effectively which in turn fosters trust and collaboration. This is choreographer David Shimotakahara has collaborated with Dennis Dugan as his lighting designer for his entire career and why director Peter DuBois trusts lighting designer Russell Champa; after working together on numerous projects, the dialogue begins to happen much more efficiently and the work becomes more enjoyable. I have observed both of these designers communicating collaboratively with their director or choreographer. From their common experience and bonds from previous projects, each team can reference past

projects without needing to find or reference research examples. In an educational setting, it is important to establish a common language amongst the design team in order to become collaborative designers. The most collaborative designers are those who use this common language to communicate ideas and suggestions from anywhere to the design team in order to enhance the production's artistic vision. The trustworthiest designers execute these ideas within the technical capabilities of the production venue while keeping clear communication when any challenges arise. Only with this common language can clear communication occur to create a trusting collaborative theatrical environment.



Figure 1 – Kim Brooks Mata’s *Liminal State (part 2)* utilizing two white panels for projections.



Figure 2 – Erika Choe’s *Small Memory* with two black panels dividing the blue cyclorama





Figure 3 – Lighting design for Kim Brooks Mata's *(en)during reverie* was created with little discussion about choreographic concepts.



Figure 4 – Dinah Gray's Fall 2012 version of *Carving Light from Earth* in the Helms Theatre.



Figure 5- Dinah Gray's Fall 2013 version of *Carving Light from Earth* in the Culbreth Theatre



Figure 6 – Backstage view of borders nearly blocking the audience view of the dancers in Katie Schetlick's *Thank you for staying* with lights hitting the borders.





Figure 7 – Dancers nearly completely obscured by the borders at the end of Katie Schetlick's *Thank you for staying*.



Figure 8- Audience onstage before a performance of *Museum* with the cast member standing center in the photo.



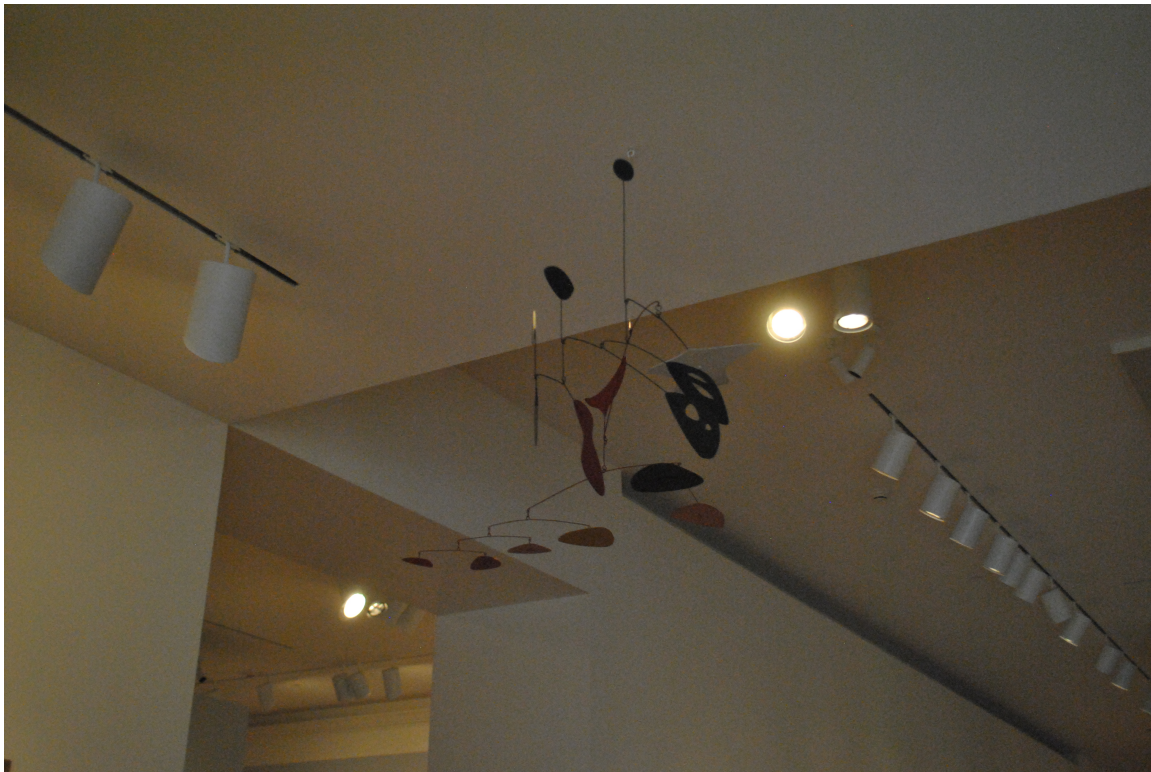


Figure 9 – Actor using aisle way for an exit during a performance of *Museum* with exterior windows open.



Figure 10 – View through the open Caplin Theatre windows during a performance of *Museum* from a point in the audience with a view of Ruffin Hall.





Figures 11a, 11b, and 11c – Track Lighting at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts





Figure 12 – The ceiling piece without track lighting installed for *Museum*.



Figure 13 – The ceiling piece with track lighting installed for *Museum*.



Figure 14 – End of transition into Act 2 of *Rhinoceros* at The University of Virginia.



Figure 15 – Start of Act 2 of *Rhinoceros* at the University of Virginia as soon as the fluorescent lights have turned off.





Figure 16 – The Ballerina in the follow spot for University of Virginia's production of *Elephant's Graveyard*.



Figure 17 – The Young Girl in a special, keeping the Engineer out of light, in University of Virginia's production of *Elephant's Graveyard*.



Figure 18 – Town windows remained illuminated at the end *Elephant's Graveyard*.





Figure 19 – First look of Girls Enter Nevada in *Crazy for You* making the girls appear in the distance.



Figure 20 – Final moment of *Crazy for You* created through a trial and error method.



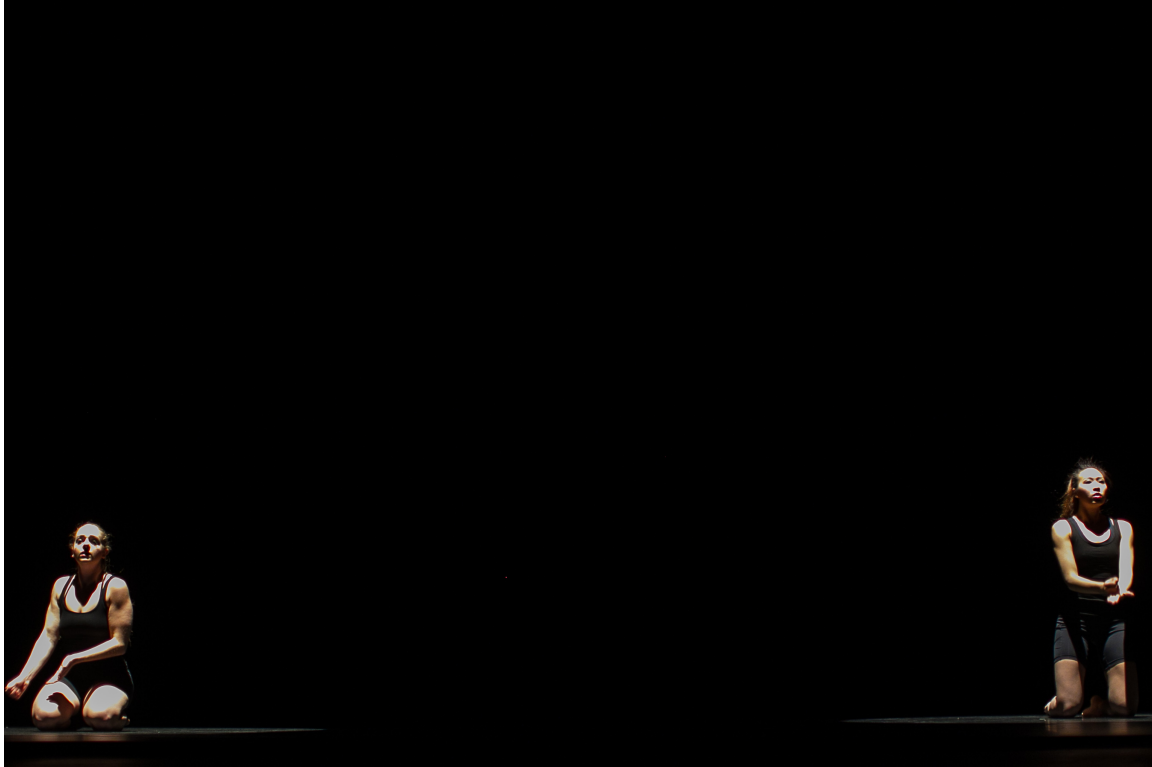


Figure 21 – Emily Chen’s piece *Please leave your shoes at the door*.



Figure 22 – Lighting design created upon the concept of “morning sunrise” for Janelle Piefer’s piece *even still*.



Figure 23 – Ghost light in use during a performance of *Crazy for You*.