PRODUCTION CONCEPT PACKAGE

Prepared for the Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College and Department of Theatre and Dance production of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare adapted by David S. Thompson and Dudley Sanders

Performance dates
October 27 - 29 and November 3 – 5, 2000

Production Concept by Dudley Sanders and David S. Thompson

Directed by David S. Thompson

Scenic, Lighting, and Costume Design by Dudley Sanders

Prepared by David S. Thompson, Ph.D.
DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT/PRODUCTION IMAGERY

Background

During the last cycle of season selection the Blackfriars Playreading Committee decided to explore the idea of producing a Shakespearean play. Based upon some of the acting talent displayed in the previous season’s production of Antigone as well as early indications of success from the Acting III class in period acting styles, the notion seemed feasible. The overwhelming majority of men in Elizabethan casts remained the largest obstacle. Utilizing the notion of gender reversal as a possibility we set upon a task of finding a play with the largest male/female ratio that might also prove a suitable vehicle for our students after reversing the genders of the production.

Since a traditional production of The Tempest may include a cast of many men and a lone woman, it seemed like a possible option. The decision to reverse the genders means that certain concessions regarding images of molestation by Caliban toward Miranda may take place. Otherwise the production shifts the world of the play from one that concentrates on men to one that features women. While this may offer an opportunity for a feminist critique of male power structures, my sense is that it will show a world in which women have just as many options and opportunities, both positive and negative, as their male counterparts.

Adaptation

As we began preliminary discussion for the production, it became apparent that we would have to alter not only the casting of the play, but the language as well. We do not embark upon such a project lightly, whether the playwright Shakespeare or anyone else. However, for the necessary clarity of ideas, particularly when referring to unseen characters, it seems obvious that we must change gender specific terms and references. Whenever possible we will preserve the original intent of the language, tone, style and meter. For that reason, I do not wish to change the character names. When Vanessa Redgrave appeared in The Tempest at the Globe, she played Prospero, not Prospera, an opportunity we should extend to our students.

Another feature of the adaptation will serve to support the production imagery (see below). In order to assist in adding contemporary appeal, I am proposing that we cut all Elizabethan songs in the text as well as the wedding masque. In place of the songs I would insert twentieth century music—resort music, Hawaiian music, Beach Boys—and in place of the masque, I would streamline the effect to that of lighting and special effects, the only real magic of the play.

Imagery

As a reminder of the basic premise, we are dealing with a world of women. The actors are playing their own genders. Miranda is now a man and all other characters are women. This is not a drag show. I hope that a mother-son relationship, for example, will yield at least as much interest as the father-daughter pairing of the original.

An additional image concept that I propose to explore is the transporting of the action to a contemporary tropical paradise. Images of beach resorts and vacationers should serve to add visual immediacy. Any contemporary visual references—swim suits, sunglasses, beach chairs—should be explored.

One result of the two premises above is that it will naturally impact the production design, particularly in costuming. An image of beach residents in a resort visited by a wedding party will pervade the production.

Characterization/Concept

This script, like many well-written works, presents several possible interpretations. While many productions emphasize the darker elements of magic, revenge and slavery, I see a different set of possibilities. As I read the text, I see groups of characters thrust together to see what they might do under extreme circumstances. Given this experimentation, I see Prospero and Ariel as mischievous manipulators
rather than a master and slave. Each has something to gain from the other, and each knows that eventually they must part company. Any image of slavery comes from the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. The notion provides an analogy to the insidious nature of prejudice and the ways that those in power may unwittingly take advantage of their position. Prospero’s relationship with her son is similar to any modern parent and child. They love one another and will work to the best advantage of each, yet they often do not connect as in Act I, scene 2.

The group associated with Alonso has just returned from a wedding, therefore additional comic possibilities exist in approaching them as tired, frustrated bridesmaids. The difficulties with costume as well as the situation could produce interesting results.

The most traditionally comic grouping of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo should benefit from an image of the beach outcast leading the wedding servants. Thus the trio becomes a surfer dude or beach bum trying to win the good graces of a pair of waitresses or bartenders.

Additional images include the use of rain gear in the tempest scene and inflatable toys as dogs, monsters and spirits.
PRODUCTION IMAGERY

Setting

Among the most promising visual images to come out of research, the vision of a sand-covered beach is the most appealing. The prospect of creating a set using tons of sand should not be undertaken lightly. In addition to the beach, a porch or platform to create levels would add much interest. I would also like to explore the use of beach furniture as a base for Prospero’s cell.

Costume

Costumes should use the beach as a concept as much as a possible. There should be a marked distinction between “island people” and “off-island people.” Islanders could conceivably wear swimsuits or resort wear in colors of the sea—blue, aquamarine, etc. Others should have images of land, possibly with browns or greens. As indicated above, the wedding party should look like bridesmaids accompanying the mother of the bride. The servants should look like waitresses or bartenders. Caliban should look like someone not belonging easily to either world.

Lighting

The action takes place within the space of a single afternoon, so daylight is the basic cue. There should be a shift to darkness during the tempest itself. Additionally, the wedding ceremony should be marked by Prospero’s art, in this case an ability to change day into night and provide romantic lighting. Appropriate cues for scene changes are also encouraged.

Sound

The play in the interpretation is not naturalistic. Therefore, sound effects should suggest the elements of wind and thunder, not attempt to recreate them. In addition, underscoring with beach music for mood and comic effect should be explored.
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AGNES SCOTT BLACKFRIARS AUDITION MEN FOR “THE TEMPEST”

The Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College announce auditions for men for their forthcoming production of “The Tempest” by William Shakespeare. Auditions are scheduled for September 5 and 6 at 7:00 p.m. in the Winter Theatre in the Dana Fine Arts Building (corner of S. McDonough St. and E. Dougherty St.) on the Agnes Scott Campus. Callbacks will be held on September 7 at 7:00. This production will feature gender reversal, therefore the one available male role is Miranda. No specific appointment time is necessary. A monologue of 1-2 minutes is requested, but not mandatory. A stipend of $250-300 is available.

Performances are scheduled for October 27-29 and November 3-5. Rehearsals begin at 7:00p.m. and run Sunday through Thursday evenings during September and October. For more information please contact David Thompson at 404-471-6250.