

ENTERTAINMENT DESIGN

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ED centerline Q&A

Darron L. West

Darron L. West is one of the busiest sound designers in New York—and one of the most creative. This spring alone, he's designed three new productions—The Misanthrope at CSC, The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told at New York Theatre Workshop and the Minetta Lane Theatre, and 2.5 Minute Ride for the Joseph Papp Public Theatre. He made his Broadway debut last season with his startling work on the revival of Wait Until Dark. Some of his most notable work has been done with director Anne Bogart and her company, Saratoga International Theatre Institute. These pieces integrate sound design in a way rarely seen elsewhere in the American theatre. West recently met with editorial director David Barbour to talk about his career.

David Barbour: We're here at CSC, where you've just designed *The Misanthrope*.

Darron West: Barry [Edelstein, the director] called me in to take care of Michael Torke, who's doing the music. It was an uncomplicated job, because I put the cabinets up a week before the lighting people got here.

DB: You don't normally get to do that, do you?

West: No, but Stephen Strawbridge [the production's lighting designer] dealt with it very well. I like to have a good relationship with my lighting designers. I like to get the light plot as soon as possible; then I start a dialogue with them about where the speaker positions need to be.

DB: We ran an article last August in which sound designers talked about their careers; a lot of them have tense relationships with lighting designers.

West: I read that article; it was like a really great therapy session. I thought, why doesn't somebody talk about working on the plays?

DB: Well, they feel disenfranchised.

West: Yes, yes, and part of me understands that, because everybody does their jobs very differently.

DB: How did you get into sound?

West: I was a broadcasting major at Western Kentucky University. There wasn't a sound department, so I did every show. By the time I graduated, I had designed, like, 45 shows. When I left, Steve Probus, the technical director there, got me my first real gig, at Williamstown Theatre Festival. That was in 1989.

DB: What was Williamstown like?

West: My first year there, I did every show, so there was no sleep—I was really cranking them out. I had a grand time—I was working with professional designers and directors. I thought, this is exactly what I want to do.

DB: You were resident sound designer at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

West: For three years.

DB: Where you met Anne Bogart.

West: During my first Humana Festival season, we did *Eye of the Hurricane*, the Eduardo Machado play. I didn't get to interact much with her in the rehearsal hall—not the way we do now. But when she came back, I made sure I could devote my time to her show. She helped out too,

because she called Jon [Jory, the artistic director] and said, 'I want Darron in the rehearsal from the first day.' We keep kidding each other that I'm the other side of her brain.

DB: How do you create the Anne Bogart/SITI shows? Does she come in and say, 'We're going to do a piece about Marshall MacLuhan or Andy Warhol?'

West: That's right.

DB: Does she have a text?

West: It's usually a lot of text, stuff that she's collected over a year or two.

DB: Where do you go from there?

West: We'll begin each day with viewpoints, which is music and movement training. She'll give us topics, just to find physical ideas for the show. Usually we'll have photographs of people's gestures or poses. She'll say, 'Incorporate the physical attitudes in these photographs while you're doing viewpoints today.' After 20 minutes of viewpoints, she usually has a definite idea of how to start. She'll say, 'I know Andy Warhol starts the play,' and then you go through seven different incarnations. Then she'll say to me, 'Have any ideas?'

That's how *The Medium* started. [Actor] Tom Nelis had a good idea to start the play. Using our research, we decided that *The Medium* would take place while Marshall MacLuhan was having a stroke. It was so ironic, because he couldn't speak after that, and this was a guy who was an unbelievable orator. So Tom came onstage and started doing his stuff, and Anne said, 'Go back and use that gesture from the photograph.' We looked at the photograph, and Tom practiced it a couple of times, then entered and did the gesture inside the speech. Then she said, 'Now move it to this word.' It's literally built that way—brick upon brick upon brick.

DB: How much time do you spend on a piece?

West: Six weeks, usually. Sometimes more, sometimes less. What's great is that when they're doing the text work, making the scenes of the play, the designers are in on it, too.

DB: So while you're watching rehearsals, you're planning your design.

West: I might be building it in the moment. There's such a fear of being wrong, especially if you're a sound designer, because you're competing with the actors' text. When I worked with Anne on [a revival of William Inge's] *Picnic*, I had these little-bitty speakers, and she kept saying 'Bring it up! I can't tell what you're thinking if I can't hear it!' Now, when we do a scene, I'll ask the actors to go back and try a different musical idea or entrance cue. Sound in the theatre scares a lot of directors, because it's powerful. It isn't like any other design principle; you have to address it like an actor.

DB: Not that many sound designers get to work this way.

West: I used to read a lot about Hans Peter Kuhn, Robert Wilson's sound designer. I envied the hell out of him. But then you have to make the effort to put yourself in the position to have it happen. When I came to New York, I wasn't interested in



Two or three things you may not know about Darron West: He spent a year working at Alabama Shakespeare Festival; he admires Ken Burns and would love to make a documentary about John Cage; his musical tastes range from Cage to the Afghan Whigs (with many stops in between).

assisting anybody. I wasn't interested in hooking up microphones. I waited until the jobs I was excited about came along. I'd work at The Gap before I'd do a play that didn't interest me.

DB: Is it less interesting to work on another director's productions, where your contribution might not be so central?

West: No, because if I can add something to the show that I feel is important, or that I don't initially see in the text, then I'll do it. *The Misanthrope* is a prime example. Michael Torke is doing the music, and this adaptation [by Martin Crimp] is amazing. It's a joy just to sit and watch Roger Rees and hang out with Michael. With every show, you've got a different perspective about what your job is.

DB: Last season you designed *Wait Until Dark*, which had extremely creative sound for a Broadway show. You and [lighting designer] Brian MacDevitt worked closely to heighten the tension with certain effects, like strobe flashes combined with unnerving camera-clicking sounds.

West: Brian and I had a great time; he's a fabulous collaborator. I'd been working on this photo flash idea. When I played it, he said, 'Oh, my God!' and set up some strobes. We ran back and forth between each other's tech tables, working on it.

DB: Was Leonard Foglia [the director] open to this kind of work?

West: In the beginning, I don't think he knew what to do with me. It was the first show in three years where I wasn't in the rehearsal hall with the actors the moment they started working. So I gave him my stuff on a cassette, which is a really old-fashioned way for me to work. When we got to Boston [for the tryout], I played him all these wild ideas, but he said, 'I don't know if we want to make that show yet.' Then one night, after a preview, he said, 'Go home and make that show.' I spent our first day off in Boston putting together all these metal-grinding samples and location recordings that I had done in New York. It was a good learning situation for both of us. He never really explored sound that way before.



DB: On the Anne Bogart shows, you work with the same group of designers.

West: Neil Patel, James Schuette, Mimi Jordan Sherin. Mimi stays away from the rehearsal process. She wants to be completely objective. She's counted on, by the designers, and the actors, too, to be the outside person. She's the one to come in and say, 'I'm not really getting this; explain it to me.'

DB: So she functions as a kind of dramaturg?

West: Good designers should function as dramaturgs. You're trying to tell the story, too—you're just using a different tool. The best designers can carry on a conversation with the director about the play, not about whether you should use a clarinet or not. If you're talking about the play, then the play will tell you musically what's it's supposed to be. If you're doing a Tennessee Williams play and you narrow yourself into a certain time frame because the costumes are supposed to be from the 1940s, I think you're limiting your ideas.

DB: Do you compose music or play instruments?

West: I play percussion. I have composed on occasion for shows, but I find I like dealing with what we already have. I like the idea of taking a really great Duke Ellington piece and putting it up against what's happening onstage—and then all of a sudden the piece of music means something different.

DB: What Anne Bogart shows are out right now?

West: We just got done with *Gertrude and Alice*, which is brand new. That's why I was in St. Louis. We had a house filled with people who are 'Steinites'—I guess that's what you call them—so they got every laugh. Then there's *Bob*, about Robert Wilson, which was at New York Theatre Workshop last fall; it just got back from Minneapolis and then we're going to Paris and Prague with it. Also, we're starting work on *Cabin Pressure*, for the Humana Festival. We're also supposed to do *Bob* in Amsterdam, but I'm not sure when.

DB: It must be fun to travel so much.

West: It's great. It makes you a better artist. You never get more in touch with who you are than when you're away from your own country. You know, there are effects that happen at the beginning of *Bob*, because the last time I was in Prague, I took a walk on Sunday morning when the bells were ringing and there were crowds of people. In every city I visit, I usually go for a walk with a recorder. I really love Prague; it's a fabulous town for art. **ED**



The SITI Co.

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

The
2000
EDDY
Awards

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 repertory 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

The
2000
EDDY
Awards

The client list at Tait Towers of Lititz, PA reads like a who's who of the music industry. From the Rolling Stones to U2, from Kiss to Reba McEntire, Tait Towers sets and stages can be found in the best touring productions out on the road. It is this sustained excellence in the field of concert set construction that has earned them a 2000 EDDY Award.

The firm, started by then lighting designer Michael Tait, began in 1978, when he was working for the band Yes. Tait, a pioneer in the concert lighting industry, devised one of the first self-contained lighting towers in the early 70s that were nicknamed Tait Towers. "The name stuck, and it seemed to be an appropriate name for the company as well," Tait says.

In the early days, Tait Towers was more focused on lighting, until the fateful day that Tait came upon the idea of using an in-the-round rotating stage. "If we played in the center, everyone in the audience would be closer, we could sell more seats, and everyone would see better," he says.

The Yes in-the-round rotating stage garnered

rave reviews, and soon the likes of Kenny Rogers and Barry Manilow came knocking on the door. "At the time, Tait Towers was still primarily a lighting company; no one thought of actually having a set-building company," Tait notes.

Tait Towers continued to grow slowly, and, in the mid-80s, added general manager James "Winky" Fairorth to the stable. At that point, the industry began moving toward expensive automated fixtures. That's when Tait struck up a deal with Nocturne to buy the firm's lighting equipment. "I finally realized that for all of these years, the sets had been subsidizing the lighting," Tait explains.

Tait, with almost 20 years on the road behind him, understood the finesse needed to create good, roadworthy stages and sets. "I figured out how to make dollies that went up a ramp safely, how you can forklift set carts easily, and all of those little tricks that other people still haven't learned," he confides.

Tait Towers moved out of its original facility in the early 90s, and now has 40,000 sq. ft. of space, which enables them to work on several shows simultaneously, as well as an adjacent 25,000-sq.-ft. facility for set storage and staging rentals. The main facility has an entire floor dedicated to painting backdrops and a completely mobile welding and machine shop with 37 full-

time employees who enjoy flexible scheduling.

The last year was a notable one for Tait Towers. The firm's handiwork can be seen in the movable B stage on the current 'N Sync tour, and they're out with Britney Spears as well. Working with scenic designer Mark Fisher, the company engineered the amazing movable arm found on the Tina Turner tour, as well as devised a new latching system for some of its scenic pieces. "The strength of the company lies in Michael being very hands-on," Fisher explains. "He's been on the road, so he knows that it's the little things that count, as well as what works and what doesn't."

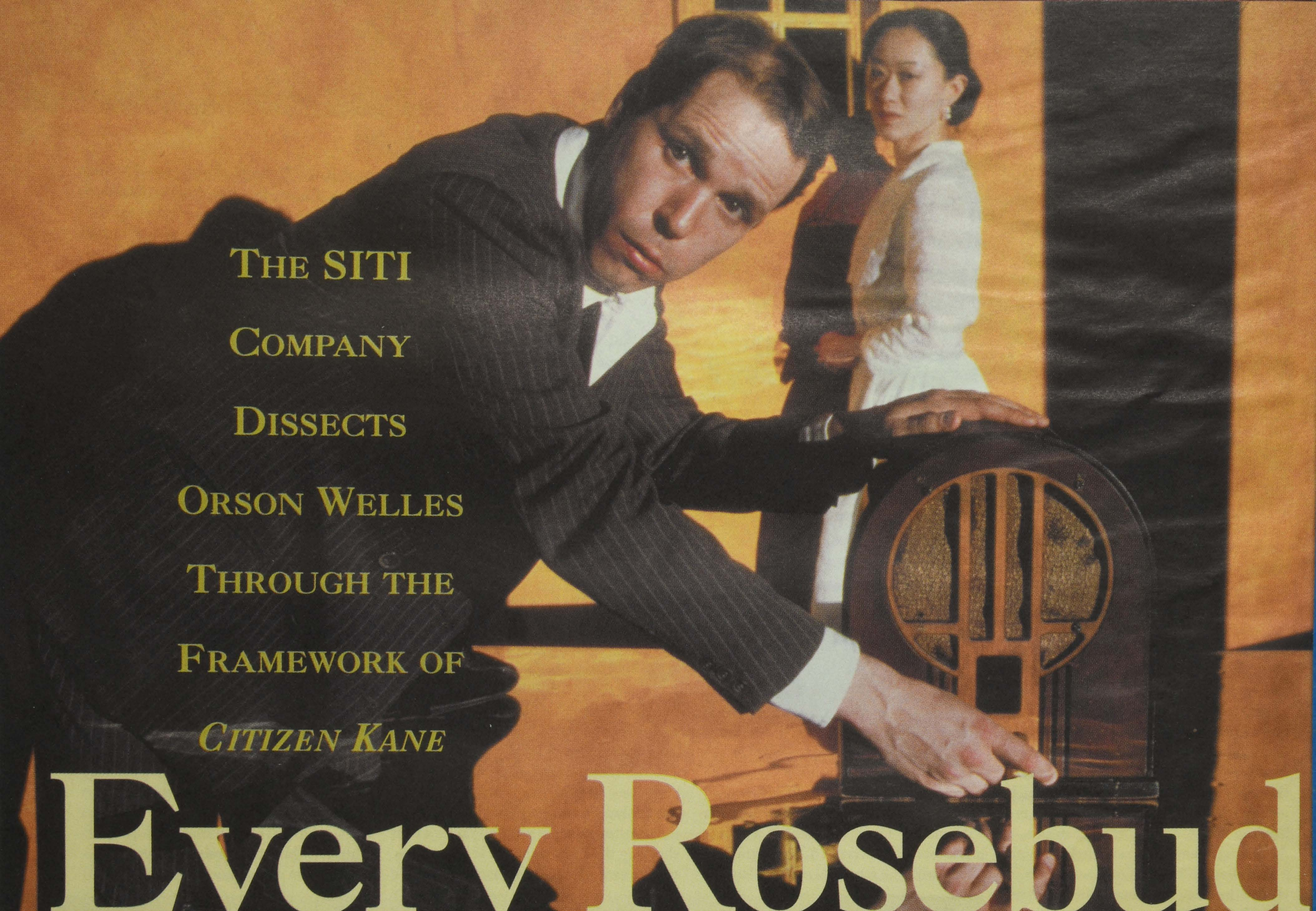
Tait Towers continues to be the leader in the industry, in part due to Tait's personal philosophies. "Our corporate plan is to build the best product possible," he asserts. "I'm involved in every single project and I look at every single piece that goes out of this building—the buck stops here because my name is on that piece." As Tait Towers looks toward the 21st century, Tait looks toward continuing the firm's tradition of excellence. "No matter what we did last week, when we do it this week, we're going to improve on it. We're looking to improve on every single thing that we do."

Sharon Stancavage

From Yes to
Britney Spears,
a career built
on concert sets
that rock

Front row, from left: Adam Davis, Kevin O'Grady, Michael Tait, James "Winky" Fairorth. Back row, from left: Russell Snively, Chris Vachon, Matt "Mearl" Weaver, John "Freddy" Frederick, Ken Knier, Tim Wagner, Jason Ickes, Randy Behm, Katharine "Kat" Retherford, Brandon "Dirtball" Woyurka, Mike "Balky" Long, Joel Fritz, Roxanne Glauner, Vincente Cocco. On stairs, first step: John Vanderwende, James "Lucky" Luckenbaugh, Pat McCloskey. Second step: Erik "Eekman" Eisenberger, Scott Brutout, Reid Grodski, Bill Peat. Third step: Jennifer Smith, Danny Witmyer, Mitch King. Fourth step: Lee Michael, Bill Teske. Top step: Richard "Mouse" Retherford, Bryan "B1" Wolf.





THE SITI
COMPANY
DISSECTS
ORSON WELLES
THROUGH THE
FRAMEWORK OF
CITIZEN KANE

Every Rosebud

BY JANE HOGAN & DAVID JOHNSON



The members of The SITI Company, known for their physical prowess and agile movements, stand in, climb on, hang off, and move around Neil Patel's rolling silver frame, which represents Welles' great canvas, the silver screen. Mimi Jordan Sherin's lighting illuminates the frame as it bounces off the metal, as well as theatrically representing the cinematic lighting angles for which Welles was known.

The *War of the Worlds* has nothing to do with Orson Welles' radio broadcast of the H. G. Wells classic; it's more a biography of the legendary artist, except that it isn't really a biography in the true sense, since so much of it is conjecture and speculation—in fact, it's really structured like Welles' film *Citizen Kane*, except that it's onstage, not on film, and it actually covers most of Welles' films, not just his first and most famous.

Are you still there? Those of you at all familiar with Anne Bogart's SITI Company should have no trouble following the thought process at work here. As with most projects by this highly inventive troupe (*Cabin Pressure*, *BOB*, *Culture of Desire*), *War of the Worlds* started as a question that occurred to Bogart, the company's artistic director: When did news become entertainment? She concluded that the answer was Welles' 1938 radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds*. That same thought process took her to the subject Welles himself, who by the end of his life was known more as a portly spokesman for Paul Masson wines than as a director of at least one of the greatest films ever made. Who was this person? Since Welles loved magic and was something of a stretcher of the truth all his life, the challenge to the SITI Company was to create a theatrical portrait of this elusive man that occasionally played as fast and loose with the facts as his thinly veiled portrait of William Randolph Hearst in *Citizen Kane*.

The company used that seminal film as the structure for *War of the Worlds*, as a journalist attempts to uncover "the secret" behind Welles' last word: Thorne. Thorne was the name of the room in which he spent time as a youth at the Art Institute of Chicago, according to this production, written by Naomi Iizuka; whether it was actually Welles' last word is as dubious as his use of "Rosebud" as Hearst/Kane's (especially since Hearst wasn't even dead at the time). For the SITI design team—set designer Neil Patel, lighting designer Mimi Jordan Sherin, sound designer Darron L. West, and costume designer James Schuette—it was the Welles oeuvre that served as the starting point for the project.

"It's all about the frame," says the Welles character early on in the production. He's referring, of course, to the rectangular frame of the silver screen, the space that served as a canvas for his work as a film director. For Patel, the idea of the frame became the central element for the spare design of the production. "In the first version of the set, there was a kind of literal Thorne room onstage, but it all got very complicated. In rehearsals it eventually came down to the idea of the frame, how we'd see different images through it," explains Patel. "And then it became about how to create a theatrical metaphor for the cinematic techniques that Welles talks about without imitating them literally, like how you would describe a zoom onstage, or his use of angle, or his famous use of light and shadow.

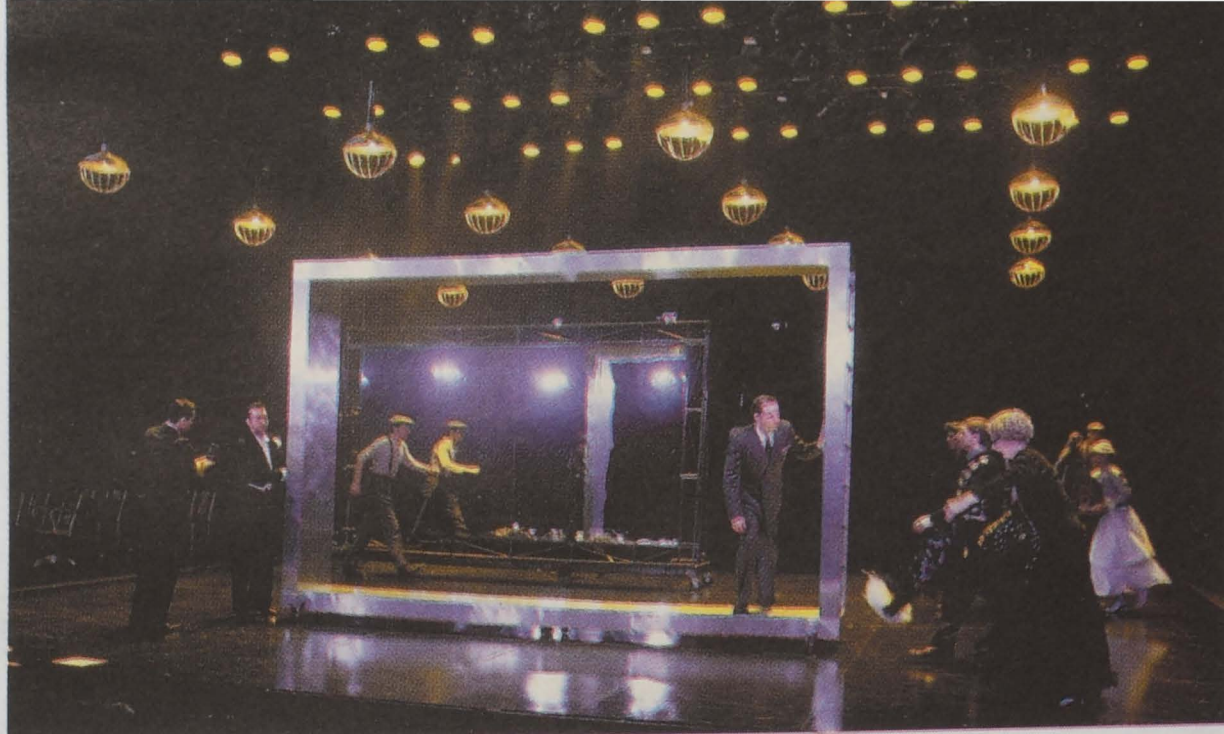
"So what we came up with was a silver frame with wheels that would track and spin onstage," he continues, "and you'd either see it as an object floating through space, or as an actual frame for a series of symbolic panels. The white screen, of course, is the screen, but it also serves as a mirror, to represent Welles the magician as well as the scene from *The Lady from Shanghai*. There is a room, which has a window and is very natural looking, which serves as both Welles' mother's room as well as the Thorne room. And then there is a hand, which is also the idea of the magician."

The size and movement of the frame varied throughout both the rehearsal process and the production's several incarnations (*War of the Worlds* had its world premiere at the Humana Theatre Festival in Louisville, KY, then was presented at the Edinburgh Theatre in Scotland, and BAM's Next Wave Festival in Brooklyn). "One version of the frame traveled all over the place, and we decided to limit it and put it on a track, so that it would always be centered but could spin," says Patel. "And then when we figured out what the movement and the choreography would be, we wanted one person to be able to spin it while having it stay on the center point and also track up and down, so that its movement was very fluid."

In addition to the frame and varying canvasses, the other main fixtures of the set are 5K lights on stands meant to represent film lights, which surround the stage at various moments in the production. "There's an image of Welles in his movie *F for Fake*, where he's wearing a cape in a forest," says Patel. "And we liked the idea of him being surrounded by a forest of these lights and cables as he walks out in the beginning and introduces himself."

SHADOW PLAY

Mimi Jordan Sherin says she used four rolling units (Ianiro 10" 5Ks on Mole Richardson film stands), which the actors also manipulate, "to make it as cinematic as possible—as close to Orson Welles as possible—in terms of angles and of light in his movies and in the frames." Budgetary concerns did not allow for the use of actual film lights, so Sherin made do with the 5Ks on film stands.



"It's my story," asserts the Welles character during his introduction, but he is not merely the piece's subject matter; he is also the designers' inspiration. This is particularly true for Sherin, whose lighting, with its clear and white tones, suggests the black-and-white world of the director's cinema. Yet the lighting is by no means colorless throughout. The LD suffuses the stage with a peculiarly unpleasant yellow at times and also accents the white with an elegant lavender.

The yellow, Sherin says, "was the nastiest yellow that I could come up with. It was a combination of two yellows to make it look sickly—and it was intentional—and to wipe the eye. It was a huge statement." Lee 010 (Medium Yellow) and Lee 100 (Spring 100) creates the purposely nauseating color. Yellow is also manipulated for gentler ends, serving to warm up the scenes set in Rio or, as Sherin puts it, "to literally get sun onstage."

She added lavender (Roscolux 355 Pale Violet) to the white light because "it makes white light elegant, especially when you are dealing with black." And then there was the play between the lighting and the metal frame. Says Sherin, "Lavender really makes metal zing." Sherin also commandeers Welles' love of shadow, particularly in the aforementioned magician scene in which shadows change in size with Welles dwarfing the other character and vice versa.

And for a man with an "octopus of an ego" (as one character exclaims), a Lycian 1275 Super Star 1.2kW HMI followspot zeroes in on Welles from the back of the house. Sherin also relied on what she deems "old-fashioned" beam projectors. "I keep saying I am going to retire if they were to stop making them," she says, adding that she relies on their tendency to "focus badly" and to "make beautiful floor patterns." The rest of the equipment is essentially ETC Source Fours for crosslight, PAR-64s, and ARRI Studio Babys, the latter for diagonal frontlight. Sherin placed MR-16 footlights on trunions in front of the stage.

As part of the design, Sherin hung a series of industrial-looking practicals covered with metal cages that featured clear 150W bulbs. As much a part of the scenery as the lighting, these perfectly positioned rows of lights create a symmetry that reveal Sherin's attempt "to unify the space." She notes that "Neil [Patel] added the cages to make them look unusual"—a word that perhaps best sums up both Welles' and the SITI Company's idiosyncratic styles.

JH

BLACK IS THE NEW BLACK

Welles may have been a complex person, but you could say the SITI Company took a black-and-white approach to this enigmatic figure, at least costumewise. Designer James Schuette, too, took Welles' groundbreaking 1941 film as the model for his designs. He notes, "It [*Citizen Kane*] is a black-and-white film, and since we are using the structure of *Citizen Kane* to tell the story of Welles' life, it was very informative. We wanted to parallel it in certain ways, so we decided to make the clothes in a similar color palette of blacks and whites and grays and silvers and pretty much keep color out of it."

Seven actors portray multiple characters, and, as Schuette points out, though based on a person or persons in Welles' life, characters are often more representative or iconographic than anything else: the lover, the mother, the producer, the friend. The period of *Kane* is reflected in the style of clothing Schuette chose, essentially late 30s and early 40s. The one exception is the white, re-embroidered lawn cotton dress worn by the actress who represents Welles' mother, which evokes an earlier era (the teens). The long dress has an open neck, wide collar, and double-tiered skirt.

For the Leni Zadorov character, a composite of Marlene Dietrich, Marion Davies (William Randolph Hearst's mistress on whom the *Citizen Kane* character Susan Alexander was based), and Rita Hayworth (Welles' wife for a time), Schuette designed a long, black, bias-cut Devore velvet evening gown.

"And then," Schuette laughs, "it was just a lot of men's suits," which is an oversimplification, since the suits range from day to evening wear and even include a carnival man's costume, complete with striped jacket and boater. Welles, whom Schuette says tended to be nattily attired, is dressed in a light gray pin-striped double-breasted suit with a white shirt.

Then there is the character of Stephen Webber, the fictional best friend, based in part on veteran actor John Houseman, who, along with Welles, founded the Mercury Theatre. As if all this wasn't confusing enough, the best friend character is named after the actor portraying Welles (keep in mind that this is a concept piece). But back to the costumes—and even here you get a sense that the SITI Company does not demand an exact rationale as to why a character wears what he or she does. He wears a white tie and



ACTORS THEATRE OF LOUISVILLE/RICHARD C. TRIGG

With performers taking on multiple roles, small costume changes, such as the addition of feather headpieces and a striped carnival barker jacket (above) suggest other characters. LD Mimi Jordan Sherin added rows of hanging practicals to "unify" the space (above right). The instruments' cages, which covered clear bulbs, were set designer Neil Patel's idea.

tails because "there was just something about him," explains Schuette. "It was the first thing that came to me, that he should be in a tie and tails." All of the men's costumes were built by New York City sartor Mr. Tony, except for the white tuxedo, which is vintage 1930s.

As the show is heavily movement-based, the two aspects that most concerned Schuette were flexibility and endurance: "When you design clothes for the SITI Company, you have to be prepared for them to stand on their heads and roll around the floor," he says.

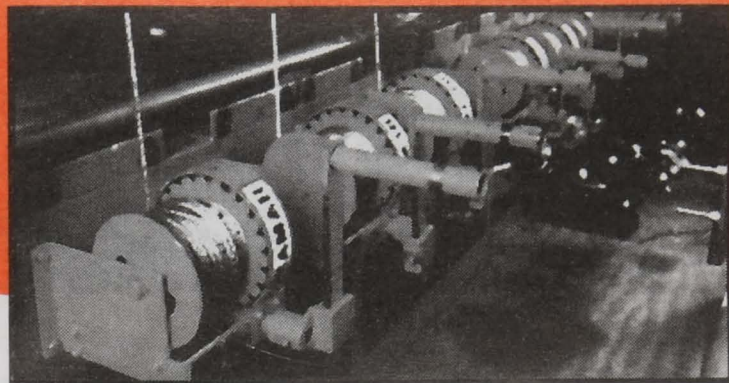
In designing for a show that has played in more than one location, Schuette aimed for consistency for the sake of the actors. He says, "The actors become used to having certain pieces of clothing, so you kind of have to have a similar structure when you redo it. One little glove means a lot to them."

There was one important difference between the production at BAM and the one in Louisville: no "fat suit" for Welles, who grew rather stout over the years. Initially, the actor playing Welles would put on a large, black padded coat and a fedora with a built-in beard; but the decision was made to cut it from the show, in large part due to the fact that director and designer both thought it more interesting if the actor created transformations without a costume. Says Schuette, "We realized that we just didn't need it." The costume designer adds that his job is made extremely easy by the company members, "They all have wonderful bodies and they wear clothes extremely well."

JH

BROADCAST QUALITY

For Darron West, the initial inspiration for the sound design came, appropriately enough, from the *War of the Worlds* broadcast of 1938. He and Bogart had worked on a presentation of the radio play at the West Bank Cafe early on in the process of bringing the SITI project to life. "What we were trying to attack in this thing is how to take cinematic ideas



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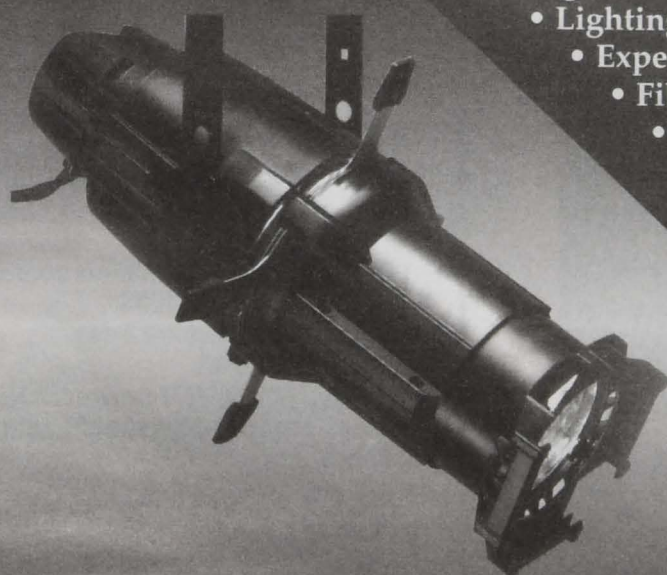
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Both the color and composition of *War of the Worlds* parallel Welles' 1941 *Citizen Kane*. Above, the performers sit at a long banquet table in their black-and-white-toned costumes, designed by James Schuette. By play's end (right), a defeated Welles sits, with Patel'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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Welles often speaks directly to the audience; he even introduces the piece at the beginning. So does a film scholar, who discusses Welles' triumphs and tragedies in Hollywood. In order to delineate between the film and theatrical worlds, West miked the "film" actors but not the "stage" actors. The designer's biggest challenge was reconciling the heavily cinematic and radio scenes with the quiet theatrical moments. "I would have a huge radio sequence with all these sound effects—typewriters going, bells ringing, music, and actors speaking into microphones—at 85dB, finishing it all with a dial tone, and then the next thing you hear is a dry actor's voice. I was always dealing with getting the fully designed sections of the show to correlate with the sections that were just silent."

West used Marshall Electronics MXL2001 large diaphragm cardioid microphones on the film actors, "which for the money sound amazing," he notes. "I'd called a buddy at Full Compass, looking for some large diaphragm mics. Now, in an ideal world, I'd have three U87s up there, but we're a small company and there are other places to spend your budget dollar. So the guy at Full Compass recommended these to me, and I love them." The rest of West's spare rig features his stock equipment, including an Ensoniq ASR10 sampler workstation with a 100meg Zip drive, a Mackie 1402 console, Klark-Teknik signal processing, Denon 900 series cart mini-disk players, and EAW speakers. Other equipment used in the BAM production included a range of QSC amps, a Crest GTX 32-channel console, and Sennheiser wireless mics. "It's a tiny rig," he says. "I'm kind of old-fashioned when it comes to my playback systems. I'm not into a lot of multichannel stuff anymore. I think we all got swept up in our toys in such a big way that we kind of forget about the act of making a play. As I've gotten older, I'm not interested in panning a train around a room anymore. Go to the movies if you want to see that."

West may have a relatively small bud-

get for the SITI projects, but he is still no doubt the envy of his peers for the way in which sound is incorporated very early in the overall design process. Because of West's involvement with the *War of the Worlds* radio play last October, his involvement began even earlier, essentially from the project's inception. "What I usually end up doing is correlating notes and sounds with dramaturgy and style," he says. "Then I fill up with as much stuff as I possibly can on paper and do a pool of music and a pool of effects that I will

not deviate from. I went into this show with about 300 to 400 music samples and sound effects already loaded in. And I restrict myself to that. So I can't run away during the process and get a great piece of music for a radio sequence we thought of that day. I need to find something with the palette that I pulled to make it work, and sometimes ideas will come out of that I didn't expect. We like to call it following the Ouija board." A perfect turn of phrase for a subject like Orson Welles and a project like *War of the Worlds*.

Scenery construction for *War of the Worlds* was by Actors Theatre of Louisville Scene Shop and The Production Studio. Costume construction was by Donna Langman Costumes, Mr. Tony, Harwood Lee, Margaret Fenske, and Actors Theatre of Louisville Costume Shop. Audio for the BAM production was provided by Full Compass. Light for BAM was mostly in-house. *War of the Worlds* is tentatively scheduled to be performed in St. Louis in the spring.

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