



The SITI Co.

Left to right: Darron L. West, Neil Patel, James Schuette, and Mimi Jordan Sherin

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Most artists give their souls to a project. Anne Bogart's SITI Company design team—Neil Patel (sets), Mimi Jordan Sherin (lights), James Schuette (costumes), and Darron L. West (sound)—even go so far as to give their soles. "Anne and Neil were onstage during a tech in Louisville," recalls West, "and Neil kept saying, 'The color of the floor is wrong.' And Anne called to me and said, 'Darron, throw me your shoe.' So I took off my shoe at the tech table and threw it onto the stage. And Neil said, 'Oh right, that's the color. Can I take that shoe?' And I ended up running around for part of the day with only one shoe. It's just that kind of glorious, creative bakery that's always going on. I love walking into the room with those folks."

Founded nine years ago, SITI is an ensemble-based theatre company that began life as an agreement between Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki to establish a new venture in the US that would emphasize international cultural exchange and collaboration. The company most often creates new works from the ground up (*Cabin Pressure*, *BOB*, *Culture of Desire*, the current *War of the Worlds*—see page 42—and *ROOM*), but

will occasionally bring a new spin to the classics (*Miss Julie*, *The Adding Machine*, *Private Lives*). Because many of these works remain in repertoire for several years, traveling to different theatres across the world, each production is constantly evolving in look, tone, and content. Based in New York (with a summer home in Saratoga Springs), SITI is comprised of 10 actors, a production manager, stage manager, general manager, and the four aforementioned designers. Patel, Sherin, Schuette, and West have worked together as part of the SITI Company (and occasionally on other projects) for over five years now.

For Bogart, her design team's talent goes beyond their artistic ability. "All four of them share a talent that is vital in the creative process—they know how to listen," she notes. "To listen to what we're doing, and then to act on that listening. All of them are very strong articulate artists, but that comes not just from their own vision, but from listening to what is happening."

Another reason for the team's creative synergy, Bogart notes, is its ability to gracefully meld man and machine. "We're all interested in the very high tech and very low tech simultaneously," she explains, "meaning that the most important thing on the stage is the actor's body and the animal energy that comes off the stage. For example, we pretty much never have video, film, or moving scenery done by machine. But we do use the most advanced digital sound or lighting. So the emphasis is on theatre made by people with technology, but supported by both the

human body and the human imagination."

All the designers are quick to point out that it is Bogart who is the catalyst for all SITI projects. "Anne likes to say that she comes to us with a virus, and then it sweeps through the rest of the company to make the play," says West.

"It starts with the director, naturally," adds Sherin. "Anne is an amazing collaborator—even though I kind of hate to use that word—but she is an amazing, giving director. And she lets you do what you do. Then she turns around, says I like it, I hate it, you know, whatever. But it is very free to work under her."

Entertainment Design may be honoring these four designers for their sustained excellence in collaboration, but to be fair, it is a collaboration that includes the entire SITI group. "Part of the reason [the collaboration has been successful] is the consistency that we've had, working with the same director and same group of performers for a long time, so there is now a shorthand of understanding," explains Patel.

West agrees. "There is an aesthetic shorthand between all of us so that we find ourselves communicating more about what the play says and what the play should be than a lot of discussion about whether I can hang my speakers inside Mimi's lighting rig. A lot of that stuff is taken for granted. Sometimes Mimi and I will go through an entire tech and never really have to say anything to one another."

"We don't talk to each other very much," confirms Sherin. "That's a sign that a team is working, in my opinion."

David Johnson

Anne Bogart's
design team
perfects a
collaborative
shorthand



Both the color and composition of *War of the Worlds* paralleled Welles' 1941 *Citizen Kane*. Above, the performers sit at a long banquet table in their black-and-white-toned costumes, designed by James Schuetz. By play's end (right), a defeated Welles sits with Paley's frame upstage of him, surrounded by physical representations of his internal turmoil as the lights (5Ks on Mole Richardson stands) spotlight him.

and transfer them to the stage," he explains. "And I thought, let's go back and start with the radio play, which was something I knew from college. That informed a lot of the structure of the piece; the radio sequences in *War of the Worlds* came directly from our work on the radio play."

During the course of his research—

West says he saw *Citizen Kane* and *The Trial* at least 15 times each—the designer discovered that Welles—always known for his visual flair—was just as experimental with sound. "There's that story where a reporter asks him why he used this sound of a shrieking cockatoo coming out of nowhere, and Welles' response was simply, 'Just to wake 'em up,'" West

notes. "He was very, very attentive to sounds. There's an office scene in *Kane* with the specific sound of a clock ticking, which I latched onto for *War of the Worlds*, in the scene where Bernstein [Kane's managing editor in the movie, his friend in the play] is being interviewed. I

used that to give the audience a line to understand that this is happening now. But that's what Welles was all about, all those various layers: the shutting of a door, cutting out a piece of music. He used sound basically the same way I like to use it in the theatre."

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Jugglers, Specialty Performers	4:00pm

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