

One Size Does Not Fit All: The Creative Process For Lighting Designers

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Yesteryears of Lighting

Stage lighting is ingrained in theatre. From history's earliest plays lighting was not an afterthought. The Greeks built their venues with lighting in mind, the theatre at Epidauros¹ for example. As we move forward in time to 1555 lighting evolved when Sebastiano Serlio placed candles behind bottles filled with colored liquid, he intensified the candle by adding basins for reflectors.² The first theatre equipped with gas-powered lighting was the Lyceum Theatre in London in 1803,³ and during the late 1880s Thomas Edison developed the incandescent electric lamp. During the mid 1900s Lighting Designers in Britain and America develop and refined the methods of modern lighting design for theatre, dance, and opera.

It was only after the development of the electric filament lamp that these early pioneers in stage lighting were able to establish new foundations and standards in design. The incandescent lamp allowed for the development of small, safe, portable lighting fixtures that could finally be easily placed around a stage. The advancement of electronic control technology further allowed for greater control of the lights. With these advancements it became necessary for the lighting of a theatrical show to be run by a specialist, or the Lighting Designer, who is traditionally in charge of the design of all lighting-related responsibilities for a typical stage production. Within a theatrical production the Lighting Designer will collaborate with the Director and other designers to ensure the production is properly illuminated in all respects, from inception to completion.

¹The Ancient Theatre of Epidauros is regarded as the best preserved ancient theatre in Greece in terms of its perfect acoustics and fine structure. It was constructed in the late 4th century BC ("Ancient Theatre in Epidauros - Greeka.com." Web. 25 Apr. 2017).

² Boston Edison Company. *The History of Stage and Theatre Lighting*. Nabu Press, 2011. Print.

³ Edison Company. *The History of Stage and Theatre Lighting*.

The Lighting Designer

The Lighting Designer is a member of a creative team that typically includes the Costume Designer, Scenic Designer, Sound Designer, and Media or Projection Designer, all working under the guidance of the Director. While the process of theatrical design is collaborative in nature, each process is ultimately unique. In most productions the design team starts with a script, and from there they develop ideas about the story they want to tell. Through research and renderings, those ideas are refined and brought into reality. This process can be as short as a few weeks or could last years. Within each design process it is an important skill for the Lighting Designer to have the foresight to be responsive and to be able to go with the creative process however the design might evolve.

During the design process there are regular meetings where the creative team is working toward a complete and cohesive final design. However, each meeting can bring new ideas or change the direction of a production quickly. Because of the collaborative nature of theatre, designers have to be able to visualize new ideas and be able to convey them. It is common in theatre for the venue where a show is being performed to be rented and with this comes challenges involving timelines and space restrictions. When working in an unknown space the creative team does their best to visualize what the production is going to look like before it is built, but until the design is put into a space the final product is an unknown. In order to remain flexible and to adapt within the creative process the Lighting Designer must remain responsive to what is currently happening onstage or to the current topic of discussion in a design meeting.

The Creative Process

During my three years as a Master of Fine Arts candidate in Lighting Design at the University of Virginia, I have been a part of the theatrical design process for twenty-three productions produced at the University, locally, and professionally. Each production offered me unique opportunities and challenges to explore as a Lighting Designer. Through my work on these productions I have gained new technical and interpersonal experiences with my process as a designer and as a collaborator. Three of the above mentioned productions are the focus of this thesis study. I chose the following productions because the creative process for each show was different, requiring me to be able to solve problems creatively. The first is *Luv*, produced by The Heritage Theatre Festival where I was a designer in residence. It represents a typical design process that had an adequate design phase where the creative team had ample time to discuss and design the show. However, the production ran into scheduling conflicts between scenic and lighting once the show went into production. The second production, *The Bridges of Madison County*, was produced by The Media Music Theatre Company, an Equity non-profit theatre near Philadelphia. This production was my first experience as a visiting designer where the design phase took place remotely via phone or email, and the production phase took place within a compressed schedule. Finally, I discuss *The Comedy of Errors*, a University of Virginia Drama production. As my thesis show, it was to be the culmination of my studies at the University. The production many challenges including production delays, a comparatively disorganized design process, and the challenge of working with two directors.

For each of these productions the creative process was different, each with its own challenges which required me to be able to adapt and solve problems creatively.

Luv

The Heritage Theatre Festival, hosted in the University of Virginia's Department of Drama, operates annually during the summer months. During the 2015 season, five shows were produced between the department's three theaters. With the number of shows scheduled for the summer the timeline for each show was short and the turnarounds times in scheduling were quick (Fig 1). In addition, Heritage Theatre Festival employs hundreds of people all working simultaneously on the same shows in multiple departments: scenic, lighting, sound, paint, and stage management.

Luv was produced in the Ruth Caplin Theatre, a 300-seat thrust space. The play is an absurdist comedy by Murray Schisgal about two college friends, Harry and Milt, who are reunited when Milt stops Harry from jumping off a bridge. Each discovers the other is miserable as they share stories, and Milt begins to see Harry as an answer to his problems.

Although I consider this show to be representative of a typical lighting design process, that is not to say it was without issues. My initial reaction about the show involved questions about the script and how best to help the plot along. I did not know what shape the lighting design was going to take because the show takes place on a bridge in the middle of the night, but I did know that I wanted the lighting to be dark and full of shadows to mimic the depressing nature of the play.

When I first met with the Director, he wanted the lighting to be opposite to the timeframe as indicated in the script, in an ironic fashion. He envisioned the lighting to be bright and realistic as if it were a sunny and happy day. Responding to the vision of the Director, I did image research observing sunsets and rays of light piercing clouds (Fig 2). Within the rays of

light I felt the warmness and happiness of the amber light but also found there was a quality of darkness to these images that I thought could help the plot of the play. The nature of the show becomes more demented as the play progresses, and my idea was that the lighting would become more abstract.

June 2015						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Crew Move In Day					
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Day Off	Luv Rehearsals Begin	Luv Scenic Build				Luv Focus
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Day Off	Luv Notes					Luv Tech 10-1/2-6
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Day Off	Luv Tech/Dress: 2-5/6-10	Luv Tech/Dress: 11-4/6-11	Luv Preview- 7:45 PM	Luv Perf- 7:45 PM	Luv Perf- 7:45 PM	Luv Perf- 2:00 PM/7:45 PM
28	29	30				
Day Off		Luv Perf- 7:45 PM				
Notes:						
Preview/Performance Call: one hour before Half-Hour (eg: 6:30 PM for 8:00 PM GO)						

Fig 1. Schedule of *Luv*'s production phase. Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

When thinking about lighting, it is important to remember that all light has direction. In nature, most light comes from the sky. Because of this, a majority of theatre lighting comes from above, however there can be multiple sources of light creating appealing contrast on a performer's body. Using these multiple angles of lights, Lighting Designers can create visually appealing and appropriate looks onstage.

Working from the original sketch from the Scenic Designer (Fig 3), I started playing with my own ideas in response to the script and from my meeting with the Director to create a rendering with Adobe Photoshop. The rendering (Fig 4) showed the quality of light I was trying to achieve on stage: dark overall, with strong hints of color from the background. The lighting had an abstract nature due to the angles, which helped carry the show's abstract plot. When creating these renderings, I stylized them with exaggerated color and detail. The Director liked the direction in which I was going with the rendering, so I continued with this style of lighting. For the first act the cyclorama⁴ would feel realistic, like the rendering, and the second act would be more abstract.

The next part of my process was to create the Light Plot (Fig 5). I worked from the drafted scenic plates (drawings based on the set), which had been created by this point. The set design was open and left ample room for lighting. With this in mind, I used the drafting software Vectorworks to start placing instruments and create the plot. During the plotting process, I get a clearer picture of where the scenery is in the theatre and the best places to hang lights. Depending on the scenic design it can be difficult to isolate the actor without lighting the scenic elements. When placing lights, I first look for unobstructed shots from the lighting hanging positions to where the actor will stand, and then I attempt to determine the best layout for the instruments at each lighting position. Since *Luv* was in a thrust theatre and the members of the audience would each be watching from different viewpoints, I considered what the audience's view would be from each side of the stage and placed instruments so that everyone would see a similar show. After the light plot was finished I created the Channel Hookup (Fig 6) and the

⁴ A cloth stretched tight in an arc around the back of a stage set.

Instrument Schedule (Fig 7). These documents, along with the Light Plot, comprised the lighting design paperwork that would be used by the electricians, led by the Master Electrician, to ensure all instruments were hung correctly with accessories.

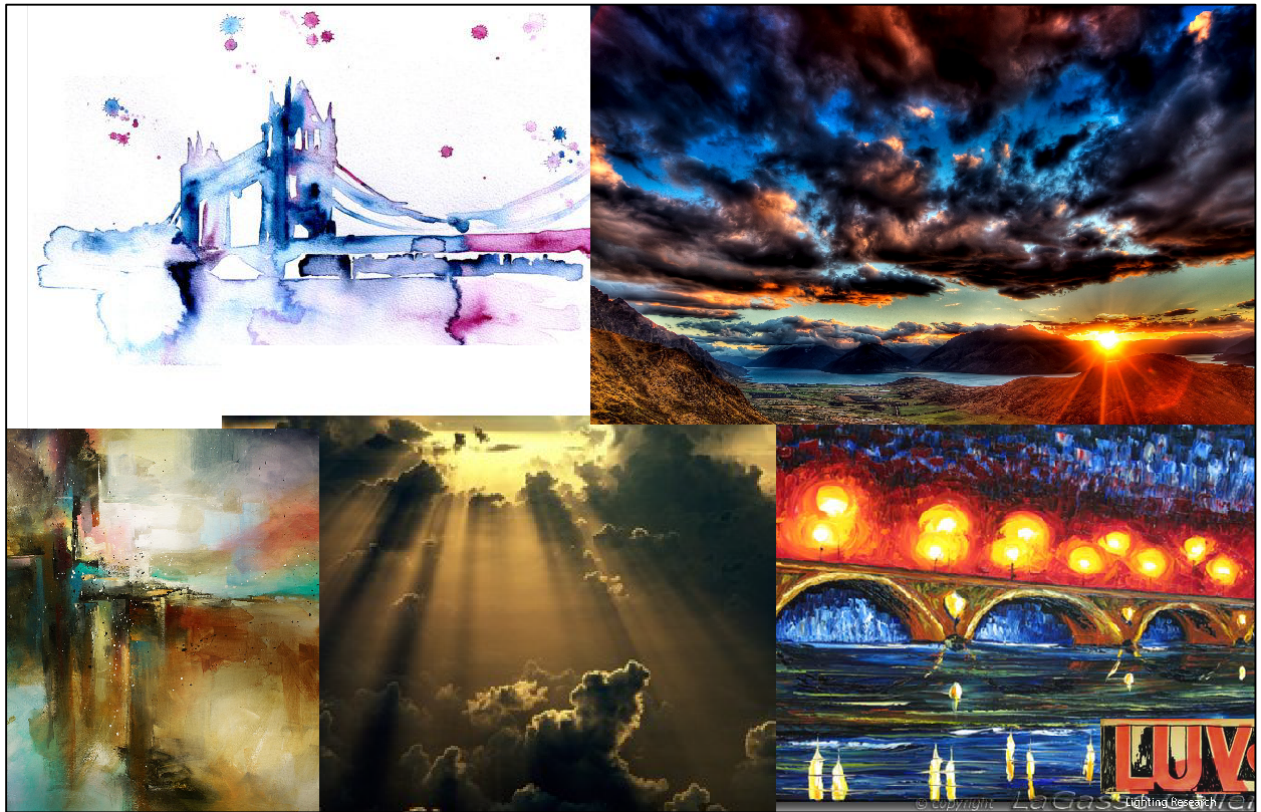


Fig 2. Example of research images from the lighting process. Lighting Design by Steven P.

Spera. Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

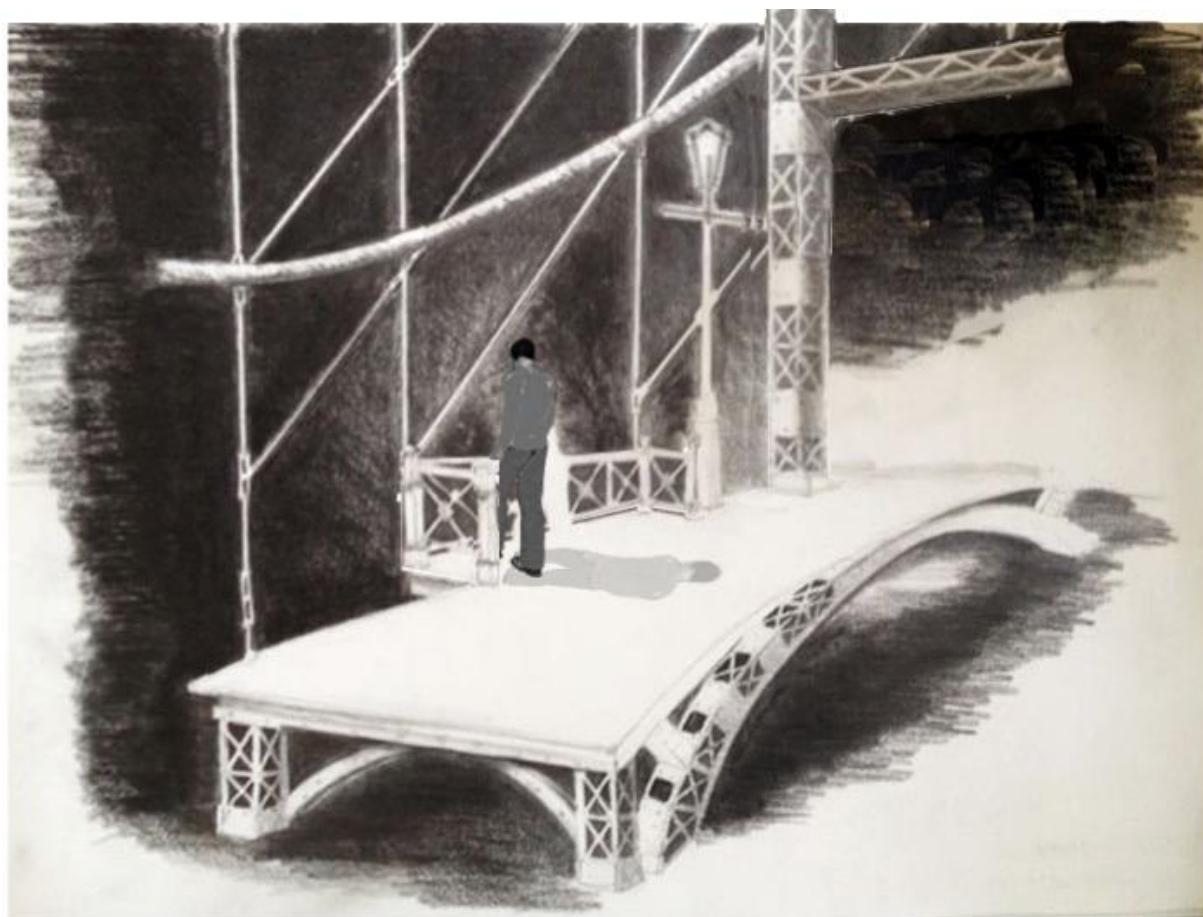


Fig 3. The scenic sketch from *Luv*. Scenic Design by Tom Bloom. Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

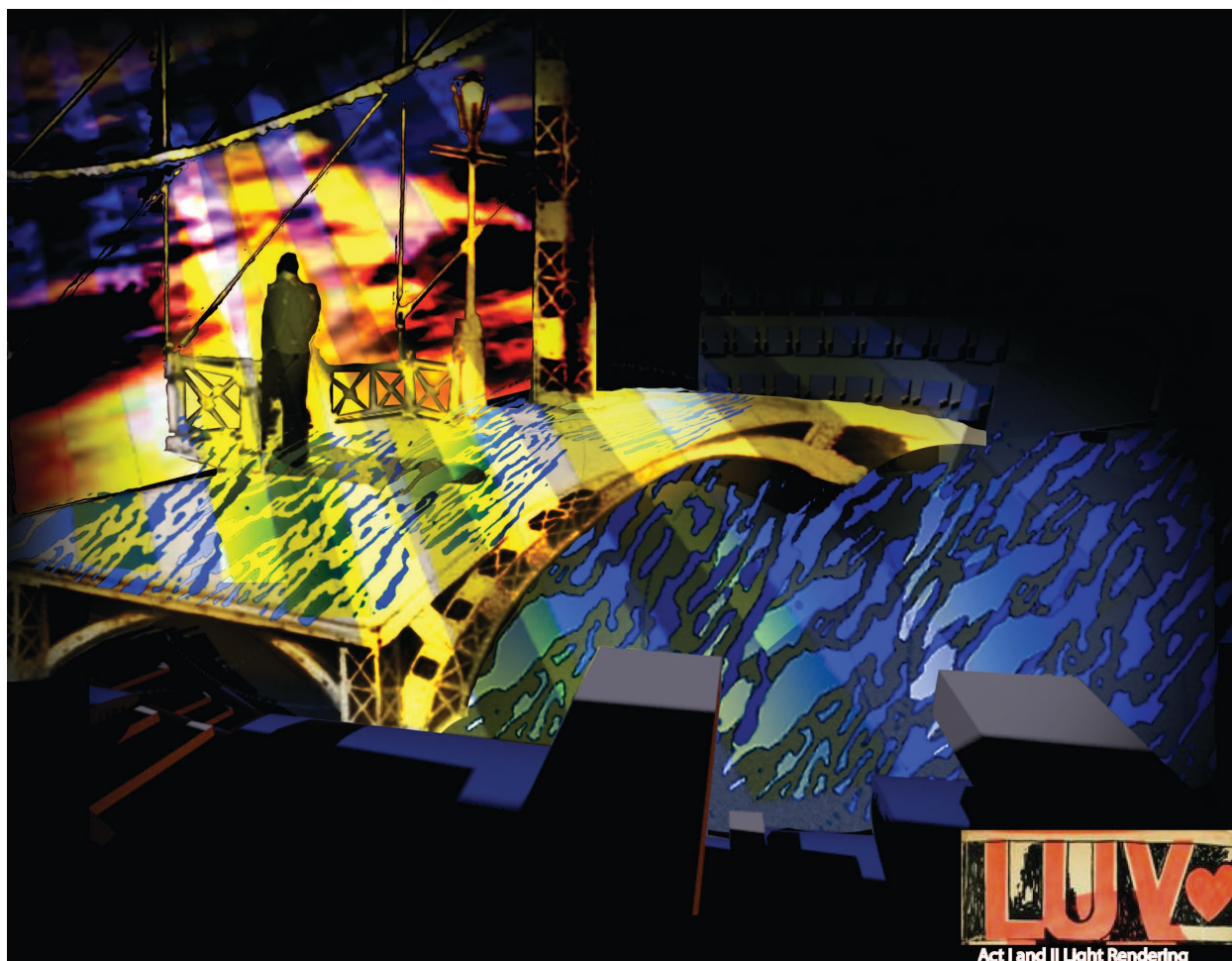


Fig 4. Light Rendering of *Luv* from the lighting process. Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera.
Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

In a typical production, the designer run-through (a performance rehearsal without any technical elements) happens after the light plot is due, but before the Lighting Designer focuses the Light Plot. The designer run-through allows the Lighting Designer to see the performers' blocking and start placing light cues into the script. Seeing a full run-through of the play is important because the action onstage is usually what motivates light cues. For example, when a performer walks onstage, the lights would usually fade up. Of course there are exceptions to this

guideline, but generally the actors motivate the technical elements.

After the designer run, the next major step in the lighting process is focus.⁵ The standard practice for focus is for the theatre to be completely dark while the Lighting Designer places the beam of each individual instrument with the aid of electricians. This part of the process is quite tedious and can be exhausting depending on how many lights there are to focus, but the Lighting Designer must stay focused in order to keep mistakes to a minimum. Mistakes have to be adjusted in the days following focus, large numbers of mistakes become costly, as the producing company has to pay the crew for additional hours to fix those mistakes.

For *Luv*, the focus call was difficult because scenery was behind schedule, and they needed to be in the space working on the set during the focus call. Scenery being behind schedule had a direct effect on the lighting because without scenery I did not have a surface on which to focus the lights. In addition, with scenery being in the space working, there were other challenges for the lighting department. With the loud noises coming from the tools, it became difficult to instruct the electricians on what to do. In adverse situations like this one, I employ hand signals to communicate to the electricians. While it is usually easier to use my voice to communicate, I was able to manage with just the hand signals. Aside from the noise, we also needed to leave work lights on during the focus call for scenery to be able to work safely. With work lights on, the contrast in the room was diminished, which made it difficult to see what the lighting was doing on the set. Unfortunately, with scenery running behind schedule I was also unable to have the space completely dark to adequately program the cues. I had to program my cues in as little light as possible so that scenery could safely work in the space. When setbacks

⁵ Focus is when the Lighting Designer will direct the placement of the the light beams with the aid of electricians.

like this happen, I have learned to remind myself that there are always challenges we cannot avoid, but if we are responsive to them we can overcome them collaboratively, and continue with the process.

Following the focus call and programming time comes the technical rehearsals. The technical process for theatre involves taking all the different design areas and putting them together. For scenic, it is seeing how the actors use the space; for sound it is hearing how everything sounds; and for lighting it is seeing how everything looks together. Tech is important because the creative team needs time to see how each element is working within the world the team is creating. During this process, however, the other technical elements are still evolving. Most of the time, the set is still being completed and the costumes are introduced later in the process, so the final look for lighting does not culminate until after tech. Lighting then has the opportunity to see how the light is interacting with the other completed elements and how the show is taking shape.

After *Luv* opened, I received criticism about the lighting design from several people. One person thought my color palette was too broad, another thought the use of patterns was overwhelming, and still another thought that there were too many cues. Looking back now at my color palette, while I was attempting to create a visually appealing and dynamic image onstage, I realize that it was a bit overwhelming. During the tech process I had added a system of lighting that was lime green in hue, with the intent of unifying the image. I now believe my approach with this system was not effective because the chroma of the green light took focus away from the actors.

Theatre Festival, June 2015.

Luv		CHANNEL HOOKUP				Page 1 of 12	
Luv.lw5						6/11/15	
						LD:Steven Spera	
Channel	Dm	Position	U#	Inst Type & Access & Watt	Gobo	Color	Purpose
(1)	2	Cat	8	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(2)	3	Cat	12	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(3)		Cross Pipe 1	1	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(4)	4	Cat	19	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(5)	3	Cat	9	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(6)	4	Cat Rear	4	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(7)	4	Cat	15	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(8)	4	Cat Rear	2	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav L
(11)	4	Cat	3	Source4 19° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(12)	4	Cat	2	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(13)	4	Cat	6	Source4 19° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(14)	4	Cat	5	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(15)	4	Cat	9	Source4 19° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(16)	4	Cat	8	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(17)	4	Cat	12	Source4 19° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(18)	4	Cat	11	Source4 26° 575w		R4930+R132	Key Lav R
(21)	2	Cat	6	Source4 26° 575w		R132	Key Pink L
(22)	3	Cat	11	Source4 26° 575w		R132	Key Pink L
(23)		Cross Pipe 1	4	Source4 26° 575w		R132	Key Pink L

R. Lee Kennedy / Lightwright 5

(1) thru (23)

Fig 6. Channel Hookup example from the *Luv* lighting process. Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera. Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

Luv

INSTRUMENT SCHEDULE

Page 1 of 13

Luv.lw5

6/11/15

LD:Steven Spera

4th Electric

U#	Instrument Type & Accessory & Wattage	Gobo	Color	Dm	Chan
1	Source 4 70 deg 750w	Real Clouds	L202+R132		(332)
2	Source 4 70 deg 750w	Real Clouds	L202+R132		(331)
3	S4 PAR MFL 575w		R64+R104		(313)
4	Source 4 90 Deg 750w	Big Clouds	Colorizer + R132		(343)
5	S4 PAR MFL 575w		R64+R104		(313)
6	S4 PAR MFL 575w		R64+R104		(313)
7	Source 4 90 Deg 750w	Big Clouds	Colorizer + R132		(342)
8	S4 PAR MFL 575w		R64+R104		(311)
9	Source 4 90 Deg 750w	Big Clouds	Colorizer + R132		(341)
10	S4 PAR MFL 575w		R64+R104		(311)
11	Source 4 70 deg 750w	Real Clouds	L202+R132		(322)
12	Source 4 70 deg 750w	Real Clouds	L202+R132		(321)

R. Lee Kennedy / Lightwright 5

4th Electric

R. Lee Kennedy / Lightwright 5

4th Electric

Fig 7. Instrument Schedule example from the *Luv* lighting process. Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera. Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

While this show was representative of a typical design process, the decision to start the tech process with a cue-to-cue had an impact on my process with the lighting. Beginning in this fashion caused me to think about the show in pieces as opposed to seeing the show as a whole, and that was reflected in my design choices. Overall, I believe the lighting for this show took the audience out of the moment, and while the cues were visually appealing, they did not enhance the story. This show made me realize that I need to look at the show as a whole through the

design process as opposed to focusing on specific looks for individual moments.



Fig 8. Production Photo from *Luv*. Direction by Bryan Garey, Scenic Design by Tom Bloom, Costume Design by Amy Goffman, Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera. Photo Credit, Michael Bailey. Heritage Theatre Festival, June 2015.

The Bridges of Madison County

Originally constructed as a vaudeville house, the Media Theatre was renovated and turned into a proscenium style theatre in the late 1990s. The company produces five Broadway-style shows per season. The Media Theatre's production was the Philadelphia regional premiere

of *The Bridges of Madison County*. A best selling novel written by Robert James Waller, *The Bridges of Madison County* made its transition to the stage as a musical on Broadway in 2014.

The Bridges of Madison County is about an Italian war bride, Francesca, whose first husband, Pablo, was killed in a war. She then meets Bud, another soldier from America and leaves Italy to start a new life with him. She thought it was going to be an exciting life, but it turned out to be boring and loveless until she meets Robert, a photographer from the National Geographic. He shows up one day in Madison County, Iowa looking for a bridge to photograph. Francesca decides to travel with him to help him find the bridge, and during their time together, she falls in love with him. The two lovers have a short-lived affair, after which Francesca decides to stay with her family instead of running away with Robert.

When I met with the Director for *The Bridges of Madison County* I spoke with him about his vision for the show. The Director wanted the audience to look at Francesca and Bud's relationship and to see the hopelessness of Francesca being stuck in a loveless marriage with no way out. I thought the lighting had the ability to show contrast between her mundane married life and her passionate affair. I wanted the lighting to convey that contrast by looking bright and happy yet flat and lacking passion. When Francesca meets Robert, I wanted the lighting to become vibrant and full of life and almost painful to look at because their passion was so intense that it was blinding. All in all, I wanted the lighting to convey Francesca's emotions and experiences throughout the show by changing intensity and hue.

The scenic design for this show included multiple portals (flats that obstructs part of the stage), a screen door, and a rear projection screen near the back of the set (Fig 9). Overall the design was minimal, and lighting would have to take the audience on Francesca's journey. For

the show to look dynamic and full, I added moving lights on booms (a vertical pipe typical placed on the side of a stage) about ten feet off the ground on both sides of the stage. I planned for all the color to come from these units. Using the moving lights as sidelights⁶ would also give the actors' bodies a fuller illumination. I wanted the lighting to be more than simply functional because it needed to carry the audience through Francesca's emotional journey.

The designer run of *The Bridges of Madison County* allowed me to see the show in a completed state before adding the design elements. The show was sung well, the transitions in and out of scenes were well-executed, and I knew where I wanted cues in the script because of the run. After the designer run I programmed a general look for each scene with a plan to adjust those looks to fit the different scenes during the tech process.

After the designer run, the schedule became compressed and complicated (Fig 10). Since the Monday following the designer run was a holiday, the theatre would have to pay extra for anyone to work on that day, so it became a day off. In a typical production, the Lighting Designer would make the plot prior to seeing the designer run, and the lighting units would already be hung on the lighting hanging positions in the space before the designer run. In this case, I was not asked for a plot beforehand, so I made the plot (Fig 11) in the two-day period between seeing the designer run and the first day of hang. Including that first day, the crew had a total of two days to hang and focus the entire plot.

⁶ Lighting that is directionally coming from the direct side of the performer.

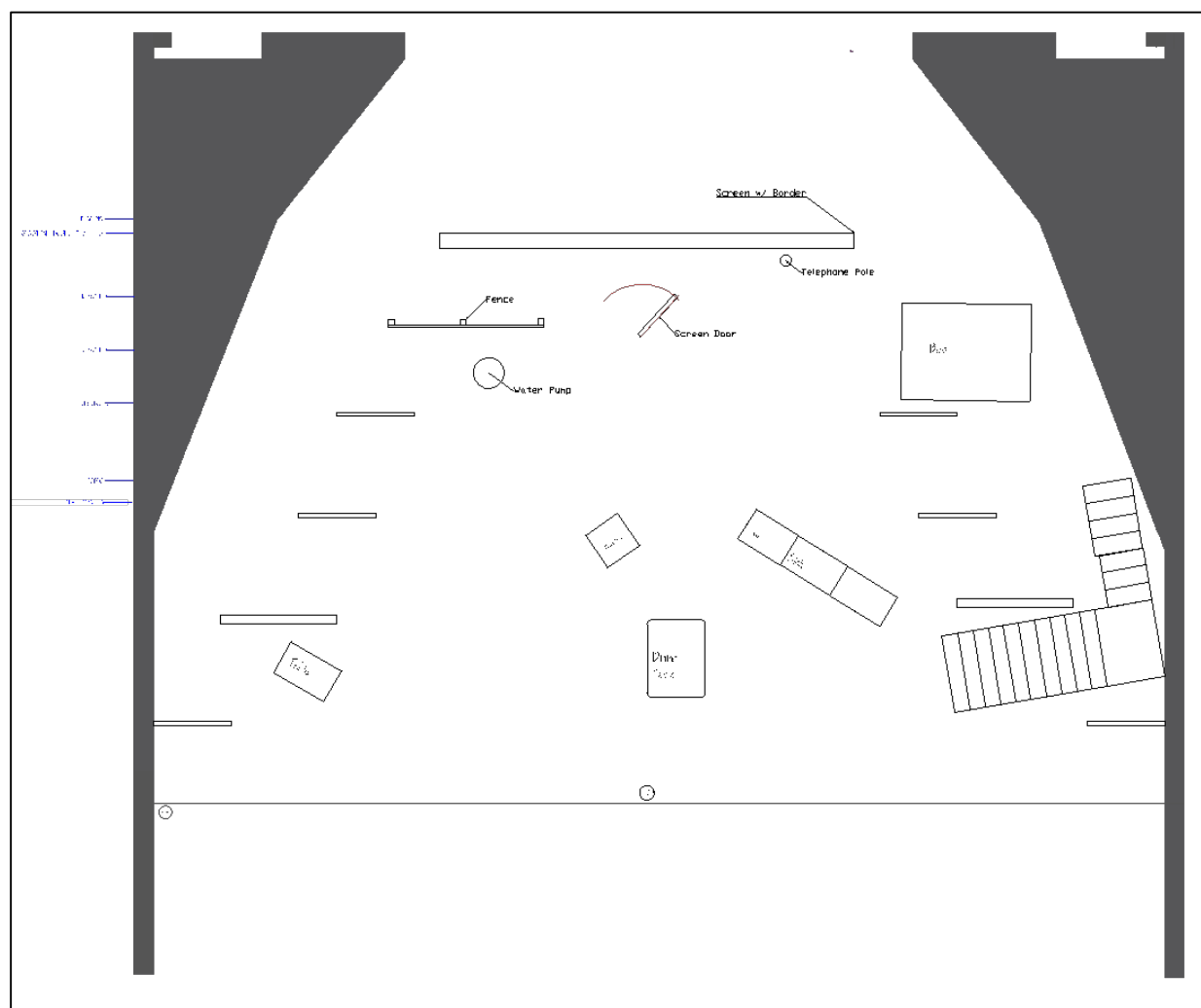


Fig 9. The scenic preliminary Ground Plan from *The Bridges of Madison County*. Scenic Design by Kyle Brylczk. The Media Music Theatre Company, August 2016.

September 2016						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
28	29	30	31	Sep 1	2	3 Bridges Designer Rui
4	5	6 Hang/Focus	7 Hang/Focus	8 Tech	9 Tech	10 Hang/Focus Notes Tech
11	12 Tech	13 Tech	14 Preview	15 Preview 2 and 3	16 Bridges Opening	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	Oct 1

Fig 10. The Schedule for *The Bridges of Madison County*'s production phase. The Media Music Theatre Company, August 2016.

During the first day of hang there was already a lot working against the crew. There were multiple crews working in this space during this time which caused the hang to take more time than expected. I did not think the crew was going to have enough time to finish hanging the plot and focus it, so I had to decide which lighting elements were most important for the show. I ended up cutting systems from my original plot and told the crew that the most important elements were the moving lights on the booms because those positions were going to add the

color and illumination I wanted. It is important for a Lighting Designer to be responsive and flexible when these kinds of challenges occur in order to keep the process moving forward

Even though this show was put up in a short amount of time, because of the prior planning on all parts of the creative team, the tech went smoothly and we did not have to spend a lot of tech time on individual elements. As I went through tech my color palettes started to evolve. I used warm tones in all scenes but kept the vibrancy only to scenes between Francesca and Robert. When I go into a tech rehearsal I never know what to expect, but my original plan was to keep the scenes with Bud relatively flat and the scenes with Robert more vibrant, though I made a few adjustments in response to what I was seeing onstage.

After the show opened, the reviews were positive. One read: “In this musical about a photographer and the community he disrupts, [the Director] uses images potently in Steven Spera's lighting design, enlarging the thematic and moral scope.”⁷ Unlike *Luv*, where there were a number of strong critiques, for *The Bridges of Madison County* the lighting was well-received and was said to be appropriate for the show. By the time the show opened, I thought it worked well as a whole. More importantly, I thought the lighting came together and worked well with the other elements to make for a cohesive and entertaining show.

Looking back, I am glad that the Light Plot was not due before the designer run because the theatre was not adequately represented by the drafting I was given. I believe this to be a theme for a Lighting Designer; we have drafting of a venue and photos but we never know what we are going to get, so we have to be collaborative and open-minded in order to create the best show we can. Good communication throughout the design process for *The Bridges of Madison*

⁷ Rutter, Jim, and For The Inquirer. “Media Theatre’s Bridges of Madison County Soars beyond Book.” *Philly.com*. 17 Oct. 2016. Web. 6 Feb. 2017.

County allowed for a smooth tech process despite a shortened timeline. By working collaboratively with the team and being responsive to challenges getting the show hung on time, I was able to remain focused on the lighting design and how it helped move the plot along. The result was a successful visually unified production.



Fig 12. Production Photo from *The Bridges of Madison County*. Direction by Jesse Cline, Scenic Design by Kyle Brylczyk, Costume Design by Jennifer Povish, Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera. Photo Credit, Steven P. Spera. The Media Music Theatre Company, August 2016.

The Comedy of Errors

The Comedy of Errors tells the story of two sets of identical twins that were accidentally

separated at birth. This was the first show of the University of Virginia Department of Drama's 2016-2017 season, and because of that it deviated from a typical creative process. The creative process for *The Comedy of Errors* started at the very end of the previous season and continued sporadically during the summer. To begin with, the design meetings did not start until much later than they should have because the directors were not selected and the design team lacked a Scenic Designer and a Costume Designer. In the end, two directors were chosen to lead to production, each with their own style of directing. With the other two shows previously discussed, I was able to build a rapport with the directors during the process and get a feeling for what they wanted for the production. However, with multiple directors for one production and a process that was delayed, it was harder to gauge the overall vision because both members needed to agree on the choices the creative team was making. By the end of the Spring 2016 semester, Scenic and Costume Designers had been selected. While the design team was at that point complete, the production still did not have a stage manager. Without a stage manager, no notes were taken during the design meetings and distributed to the different departments, which made it difficult to keep up with details that had been decided.

During the process for *The Comedy of Errors*, the creative team decided to set the play around Coney Island. I attempted to make sense of the direction in which the production was headed by sketching and creating renderings (Fig 13) with the images of Coney Island in mind using the Scenic Designer's preliminary designs. I wanted to bring the colorful and chaotic nature of Coney Island into the lighting design. The directors liked the feel of the initial ideas and sketches, but were concerned about the overall brightness because *The Comedy of Errors* is a language comedy and they wanted the lighting not to impede the dialogue. During the process I

also collaborated with the Scenic Designer about the integration of lighting into the scenic design as a way to add another layer to help tell the story of the play. With the added layer of light between the actors and the back wall the world could become more erratic and increase the feeling of a loss of control. By the end of summer, the setting of the show had been determined and most of the scenic design had been finalized, but most other elements were still in a preliminary phase.

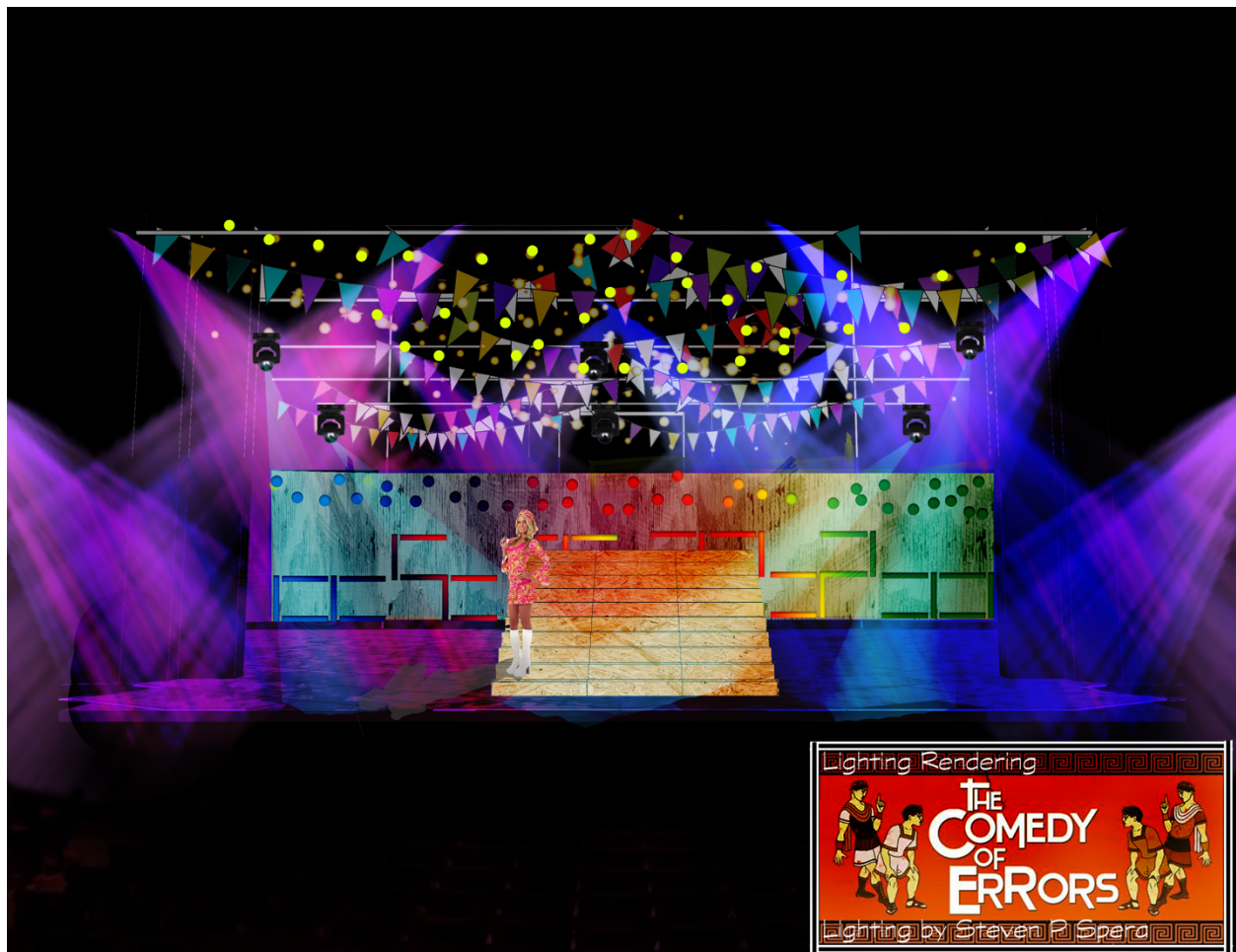


Fig 13. Light Rendering of *The Comedy of Errors* from the lighting process. Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera. University of Virginia's Department of Drama, August 2016.

As the Fall 2016 semester began, there was a final design meeting before the show went into production. Two weeks into the semester, and for most of the process that remained before focus, I had to be out of town working on another production. It is typical of a Lighting Designer to be working on multiple shows during any given period, and because of that it is normal for a Lighting Designer to remotely communicate with any given creative team. However it is important that the Lighting Designer be at the tech process for all shows for which he is designing because that is the point at which the lighting will take its shape. Before leaving, I finalized my light plot (Fig 14) and paperwork for *The Comedy of Errors* and sent everything to the Master Electrician well before seeing a designer run. I received updates and questions from the Master Electrician via phone call or email while I was away.

I returned to town the day before the lighting focus call and attended the last production meeting, both of which went as well as could be expected, and then we moved into the tech process. As I look back on the tech process I believe I started the first day in the wrong state of mind. I had gotten used to working at The Media Theatre, which was a regional theatre, and I did not immediately adjust to being back in an academic setting. During tech, the standard protocol is for all performers to stay where they are when a hold is called in order for the designers to be able to manipulate the scene so it is within the vision of the play. For this tech, the first time I called hold to fix a cue, the performers immediately moved into a group and start talking, which was frustrating for me. This was an issue throughout the tech process for this show and contributed to the disorganization that I experienced during the process. Looking back, I could have been more firm and prevented some of my frustration by explaining my expectations for

tech to the performers before we started.

At dress rehearsal, I got to finally see the show run all the way through. At this point, I felt something was missing in the lighting. It was boring and did not add much to the world the creative team was trying to construct. While I was not sure of how to fix this problem, I went and made significant changes to the lighting cues to see if anything improved. Because the show featured themes of confusion, I knew the lighting was flexible and could be anything. I started by going through each scene and adding more lights to make the scenes look more visually appealing. During the dress rehearsals my feelings of static lighting were reduced, and the changes I had made seemed to unify the production. After opening I received positive responses from audience members. One liked the lighting specifically, saying it was his favorite part. Another liked the direction to have the performers in the audience during some of the scenes and accented by the lighting choices. Reflecting on this process, I learned the Lighting Designer has to see the production for what it is currently and be open to continuing to adjust the lighting. For example, while working with the Scenic Designer, I started this process making assumptions about her style of design and thinking it was more realistic, but as the design came to realization, I discovered she preferred a more nontraditional design than I originally thought. Looking back, I would have liked to bring the designs closer together by taking the lighting design in a less conventional direction.

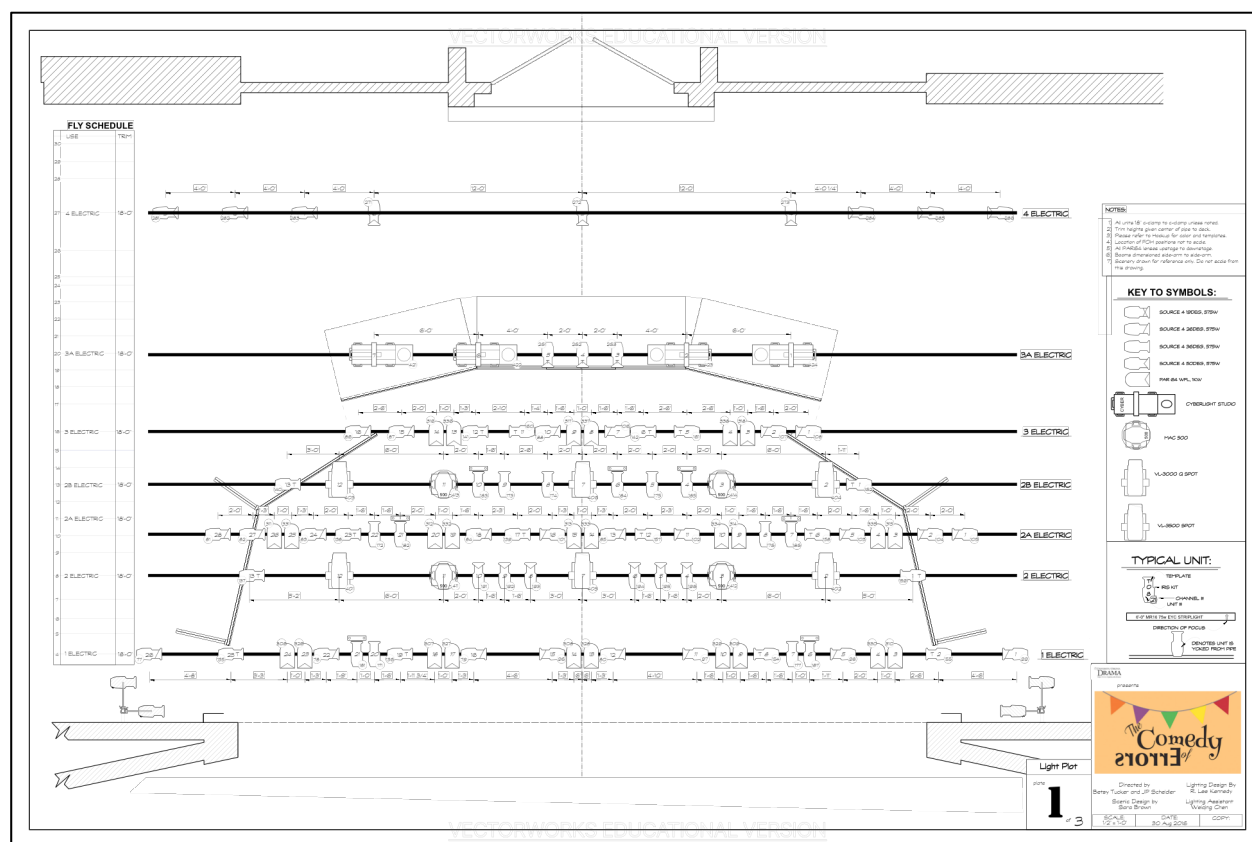




Fig 15. Production Photo from *The Comedy of Errors*. Direction by Betsy Tucker and JP Scheidler, Scenic Design by Sara Brown, Costume Design by Sara Brown, Lighting Design by Steven P. Spera. Photo Credit, Steven P. Spera. University of Virginia's Department of Drama, August 2016.

Conclusion

For me, the most important attributes for a Lighting Designer to possess in order to arrive at a successful production are flexibility and creative problem solving. Within each of these productions I was faced with unique challenges: for *Luv* it was working with conflicting schedules, for *The Bridges of Madison County* it was working as a visiting designer, and for *The Comedy of Errors* it was about working within a disorganized process. In facing those challenges I was able to keep an open mind about what was currently happening and was able to find an

appropriate solution to each of those challenges. Even with all of the issues I faced, some known and some unknown, I found a way to get each production to a successful finished state. With the experiences from these productions I gained the confidence to produce a successful design but only by being collaborative and being open to new ideas.