Production Concept Package

prepared for the
Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College
and Department of Theatre and Dance
production of
The Memorandum
by Václav Havel

Directed by
David S. Thompson

Scenic, Lighting and Costume Designs by
Dudley Sanders

Performance dates
October 25-27 and November 1-3, 2002

Prepared by
David S. Thompson, Ph.D.
JUST OVER A YEAR AGO, I LEARNED THAT BLACKFRIARS HAD ONCE CONSIDERED A PRODUCTION OF VÁCLAV HAVEL’S THE MEMORANDUM. I MUST SAY THAT I APPLAUDED THE FACT THAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED, SO MUCH SO THAT I REREAD THE SCRIPT AND PRESSED FOR ITS INCLUSION IN THE SEASON. HAVEL IS ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING DRAMATISTS AND PERSONALITIES OF OUR TIME AND MAKES A WONDERFUL ADDITION, BOTH PEDAGOGICALLY AND THEATRICALLY.

Many of Havel’s plays offer a variation on his personal experiences with the Czech communist government. (We have ordered copies of THE GARDEN PARTY AND OTHER PLAYS; I encourage one and all to read as much of the other material as possible.) Frequently, the audience follows an Everyman not unlike Gross or Havel himself. The plays are satires on oppressive regimes and arbitrary order meant to suppress individual spirit. The strategies involve groupthink, forced commonality, and communal agreement, all artificially manipulated by those in power. While Havel’s plays are absurdist in their approach, they also contain hyperrealistic elements. In other words, the behavior of those aligned with the government (or company or other structure) is plainly outlandish, but the fact that a thoughtful individual cannot ignore it and cannot escape it—and might actually come to harm—makes for a fearful, even frightful, existence.

As we have discussed as a possibility with a number of plays, we will produce THE MEMORANDUM by having our women assume all roles. Women are no strangers to office politics and political turmoil. They have the same range of ambitions, frustrations and fears as men. This play brings that parallel into sharp focus. Normally, the play would feature 13 men and two women; reversing the male roles produces a cast of 15 women and involves many more of our students.

One potential oddity (although I don’t think most of our campus community will have a bit of difficulty) rests with the two roles originally written for women. There is no small amount of sexual innuendo and even sexual harassment by the men who encounter these women. Obviously changing the gender of the male characters changes the nature of the conflict. Then again, many of us are well aware that sexual harassment often has more to do with power than with sex. In addition, it is not limited to exchanges between a man and a woman. In that regard, we are making a common statement, but in an unexpected manner.

The tone of the production must be that of Gross as a stranger in a strange land. Only rarely do others in the play question the status quo or seem bothered by it. In that sense we want to humanize the absurdity. Ideally, we will get a double reaction of amusement at the ridiculous codes of conduct and discomfort that someone could be caught in its web. To reinforce the lack of control, we will often travel at breakneck pace, particularly during scene changes, then slow selectively to emphasize moments of individual difficulty.
DESIGN IMAGERY

General  
Cold, sterile, antiseptic. There is little warmth in this world and no end of regulation.

Set  
The structure of the play is perfectly symmetrical. Each act features six scenes, two scenes each in the Managing Director’s Office, Classroom and Translation Center, in that order. To keep things moving and to emphasize the orthodoxy, I would suggest that there be as much in common with each setting as possible. Each room should have, for example the same style of desk and chairs. If we could create an environmental concept whereby the same furniture moves into different configurations to suggest each locale or have similar walls and panels that move to create slightly different backgrounds, we will go a long way toward capturing the spirit and tone.

Lighting  
Industrial. Office. Stark.

Costumes  
Office apparel. Only the secretaries should wear anything remotely feminine. All others should have suits, ideally with pants rather than skirts, but at all costs suits that evoke power. Lower-level employees might have something less formal such as the omission of jackets or rolled-up sleeves. Managers should wear suits with matching pieces. All colors should be dark—black, charcoal, and gray are preferred.

Sound  
As described above, I want the tone and energy of the play to feel somewhat out of control. That does not mean that it is reckless, just that someone else is controlling the pace. Music should permeate the house during preshow, intermission, set changes and, briefly, post-show. I keep returning to both virtuoso guitar instrumentals (anything from Les Paul to Brian Setzer) and driving big band recordings such as “Sing, Sing, Sing.” If we decide to run with big band, we should avoid the specific example of “Sing, Sing, Sing” because it has been used in a number of films to achieve effects similar to what I have in mind.

Props  
Office Depot!
CHARACTER TRAITS

Jo Gross, Managing Director
Every(wo)man     Honorable
Dependable      Logical
Stranger in a strange land trying to make the best of every twist and turn.

Jan Ballas, Deputy Director
Opportunistic    Officious
Underhanded     Impatient
Ultimately very weak and insecure, probably explaining her ridiculous schemes.

Ferry Pillar (Ballas’s Partner)
Opportunistic    Sycophant
Silent          Patient
Like her partner, looking for the best possible time to strike; unlike her, silent.

Otto Stroll, Head of Translation Center
Overconfident    Assertive
Comfortable     Crude (Rude)
Image: Manager most concerned with wielding power.

Alex Savant, Ptydepist
Arrogant         Academic
Elitist          Crude (Unpolished)
Image: University professor with injurious case of ivory tower syndrome.

Helena, Chairman
Strong           Strident
Socially inept   Boorish
Image: Matronly real estate broker.

Maria, Secretary at Translation Center
Observant        Honorable
Empathetic      Helpful
A breath of humanity amidst non-humanity.

Hana, Secretary to Managing Director
Robotic          Mindless
Lacking in ego or personality.

Ms. (Mary) Lear, Teacher of Ptydepe
Single-minded nightmarish lecturer.

Ms. (Petra) Thumb, a clerk
The good student, willing to please.
All facts, no knowledge.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>George, Staff Watcher</td>
<td>A cog in the wheel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Column</td>
<td>Pillar’s replacement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three Clerks</td>
<td>Occasional students of Ptydepe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SCENE CHANGE BLOCKING

NOTE:
- Most of the scene changes will involve the Three Clerks, Thumb and George.
- Other personnel may be required. For example, there are times when it makes sense for Stroll or Gross to make the last scenic shift prior to the beginning of a scene or for Hana or Maria to shift a panel close to the desk stage left.
- Panels are numbered from stage left to stage right (left to right from the audience perspective)

ACT I

1 → 2  (Director’s Office → Classroom)
  a. GEORGE closes Panel 2  
  b. COLUMN closes Panel 1  
  c. CLERKS enter with chairs (begin when Panel 2 is halfway closed)

2 → 3  (Classroom → Translation Center)
  a. CLERKS exit with chairs  
  b. COLUMN enters SL; opens Panel 2 (begin as soon as clerks step toward exit)  
  c. STROLL opens Panel 3; sets chair  
  d. MICHELLE opens Panel 4 on her way out (or GEORGE prior to places?)  
  e. COLUMN opens Panel 1; exit SL

3 → 4  (Translation Center → Director’s Office)
  a. THUMB crosses L-R moves US chair  
  b. KATE enters L; closes Panel 3; exits R  
  c. COLUMN enters R; closes Panel 4; exits L

4 → 5  (Director’s Office → Classroom)
  a. GEORGE closes Panel 2  
  b. COLUMN closes Panel 1  
  c. CLERKS enter with chairs (begin when Panel 2 is halfway closed)

5 → 6  (Classroom → Translation Center)
  a. CLERKS exit with chairs  
  b. COLUMN enters SL; opens Panel 2 (begin as soon as clerks step toward exit)  
  c. GROSS opens Panel 3; sets chair  
  d. MICHELLE opens Panel 4 on her way out (or GEORGE prior to places?)  
  e. COLUMN opens Panel 1; exit SL

6 → INT  (Translation Center → Director’s Office)
  Run Crew sets Managing Director’s Office for Scene 7
ACT II

7 → 8 (Director’s Office → Classroom)
   a. GEORGE closes Panel 2
   b. COLUMN closes Panel 1
   c. CLERKS enter with chairs (begin when Panel 2 is halfway closed)

8 → 9 (Classroom → Translation Center)
   a. CLERKS exit with chairs
   b. COLUMN enters SL; opens Panel 2 (begin as soon as clerks step toward exit)
   c. GEORGE opens Panel 3
   d. MICHELLE opens Panel 4 on her way out (or GEORGE prior to places?)
   e. COLUMN opens Panel 1; exit SL

9 → 10 (Translation Center → Director’s Office)
   a. THUMB crosses L-R moves US chair
   b. KATE enters L; closes Panel 3; exits R
   c. COLUMN enters R; closes Panel 4; exits L

10 → 11 (Director’s Office → Classroom)
   a. GEORGE closes Panel 2
   b. COLUMN closes Panel 1
   c. CLERKS enter with chairs (begin when Panel 2 is halfway closed)

11 → 12 (Classroom → Translation Center)
   a. CLERKS exit with chairs
   b. COLUMN enters SL; opens Panel 2 (begin as soon as clerks step toward exit)
   c. GEORGE opens Panel 3
   d. MICHELLE opens Panel 4 on her way out (or GEORGE prior to places?)
   e. COLUMN opens Panel 1; exit SL

Curtain Call
   a. THREE CLERKS, COLUMN, GEORGE Enter SR, Bow C, X DL
   b. MARIA & HANA Enter SL, Bow C, X DR
   c. LEAR & THUMB Enter SR, Bow C, X LC
   d. STROLL, SAVANT, HELENA Enter SL, Bow C, X RC
   e. BALLAS & PILLAR Enter SR, Bow C, X UC
   f. GROSS Enter SR, Bow C, Adjust for Company Bow
This listing provides a brief outline to basis character and possible concept. A detailed
costume plot for each character, one that coordinates with other design decisions, will
emerge as part of the production process.

Jo Gross, Managing Director
  Neat, professional, tailored, managerial
  Business suit, wool blend (perhaps gray pinstripe), tasteful blouse, perhaps a scarf
Jan Ballas, Deputy Director
  Ambitious and a bit sleazy; business equivalent of lounge lizard
  Dark suit, double knit if possible with garish accessories
Ferry Pillar (Ballas’s Partner)
  Nondescript dark suit, tending toward a uniform in cut and attitude
Otto Stroll, Head of Translation Center
  Look should be somewhat masculine and not as neat as Gross or Ballas
  Male tailoring or pantsuit pieces; coordinating, but not of the same suit; possibly
  mismatched, poorly matched or ill-fitting; shirt and tie
Alex Savant, Ptydepist
  Also masculine, tending toward academic rather than business attire
  Jacket, possibly tweed, and slacks; oxford shirt and tie.
Helena, Chairman
  Image of matronly saleswoman
  Blazer and long skirt; at least one overly bright touch, either a print on suit
  element or a bright blouse, possibly a pin or faux floral bow.
Maria, Secretary at Translation Center
  Tasteful skirt and blouse
Hana, Secretary to Managing Director
  Less tasteful receptionist gear (skirt and blouse) than Maria
Ms. (Mary) Lear, Teacher of Ptydepe
  Business suit, possibly with a vest or odd shirt
Ms. Column
  Either identical to Ms. Pillar above or following the guidelines below.
Ms. (Petra) Thumb, a clerk
George, Staff Watcher
Three Clerks
  The lower level members of the staff must look like clerks in some regard. They
  are not as well dressed or as fully pulled together. Some may wear skirts, others
  pants. Simple blouses or oxford shirts; some may roll up sleeves or wear vests.
  No suits and no jackets.
Propeties List

Updated 9/10/02

Props are listed according to first appearance using pagination from The Garden Party and Other Plays.

Scene 1

55 fire extinguisher w/wall mount
   (2)
55 coat rack
55 mail
55 waste basket
55 desk tray (in-out basket)
56 money
56 shopping bag
56 mirror
56 comb
56 bag/purse
56 computer (typewriter)
57 empty bottle
58 bottle of milk
60 string bag
61 typed memo
64 string bag w/rolls

Scene 2

TBA

Scene 3

68 paper bag w/peaches
69 handkerchief
69 cigarettes
71 string bag w/onions
71 knife/fork/napkin (several sets)
72 box w/ cigars
73 watch
74 purse

Scene 4

80 notebook
83 box of chocolates
83 typed sheet of paper

Scene 5

TBA

Scene 6

88 paper bag w/limes
91 jar/can of coffee
92 iron
92 coffee maker
92 coffee cups
92 spoon(s)
93 bag of sugar

Scene 7

TBA

Scene 8

TBA

Scene 9

104 string bag w/onions
104 mirror
105 hat (costumes?)
110 file folders (several)

Scene 10

TBA

Scene 11

TBA

Scene 12

TBA
The Memorandum

AUDITION INFORMATION

1. **Schedule:** Auditions will begin at 7:00pm with a brief meeting for all in attendance. At this time any questions will be addressed. Auditions will not end until all auditionees have had an opportunity to perform.

2. **Preparation:** In order to give yourself the best possible chance to shine, consider the following items.
   a. Warm up. Loosen up physically, vocally and mentally.
   b. Gear up. Put yourself in a frame of mind to make clear choices, display lots of energy, maintain focus, and use your entire self.
   c. Select an article from a section of newspaper. (Samples are provided.) Paragraphs that form a coherent narrative are best for our purposes. Become familiar with the passage—memorization is not necessary.
   d. Prepared monologues are welcome, but not required.

3. **Auditions:**
   a. See Melanie Luschen, your Assistant Director/Stage Manager about a slot.
   b. Auditionees will enter the theatre individually.
   c. Auditions will begin with a brief interview/conversation.
   d. You will be asked to read the article you have selected. Then you will receive directions about how to read in the manner of different characters in various situations.
   e. You may be asked to look at a passage from the play to study.

4. **Tips:**
   a. What am I looking for? . . . Energy, Enthusiasm, Imagination, Confidence, Cooperation, Dedication, Perseverance
   b. In short, I am looking for someone who *wants* to be here, is willing to *give* of herself, and is willing to *work*—both to improve personally and to create a production worth seeing.
CALLBACK SCENES

Sc 1, pp. 61 (mid) – 64 (mid)  GROSS, BALLAS
Sc 2, p. 65          LEAR
Sc 3, pp. 74-76      STROLL, SAVANT, GROSS
Sc 4, pp. 80-84      GROSS, BALLAS, (PILLAR), some HANA
Sc 5, pp. 86-88      LEAR, GROSS, THUMB
Sc 6, pp. 90-94 (mid) STROLL, SAVANT, HELENA, GROSS (MARIA OS)
Sc 6, p. 94          GROSS
Sc 8, pp. 102-104    LEAR, THUMB (stichomythia)
Sc 9, pp. 110-111    BALLAS (“You still haven’t told me…”), STROLL, SAVANT, HELENA
Sc 9, pp. 112-114    MARIA (“Do you realize…”), GROSS
CALLBACK LIST

Barnes, Kenner
Bidwell, Kate
Currica, Michelle
Dresser, Christina
Edmonds, Jenna
El-Shair, Asha
Ginn, Meg
Gugino, Amber
Guin, Sara
Hartung, Christin
Holloway, Anna
Jordan, Katie
Kim, Annie
Nichols, Sarah
Rahman, Moutushi
Reuter, Hannah
Reynolds, Karen
Shebs, Kayleigh
Tarney, Kat
Vetter, Gwendolyn
Willard, Ann
Zheng, Cindy
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## The Memorandum

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<td>Michelle Currica</td>
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<td>Kate Bidwell</td>
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### NOTES:

1. Many thanks to all who auditioned.
2. We will begin rehearsals with introductions and the first reading on **Monday, September 9 at 7:00pm in the Green Room**.
3. See Melanie Luschen for scripts.
DIRECTOR’S NOTE

The realm of politics offers us several clichés that may readily apply to other aspects of life. Among these are the assertions that it is easier to campaign than to govern, easier to protest than to lead. Whether in government, business, art or education, finding those who truly excel on both sides of such equations is a rarity. In considering those few with both a depth of humanity and a breadth of leadership abilities one must include Václav Havel. As we were completing preliminary planning for this production, much of Europe, including the Czech Republic, was devastated by floods. Throughout the rehearsal period, I have kept on my desk a photo of President Václav Havel surveying a muddy sea that only hours before had been Prague. Rather than panic or disappointment, Havel’s expression suggests observation and analysis. The same sort of calm intelligence made his plays the perfect vehicle for satirizing an oppressive regime. It also helped him to fight for human rights, to improve his homeland, even to face certain imprisonment rather than accept numerous opportunities to leave. And while his plays were written in response to specific circumstances—many would say personal circumstances given the numerous autobiographical parallels—they have come to carry universal messages. Havel writes about issues of basic humanity and blasts those who seek to rob us of that fundamental impulse. His targets are the tools of power, including structure, position and language. Yet, Havel’s work is frequently so clever that laughter and tears may mask one another. So laugh with us or cry with us; be entertained or distracted. But before you know it you must think. Think as a leader who looks for the next opportunity to build, even in the midst of devastation.