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SCENE DESIGN

OF

A CHORUS LINE

By

NAOKO SKALA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

MANKATO, MINNESOTA

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ABSTRACT

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This document is a detailed account of Naoko Skala's design process for *A Chorus Line* by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre from Minnesota State University, Mankato. These documents trace the design process from the designer's preproduction analysis, historical and critical analysis and post production analysis of the effort. Included also is the designer's journal which documents the process chronologically from its inception through its realization. Finally, the designer has provided an analysis of her overall artistic development as it has been influenced by her education and personal experiences throughout her career and culminating with the impact on her process as it related to her tenure in the Department of Theatre and Dance at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Appendices and Works Cited are included as well.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter contains the early production analysis for the scene design of *A Chorus Line*, a musical play conceived and originally directed and choreographed by Michael Bennett, book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante in 1975. The production will be performed in the Ted Paul Theatre at Minnesota State University, Mankato from October 4-7 and 10-14, 2012. Paul Finocchiaro, faculty member, will direct the production. Lighting design will be by third year M.F.A. candidate Jordan Green; costume design by third year M.F.A. candidate Angela Sahli; and sound design by faculty member George Grubb. Technical direction will be provided by second year M.F.A. candidate Joel Schiebout, and junior B.F.A. candidate Alisa Bowman will serve as production stage manager.

In this chapter, the scene designer will provide a brief overview of the musical, followed by an identification of the various elements required of the scene design as found within the script. Following that, she will discuss her ideas and goals for the setting of this play.

A Chorus Line is set in a chorus dancers' audition of a 1970s New York Broadway musical theatre. In this setting, the director, Zach, wants to have four girls and four boys for his show. He asks the dancers to tell their personal stories

because he says “it would be better if I knew something about you – about your personalities. I just want to hear you talk and be yourselves” (Kirkwood 15). He wants to know what is not on their resumes and this idea makes everyone confused, but is more interesting than a normal audition. For instance, when Diana tries to tell him which show she was in and her physical description, Zach stops and asks her why she started dancing and why she kept dancing. Diana gets confused and asks Zach “I’ll act, I’ll perform. But I can’t just talk. Please, I’m too nervous” (Kirkwood 15). Everyone else feels the same way, but they slowly start telling their personal stories because they want to be in the show.

When Zach talks with Cassie, with whom he had a relationship before she auditioned and came back to audition again, he tells her how she is too good for a chorus. Cassie tells him that she recognizes that she cannot act after several years of trying and she also realized dance is the only thing she can believe in. She says, “There is nothing left for me to do. So I’m putting myself on the line. I don’t want to wait on tables. And what I really don’t want to do is teach other people how to do what I should be doing myself” (Kirkwood 54).

Cassie’s passion for dance is the true voice of the other dancers. It gives the audience a deep understanding about why dancers want to dance and why they keep dancing.

However, Zach is still wondering why Cassie left him and came back because he mixes his private and work relationships. When Cassie says that she wants to start her dance career over, Zach reacts with what that means for

them. Cassie says every dancer in the audition is special and she is happy to be a dancer. In the finale, everyone shows up with show costumes and the audience notices they create one big moment together.

The play was written about the reality of theatre and show business. Theatre has an on-stage side that is what audience members can see, and an off-stage side that no one usually sees. Audiences tend to forget people on stage have real lives outside of the theatre. However, *A Chorus Line* focused on performers off-stage and the details of the story makes audiences understand the performers' feelings and real life.

The strength of the play is in describing the details of each characters life. They have strong personalities and stories about why they started dance or how they want to be dancers. For instance, when Paul talks about his story, he does not sing and he is on stage by himself. That monologue expresses his deeper emotions and catches the audience's hearts and makes them feel sympathy for him because his story is so realistic. That is why when Paul falls down, audiences have a strong emotional attachment with him and the song "What I did for love" has a strong connection with the characters.

A weakness of the play is the difference of the scene when Zach eliminates people for his show at the end of the play and finale. It needs to happen to show the reality of theatre, but audiences could get confused and disappointed. At the final scene, characters come out with performing costumes

and sing and dance together. That scene helps us to understand the big picture that theatre tries to make, but it is hard to accept and understand from the script.

The script says that minimum scenic requirements are a white line, black background and mirrors, and some kind of special scenery for the finale. In the Broadway production, they followed what the script said. When this designer saw the revival show in New York, she was disappointed with the scenery. During big numbers such as “Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love”, she strongly felt that the scene design missed some background because it did not have any emotional reflection on the stage except for the lights. From this scene designer’s standpoint, that was not enough to express each character’s personality. Most of the songs need to have some reflection of their colorful and bright emotions and characteristics. The designer started thinking about how to get a colorful background and changing moods from scene to scene with a minimum of scenery.

The scene designer started to research her inspiration from art movements in the 1970s to get an idea of the mood; what people saw and liked in the time when the script was written. The designer was strongly inspired by Minimalism, Superrealism, and Pop Art. Those three movements helped her to build the idea of each design element making one big shape, creating an illusion of reality from non-real elements and colorful backgrounds for some scenes.

After that research, the scene designer remembered that Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lights can change colors without changing gels, and she thought this

would be a good element to help her creative process. She wanted to use light boxes for her design to change the scenery easily. The scene designer also remembered that periaktoi, which are tall triangular boxes that rotate from scene to scene, might be a good solution. They were also what the original Broadway production used. She started to think how to use periaktoi for her idea and combine them with other scenery requirements from the script.

In the first concept meeting, Finocchiaro asked for minimum scenery, namely, the mirror scene, black void, and the finale scene. He also said he would be open to other ideas. That helped the designer bring up several new ideas.

The scene designer asked lighting designer, Jordan Green, about general information of what the possibility was of using LED lights in light boxes and installing them in periaktoi before she started the actual design process. His response was positive and that made the designer move on her ideas.

The biggest goal of the scene designer in this show is to tell the audiences what real theatre is about and why people do theatre. That is why making visual effects for some of the different atmosphere between the finale scene and other scenes is important. The differences show the real life of the theatre. Audiences usually see only performances but no one cares about each chorus dancer's life behind the stage. However, after audiences see the musical's audition process and each characters' personal life, they may understand the theatre is made by unique individuals, and can create one big moment of their life to share.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The research and historical inspirations for the designer will be discussed in this chapter. It will also examine the playwright's background, their time frame and place, as it influences the further body of their work.

Researching how the script for the original production of *A Chorus Line* was created is important. Natalie Schmitt, who is the author of Actors and Onlookers, said, "In January 1974 Michael Bennett met with 18 Broadway chorus dancers. He asked them to talk about Broadway and their lives and he recorded that. Much of the material for *A Chorus Line* was then composed from the tapes" (78). *A Chorus Line* was based on real stories and that is why each monologue sounds realistic. If the stories had not been made from real stories, they may not have affected audiences' hearts as well.

After Bennett recorded that tape, "Bennett recruited Marvin Hamlisch to write the music, Edward Kleban to write the lyrics, and playwright James Kirkwood to work with Nicholas Dante on the book. The stunningly received 1975 triumph would achieve, in its day, the longest running record of any musical. One touring company lasted seven years" (Lewis 127). The show was a big hit, and has been seen by many people in the world. People wanted to know about the performers' real lives and voices. It was also attractive to audiences

because they had similarities with people's personal lives. That made them understand the performers more deeply. This interesting process and reality in the play is the key to its success.

The time frame also helped to make the show a success. Frank Rich the theater critic noted, "*A Chorus Line* was the first Broadway musical to deal matter-of-factly with homosexuality, and from an inside point-of-view that makes its gay men seem far more accessible than the martyrs and oddballs that typified stage homosexuals in mainstream American drama of the post-*Boys in the Band*, pre-AIDS era" (Varner). The record run of *A Chorus Line* and the fact that the show was the first Broadway musical which created the performers honest expression about their reality explained that people were ready to accept watching that reality on Broadway.

From her research, the scene designer became interested in how the production team and performers collaborated for the original production. Schmitt mentioned "The writers, composer, and choreographers thus developed the work slowly through a process of interaction with the dancers and their stories" (78). That sounded new to this scene designer and she wondered how that process was productive or frustrating. Schmitt also said "Freedom from time constraints expands the range of possibilities. It allows the collaborators to follow their fantasies, to interact with their materials, to make mistakes, and in general, to try things they could not try were they intent only on immediate success" (78-79). It seemed like a positive process. Theatre production team members usually work

with limited time and sometimes it limits creativity. If they have unlimited time, and collaborate with talented people, that makes the production member feel free from the stress of time concerns.

Nicholas Dante and James Kirkwood are co-authors of *A Chorus Line*. Their lives are also reflected in the script. Dante had a dancing career as a female impersonator (this revelation became part of the “Paul monologue”), even including his decision to change his name from a Puerto Rican to an Italian one for the stage. Bennett wanted Dante’s story, but not him as a writer because he was not a demonstrated writer. Bennett could not get the script without Dante. Bennett was fortunate that Dante could actually write. (Kelly 126)

The character, Paul’s monologue is the only scene that does not have songs or a dance with it. That made people focus on what the character’s story was. Dante’s personal story is one of the core parts of *A Chorus Line* and is why it should have some isolation from the others.

Bennett contacted Kirkwood because they had worked together before and thought he would be interested in writing *A Chorus Line* because he used to be a performer. “By Kirkwood’s forties he was exclusively gay. His public stance on homosexuality was confused to say the least. He frequently exhibited terror at the prospect of being ‘outed’ but at the same time insisted on planting clues to his sexuality in his work via gay supporting characters” (Egan). Kirkwood was not involved in the script like Dante, but his writing skills and how to collaborate

with Dante was significant to the play. If Kirkwood had not helped write, the show would not have had the impact on the audiences' hearts as well as it did.

The designer was curious about how the show would affect audience members who had never been involved in the theatre industry. "Whether the ending of *A Chorus Line* is happy or pathetic depends on the interpretation of audience members, their participation in the work" (Schmitt 84). The scene designer was disappointed with that quotation because it sounded like it was hard to make people understand the theatre industry. However, Schmitt also says "In a backstage musical, the performer and role are made obviously close. As a result, the relationship between performer and audience is also more immediate. The play does not require the willing suspension of disbelief that the audience, the actors, and the theatre are not there; instead these elements are called to our attention and come to seem related to the text" (83). Each characters' story was realistic and it causes audiences to feel sympathy with others' lives. These ideas explained why *A Chorus Line* was accepted by many people and that it was a big hit.

Bennett offered the scene design to Robin Wagner. Wagner is one of the finest minimalist designers in the theatre. "There is never anything superfluous or gratuitous in his work, and his deceptively simple set for *A Chorus Line*- a white line on the floor and a mirrored back wall-is highly praised by fellow designers as one of the best designs of the contemporary theatre. Wagner's scenery has been described as dancing scenery. It moves and segues smoothly

from moment to moment. (Prince 154, 161-162) Wagner's scenery strongly supported Bennett's direction. Bennett wanted to have realistic but minimal scenery, and he also wanted to have a surprise moment. The movement from moment to moment needed to be as smooth as possible because that surprises the audience.

Schmitt also described the original production, "The set consists of eight tall three-sided structures (Periaktoi) on one side of which were lightweight mylar mirrors. The space-age mirrors, which can be rotated so as not to be seen, together with the lighting, make the show essentially minimalist high tech" (82). This is a great approach from this scene designer's perspective. She was inspired by this information to create something with a minimal setting, but it has enough elements to support the expression of characters or the realism of the situation.

Wagner said "*A Chorus Line* began with a lot of scenery, including a staircase for the grand finale and even toboggans. All that was really necessary were black velour, a stage and a back wall of mirrors 'because it was about ballet classes, the studio space and the finale. Over the two years, we culled and distilled until we finally got down to the basics" (Prince 162). This working process is an excellent example of scene design. Good designers bring big ideas to the productions but are also flexible to adjust their ideas to collaborate.

This scene designer has been inspired by Bennett's passion for the show, and his interesting way of collaborating with other production team members.

Wagner's scene design also encouraged this designer to create something minimal yet surprising in its realization.

CHAPTER III

JOURNAL

Middle of March, 2012

When I saw the revival version of *A Chorus Line* on Broadway, it touched deep feelings of why I am glad to work in theatre. The voices were realistic and there was an expression of real sadness and joy in working for the theatre. I am not a performer, but I felt deep empathy for the characters who felt passion for doing theatre. Since I watched that performance, *A Chorus Line* became one of my favorite musical shows. I have listened to the soundtrack many times and have even memorized some of the music.

When I heard the official announcement that our theatre department would be producing *A Chorus Line*, and that it would be directed by Paul Finocchiaro, I immediately decided that I wanted to design the show. I was not sure I am ready to do it, but I felt a strong passion in my heart. I have seen Finocchiaro's directing several times before and I have worked with him as a prop master on other shows. I loved his directing, especially of his musical pieces.

Once I officially became the scene designer for the show, I started thinking about how I could create something better than the Broadway show. I understood that the show should have minimal scenery but I was disappointed with how limited the revival production was. The differences between the

audition scenes and the finale were not strong enough to change the atmosphere and I did not get excited. When I see something exciting, I get goose bumps and it is a good measurement for me, but I did not get that from the scenery of *A Chorus Line*. I also was disappointed with the scenery in the big musical numbers. I wanted to see some kind of reflection as a scenery piece of those important songs. I was not sure how to make it better, but I started thinking, anyway.

Beginning of April

The music and songs are already familiar to me but I have never read the script. When I read it, each character's story attracted me more than before, especially Paul's long monologue. I cried after finishing the monologue because I did not remember the Broadway production's details until then. Paul's monologue was so real and alive. After reading the script, I felt like I was listening to a friend's story. That is why I had a good feeling for this musical, especially of the finale, which involved all who were in the audition coming back on the stage, singing and dancing together. Every character is a part of the play. Zach and Cassie are leading the characters but the story is not about them alone.

April 10

We had the first concept meeting today. I was excited to hear what Finocchiaro's idea was. He wanted to set the time as multiple styles during

1975, when the script was written. Finocchiaro told us everyone wanted to be in the show at the time, and he wants the audience to cry. When Finocchiaro started talking about specific scenery requirements, I felt nervous because I was not sure how much I could negotiate with him about my ideas. He told me to put the orchestra pit down and build a four feet extension platform, with a white line, white painted numbers every two feet, and three scene changes which consist of mirrors, blacks, and a finale. He is open to using periaktoi or a flying system. He also said that some extra mirrors need to move with music. All settings should be realistic, except the mirror scenes because they should be projections of a dream.

After he said what he wanted for other designs, I asked him “do you want to have more than 3 sets of scenery and he said “3 sets are minimum and a necessary thing, and if you want to have more than three, that is fine”. At the end of the meeting, he said “ I am a director, but not a dictator. Please bring ideas”. It released me from my nervousness of negotiation with him. That is why I asked Finocchiaro about the possibility of moving the orchestra to behind the scenery and he said that if Nick Wayne, the music director, was okay with that, he did not care about where the orchestra members were.

April 11-14

I started researching art movements of the early 1970s. It was a good starting point to know what people liked and what people created at the time. I

wanted to get some inspiration from that. Minimalism, Superrealism, and Pop Art were striking to my eyes. I thought the feeling of these three movements were fitting to the play.

April 15

I am designing two other shows, which are *Avenue Q* and *God of Carnage* for summer theatre, at the same time and my brain works busy, but my ideas were bouncing like a ball on the walls. Sometimes it helps to get ideas from different plays. For instance, when I was thinking about puppets for *Avenue Q*, which needed colorful color scheme for the set and puppets, it reminds me of pop art. The colorfulness of *Avenue Q* made me think of how to bring that same sense to *A Chorus Line*'s characters into a minimal setting. I remembered that LED lights are able to change colors without changing gels. I wanted to use that flexibility for scene changes. I started thinking about a combination of light boxes with LED light and some kind of flying object in front of the light boxes.

April 16-19

I talked to Jordan Green, the lighting designer for *A Chorus Line*, about the possibility of using LED lights in a closed box. His response was very positive and it pushed me to pursue my idea. I started sketching roughly in scale and with colored pencils. It did not seem as a professional approach, but it is the easiest way to show my ideas to others.

April 20

I showed my research of the art and style in the time to my production team members and explained what inspired me and why. After that, I showed my sketches and explained what I wanted it to look like. Everyone liked my ideas and we started discussing what was doable and what was not. For instance, my first idea of periaktois was three or four feet wide and twelve feet tall, and ten of them on stage. However, it would not be realistic to stand well and spin. The size also cannot make a good reflection of lights inside of the Periaktoi. These are understandable reasons to change my ideas and I enjoyed this moment of collaboration. We decided to shrink the size from twelve feet high to ten feet high, and each lighting box would be square shaped.

April 21-May 2

I drew the ground plan, front elevation, section view, and detail drawing, with the only exception of some details on the placement of light bulbs on the scenery piece for the finale. These drawings gave other production team members some ideas. I wished that I had more time to draw and think about details. However, I knew I could make it happen with the production team. At the final meeting before summer break, we had a great discussion with my ground plan and other drawings. We made sure of the placement of scenery and what we need to do by next meeting. After the meeting, I immediately fixed something we discussed in the meeting involved placement of mirrors and the

orchestra members' position, and I sent them away to other production team members. I felt relieved of pressure and stress.

August 22

I brought a rough draft of the props list and we discussed it. Finocchiaro knows that the props for the show will be easy for me to figure out after working with me during the summer on other shows. I realized that I should finish the drawing of the light bulb placement with Vectorworks, which is a computer-drafting software, and figure out what kind of detail painting should be on the scrim for the false proscenium.

August 23-28

I started researching what details of old Broadway theatre proscenium arches look like. Most of them use Victorian style and décor, so I researched Victorian architecture and details. I showed some sketches of pattern on the scrim to my advisor, John Paul, and we picked a simple Victorian pattern. I started thinking of using a stencil for the pattern. It is nice to plan how to paint early in the process.

August 29

Fall semester began two days ago and they had auditions for *A Chorus Line*. We had a production meeting today and discussed the props and checked

the progress. We cannot start working on *A Chorus Line* in the scene shop because they need to work on changing the seat configuration in another theatre. I feel like that always happens and I hope it does not affect our schedule. I also feel nervous because Joel Schiebout, Technical Director, has less experience building periaktoi with lighting fixtures which seems complicated to build more than normal periaktoi. I usually need more time for projects if I have never done something before. That is why I started asking Schiebout about what his plan is, to make sure he orders the materials which I will need for painting. He says he did not order anything yet, and he needs to talk to his advisor about making sure he buys the right materials. His plan is to build each element at the same time, but I told him my priority is to build the false proscenium arch so that it fits with my painting schedule. He replied positively, and he promised to start building the arch first.

August 30-September 4

The scene shop started building the set. I am checking the process and am helping with the painting. It is not a heavy painting show, but I knew that if I help supervise the painting, it will make the process smooth and quick. For instance, painting the inside and outside of the false proscenium arch is a simple job, but we need to do it before Green installs all the light bulbs. If we do not paint it before, it will take more time.

September 5

We had a production meeting today. We discussed some props and the construction's progress. I asked Finocchiaro about his preference for scenery order for rehearsal purposes. He wants to have the mirrors with casters first. We also discussed what the sign should look like and I explained that I was thinking of using rope light to make the shape of the letters. I have asked Schiebout about materials we need to order, and he said he has not ordered yet. He was still not sure which materials are the right ones to use, and he kept saying he is going to ask his advisor today. I was disappointed at that, but it is his learning process, so I told him why I need the material as soon as possible and why it is important to have them early. He promised to order as soon as possible.

September 6-9

A faculty member, George Grubb asked me how I would paint the scrim. I had painted scrim before but not for any productions, and it is understandable why he worried about an unusual surface to paint. I built a sample and painted it. It helped me to prepare for how exactly I will paint this production. Schiebout told me that the fabric is coming next week. It is later than I expected, but I cannot change it. I started thinking about what I can do before it comes. I was thinking that I might paint the inside of the Periaktois. Finocchiaro suddenly came to the scene shop and asked me what I think about not using Marley on the floor. I immediately said "it is great for me" because I can adjust the shininess of the

floor. Green and I had a conversation about preference of the painted floor instead of Marley floor because we both like to have a shiny floor. Later I came in to the theatre and finished painting the inside of the periaktoi and painted numbers on the floor. It was simple stuff, but it took a while. I wish I could finish it when I have more help, but it is not matching the shop schedule. We had a designer's run-through on Sunday for Act I. It was nice to see what the show looks like and to make sure what props I need to work on.

September 10-16

Schiebout and the scene shop workers were working on the periaktoi, sign and false proscenium arch. We discussed how to make the sign, and rope light does not appear to be the best way to create what I wanted. The rope light cannot make a crisp shape and if the shape of letters are not clean, it will not be what I hoped for. The sign is significant for the finale and the font should be noticeable. I have asked Finocchiaro, and he wants to see white and gold on the sign. I started making a sample this week and decided to paint a white outline and the inside will be gold paint with gold glitter.

At the end of this week, we got the scrim. The scene shop workers installed it, at the same time they were still working on the inside of the periaktoi. Unfortunately I saw several people working on cleaning the scene shop instead of working on the periaktoi and I was concerned to see that. I asked Schiebout to explain the situation. He answered that we did not have people who are

available to work inside of the periaktoi because of the limited size, but he remembered that some people were working in a different space, and he called them back. It was nice to see him solve the problem that quickly.

This weekend, I finished most of the painting for the false proscenium arch, but it does not seem like relief. I thought I needed a second opinion for this, so I decided to wait to talk with Paul. I realized that if I start working on something I am not familiar with, I could fix it later and create something I can be satisfied with. That is why I feel nervous that we do not have the Mylar for the mirrors yet. I kept asking Schiebout, but I did not want him to feel pressure or stress either. I was not sure how to approach him. I wanted to discuss why we need to start work on something that is a new technology earlier than usual, but that is my philosophy and I did not want to force him to do it my way.

September 17-23

Schiebout told me one or two periaktoi are not straight and it is impossible to fix or redo it, so he asked me if we could move all the periaktoi and make bigger spaces between them. He said that would help to hide the non-straight periaktoi. However, I worried that would also destroy the illusion of the periaktoi. I was not pleased with that, but I was thinking about what the most important thing for the show was at this point. It was turning the periaktoi smoothly and making it look fine. Even though it is not the best, I should accept his suggestion.

After he moved the periaktoi, it looked okay from the house. I hope it works well with the stage lights.

Schiebout and the shop workers started working on the moving mirrors, but they are hard to stretch smoothly. Schiebout decided to buy a different material for the periaktoi. We have only two weeks until opening, and it makes me nervous. However, Schiebout looks more nervous and stressed, so I decided to support him as much as possible instead of complaining. I started working with whatever I can do for the construction of scenery.

This weekend, I was painting the false proscenium arch and floor. Paul suggested darkening the shadow of the relief painting and I think it is good advice. Painting the floor is easy, but using thick floor wax was not easy as I thought. It does not spread well, so it takes two times longer than it usually would. I should consider the schedule next time.

September 24-30

The scene shop workers started installing the muslin on the periaktoi this week. When I first saw it, two students were working on it, and it had some weird wrinkles. I questioned why people who did not know how to use that material, were doing it without better supervision. I needed to redo the stretching of the muslin and I hope it does not happen in the future.

We received new Mylar for the periaktoi mirrors on Thursday, and we are not sure how to stretch it well with a heat-gun. I and another graduate student,

Robb Krueger figured out how to stretch it, but it takes much more time and the show opens in less than a week. We are pressured for time, but I kept telling myself I can make it happen like I have done in the past.

After the first technical rehearsal, Finocchiaro told me he is not sure he wants to use the light box side of the periaktoi at the finale. It is because of the gap between a scenery with lights which is flying in front of the periaktoi, and the center of the periaktoi. We decided to see what the black side of the periaktoi would look like with the bow lighting at the second technical rehearsal.

When the periaktoi are turning, they sometimes hit each other. Ali Bowman, stage manager, promised to practice with the crew, and that made me feel more comfortable working with her.

After we saw the second technical rehearsal, I was not satisfied with using the black side of the periaktoi for the finale because I was not as excited as the last time. I told Finocchiaro my honest feelings and he agreed with me, so we decided to use the light box side of the periaktoi and fix the bow light's placement on Monday.

October 1-4

I tried to stretch out the Mylar as much as possible right before the show opened. I also did not want to give up stretching the moving mirrors because we have enough materials and I saw three of them looked good. It all turned out fine,

but not perfect. I wish we could have started working on it earlier, but I need to accept the reality of the situation.

October 6

We had a Kennedy Center American College Festival respondent today. She asked us many questions about process and why I chose the approach. It was nice to talk about why I chose to use light boxes in the periaktoi and how I got inspired with my ideas, to the respondent. Her response was positive and I was happy to hear it.

October 14

The show closed today and strike followed. It went smoothly and was organized well. I was working for props with two actors in the show and I heard some interesting conversation from them. They said they could not sing *What I Did For Love* well because they got emotional about the song. It proved how the show is realistic and affects any generation. I had some regret for what could have been done better, but it turned out well. I appreciated everyone who worked on the show, and especially the production team members.

CHAPTER IV

POST PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter will discuss the designer's creative process and the final product of *A Chorus Line* from her point of view. The chapter will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of her early analysis of the play and how it affected her actual work. After that, the designer will conclude how this experience will affect the process of her future work.

In the designer's early production analysis, she discussed that the play is about the reality of the theatre industry. From her research, creating a realistic setting was the right choice to do in the actual production. All vignettes of the characters are from real stories and if the setting is not realistic, it does not support the story. However, the singing and dancing and the finale should not be realistic because it should express the character's mind and needs to be in a dream-like environment. That is why one of the big challenges for the designer was how to make a smooth transition between scenes. When performers have dialogue, the stage is supposed to be realistic, which would be a bare stage with a black background. On the other hand, when they sing and dance, it needs to change the atmosphere because it is their artistic expression and is like a daydream. The finale also needs to have a different setting than the others. It is supposed to express what their ideal performing space would be. The designer

had good emotional attachments with the characters' personal stories and she deeply understood the reality of the theatre industry from her script analysis. That pushed her to create a colorful background and flexible setting, which changes the scenery for different scenes.

The idea of using LED lighting fixtures inside of the periaktoi as light boxes is one of the strongest design elements. Making differences between each character's stories with minimal settings was a key to the show and it would have been hard to do without the collaboration of Jordan Green, lighting designer, and the LED lights. Green's helpful attitude and excitement for doing difficult lighting with scenery encouraged this designer. Her interests in lighting were also a helpful tool for her design. She has been curious about how to use flexible LED lights for her scenery as background or any other way since she learned about what the LED light is. The difficulty of the transitions made the designer reach the idea of using LED lights in the periaktoi. The designer realized that sometimes, being in difficult situations leads to good ideas.

The designer also discussed in her earlier pre-production analysis her biggest goal of telling the audience what real theatre is and why people do theatre. Making visual differences between dialogue, songs, and the finale was an effective way to show the audiences what the theatre industry is like. The designer also tried to create special moments in the finale with some specific scenic elements, such as a half arch shape with lights flying in, lighting the false proscenium behind the scrim, and the "A Chorus Line" sign. This was because

the designer wanted the audience to see the spectacle and illusion of theatre because that is a major reason why people see shows. Even though it was only five minutes, people remember the brightness of the show later because of the finale being more of a spectacle than other scenes.

During the creation process, the designer had accepted some of the realities of the production. For instance, her first idea for the periaktoi was using ten of them and each being three feet wide and twelve feet tall. She wanted to fill the space as much as possible. However, that would not have worked well and would be hard to create the lighting effect inside. She understood, responded positively and changed her design. The scene designer's job is supporting the production to tell the story. She should not design for her satisfaction. It was a successful discussion with other production team members and ultimately also supported her design.

Sometimes the designer needed to decide something important quickly during the construction process. When Joel Schiebout, technical director, asked the designer to decide to move the periaktoi to make the space even between them, she chose what was the best decision for the production. The designer's ideal look was that each periaktois' gaps were as close as possible to make the illusion of all surfaces looking like one big piece, at each scene. However, the designer understood how much time Schiebout had and it was not realistic to say "redo it". Schiebout also gave the designer the option that if she does not like it he will figure it out. After he moved the periaktoi, it was not the designer's ideal

position, but it was better than showing uneven angles and having the periaktoi hitting each other. That process taught the designer that sometimes she should let go and decide what the highest priority for the production was.

The designer also learned better ways of supervising. When she saw that two undergraduate students were stretching muslin, and saw some wrinkles, she realized she would need to redo it. Stretching muslin is not easy if the person has never done it before. She learned that the best supervising system is, the supervisor should work on it with a person who needs supervision. Letting people do things is important but only with the supervisor working with them. If they have not done it before people learn from seeing how a supervisor works. Sometimes it is hard when the scene shop does not have enough supervision but that needs to change because it causes much reworking of scenic pieces.

Most of the time the designer had a great working relationship with Schiebout. However, sometimes she had a hard time sharing her philosophy of ideal craftsmanship. Her philosophy of craft is that if the person is not familiar with something, she or he should start working on it earlier than usual. It gives extra time to figure out and create something well. The designer knew the periaktoi and using Mylar was unfamiliar for those involved in building this show, and she wanted to have it as soon as possible. That is why she repeatedly asked Schiebout when it would be coming and why it was needed as soon as possible. However, she did not encourage him strongly enough to order early and she did not tell him her ideal situation for a craft person. However, that

caused Schiebout to not order some materials until close to the technical rehearsal. It made the designer nervous and she was not sure how much she could force him without causing him pressure. The designer should have talked to Schiebout about what her ideal situation would be to make the due date clearer. It seems like stepping in someone else's business, but in the case of working with somebody who has different priorities, the designer should do it professionally.

All production team members were always positive and creative, and it was a great opportunity to work with them. Paul Finocchiaro, the director, was the most positive director this designer has worked with and fun to work with as well. He also did choreography for the show and all his blocking for the show was smoothly choreographed and outstanding. When the designer saw the stage with all the dancers and scenery as a picture, the composition and balance were perfectly matched. It created realistic and dreamy environments at the same time.

In the future, the designer will need to remember her past challenges and use them as a source or as guidelines to find the best way to success. The designer should not be shy to talk about her philosophy to people who work with her. And if the designer realizes a lack of supervision that might cause rebuilding, she should step in and help supervise. The designer also should have helped support Schiebout before he became stressed from the pressures of

the show. If the designer acted earlier, she and Schiebout would not have had to redo as many things.

CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

This chapter will discuss the designer's progress as a designer and her development as a creative artist. It will investigate her artistic process and her contributions to the collaborative effort of making a theatrical production. The designer's goals will be evaluated and she will address her engagement in what she brings to the creative process.

When the designer was a child, she loved reading novels; especially if it explained specific places the characters are in: old houses, imaginary towns, etc. She imagined the space, smell, and temperature as if she was actually in the place. She was passionate about reading books and imagining places.

Several years later, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Japanese Literature from Sagami Women's University in Japan. She had only found her passion at this point in reading novels and analyzing or writing about them, so she wanted to be a librarian or an editor of Japanese novels or magazines. However, Japanese economics and politics at the time did not contribute to getting any kind of job.

The designer gave up on getting her dream job and started to be interested in going to a foreign country and changing herself. She started to study English and save money to go to the United States. A study abroad

company had a good connection with several universities, and one of the schools was Emporia State University (ESU), Kansas. The director of the international student office came to Tokyo, and this designer had a chance to have an interview with him. She was suitably impressed, and decided to go there.

During the first year in the U.S., the designer was not sure what she wanted to study there. She wanted to study English because she liked reading novels, but her English skills were not good enough to be a major. Before she came to the U.S., her study abroad advisor suggested she consider being a theatre major.

The designer was not sure what a theatre major does and she was not interested in studying theatre until she saw a production of *Noises Off* at ESU. The big scene shift change during the short intermission made her excited and curious about how it happened. After watching the show, she decided to study theatre.

Learning theatre in ESU was a joy for the designer because everything was new to her and she especially found a passionate feeling for scene painting. The faculty members encouraged her creativity and they gave her many opportunities to work for the theatre. When she was in her last year of ESU, she had a chance to design *It's A Wonderful Life Radio Play* as a scene designer. It was a simple setting with one big painted back drop and some furniture, but she enjoyed the creative process as a designer.

That experience changed her thinking about career options. Before the design experience, she was looking for a school for only scenic art, but she decided to apply to some schools for scene design, including Minnesota State University, Mankato.

When the designer was at ESU, she was not confident about making three-dimensional models and she did not have much interest in doing that. Her strongest skill was expressing her imagination or ideas in two dimensional ways. However, when she took the Scene Design I class at Minnesota State Mankato, she realized that it does not have to be perfect. It is more important to use it as a communication tool with the director and other production team members than making it great as a piece of beautiful artwork.

The designer did not have a chance to learn computer drafting at ESU. She enjoyed drawing by hand and she felt comfortable in producing her ideas or visual imagination from the play, by hand, but she also wanted to learn something new. When she came to Minnesota State Mankato, and designed *Altar Boyz*, she did her drafting by hand. It took longer to revise the drafting, than if she had used computer drafting. Other production team members, who use computer drafting, needed to do their drafting from her hand drafting. It worked fine, but when she was redrawing something, people were waiting for her longer than if she had done computer drafting. When she started to learn how to use the computer drafting software, Vectorworks, in the Drafting for Theatre class, she struggled with the software for the first couple of weeks. However, she found

enjoyment in learning something new and seeing how much she could do with the Vectorworks program. Therefore, she decided to use Vectorworks for her future designs. The drafting became simpler and less personalized than the designer's hand drafting, but it was easy to edit and to share with other production team members by email.

The designer has learned how to paint as quickly as possible from Scene Painting class. In the Scene Painting class, John Paul, the faculty member, gave the designer advanced assignments. It was more complicated than others and she had a short time to finish each assignment. It developed her painting speed.

This designer's graduate assistantship job was also helpful for the designer's skill development. Her main assistantship job was organizing and cleaning the paint and props areas, inventorying paint, and managing the renting of props to community. Sometimes Paul, department scene designer, or some student scene designers and prop masters needed extra help for productions. When this designer helped them, she learned how to teach and supervise people. The designer also increased her communication skills with other scene designers as a scene painter.

The designer had good experience painting with people who work in the Minnesota State Mankato scene shop. They were not specialized in scenic art but they worked well, beyond the designer's expectation. It was because the designer had a chance to work with several people in different productions.

Knowing or helping someone's development in painting skills requires experience.

Taking other design classes, such as lighting, costume, and sound, gave the designer different understandings for theatre. These classes helped her to create collaborative art forms. For instance, when the designer was learning about lighting design, she realized that scenic color valuations on the stage gives options of color choice to the lighting designer.

When she was taking costume design class, she learned about the unity of color schemes with characters. Considering the color balance with character relationships is important as a scene designer. When the scene designer needs to make a character's house or room, it can be important. This designer learned the best way to collaborate with costume designers is discussing what the costume designer's color scheme is with characters.

In the sound design class, she learned how to create atmosphere without visual elements. Tempo, rhythm, musical instrumentals and melody affect the atmosphere of the production. That also relates deeply with the direction. If the direction of the production is realistic, the sound designer needs to create sound effects carefully.

Other classes, such as Theatre History I and II, Theory and Criticism, Theatre Management, and Dramaturgy, provided the designer with ways to analyze theatre logically and academically. For instance, these classes gave her much historical background and techniques for research. Theatre Management

class showed what the theatre business does and what producers do for the theatres. The presentation assignments were useful for the designer because she has learned how to present for audiences' understanding and keep people's attention with power point.

The designer chose to take Graphic Design I from the Art Department as an elective class and she learned a different aspects of design. She has been interested in poster design for the theatre, and she got curious about how to use different mediums for her design. The designer discovered some posters do not connect with the actual production. The poster needs to tell the story with the director's concept instead of explaining what the production will look like. She recently took Introduction to Digital Media from the Art Department and she learned basic skills for Graphic Design. Her curiosity for graphic design increased more than before because she noticed some skills she has gotten as a scene designer are useful to graphic design. This designer wants to use graphic design with projection for her scenery in the future.

In conclusion, attending Minnesota State Mankato provided the designer with an opportunity to increase her model building skills, computer drafting skill, communication skills, and supervisory skills. It was nice to prove those skills in the realized work with educational back up. There are several things the designer needs to improve from her previous experience on her next design, and she still has much room to grow.

APPENDIX A

SKETCHES

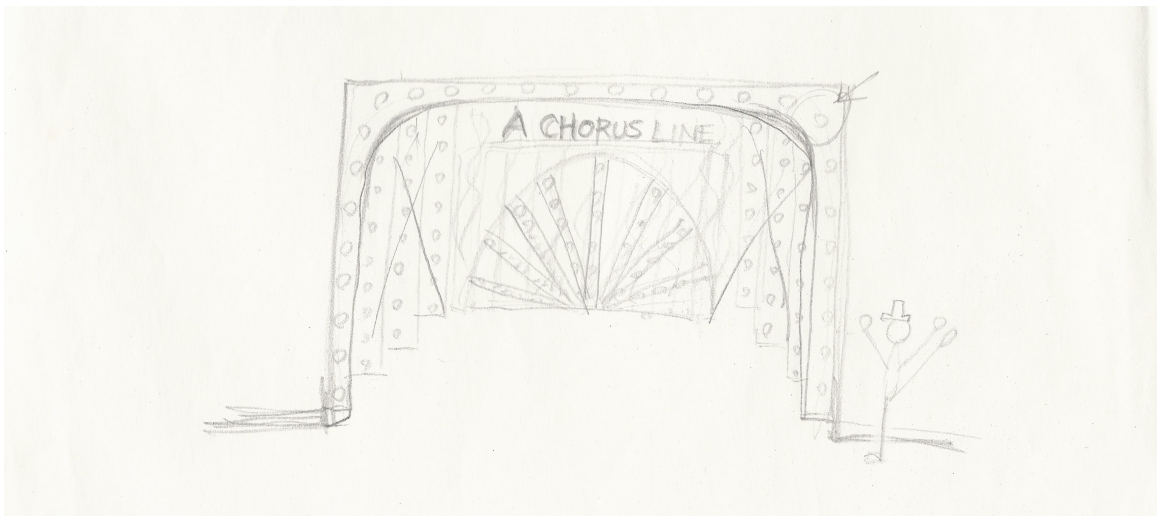


Figure 1. Sketch for finale scene



Figure 2. Sketch for mirror scene

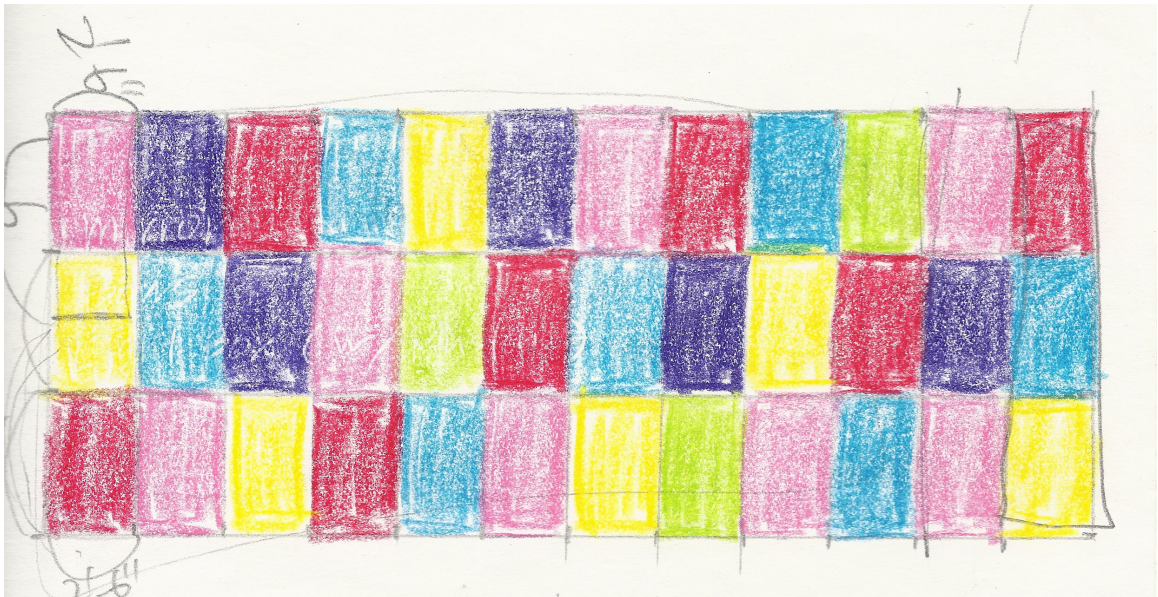


Figure 3. Sketch for light box

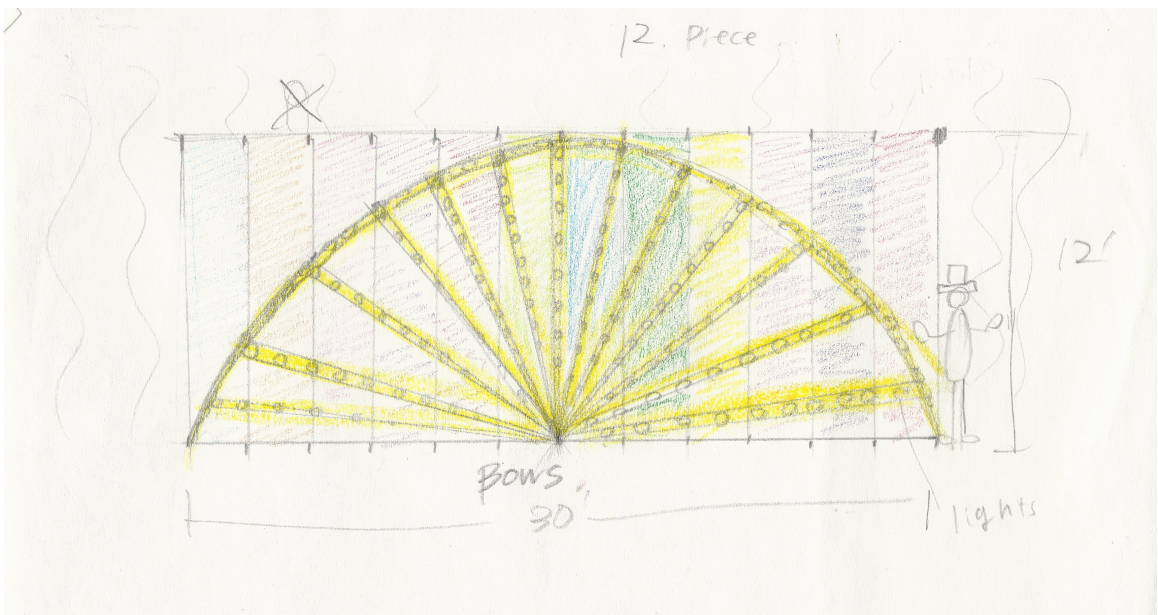


Figure 4. Sketch for bow lights with light box

APPENDIX B

GROUND PLAN

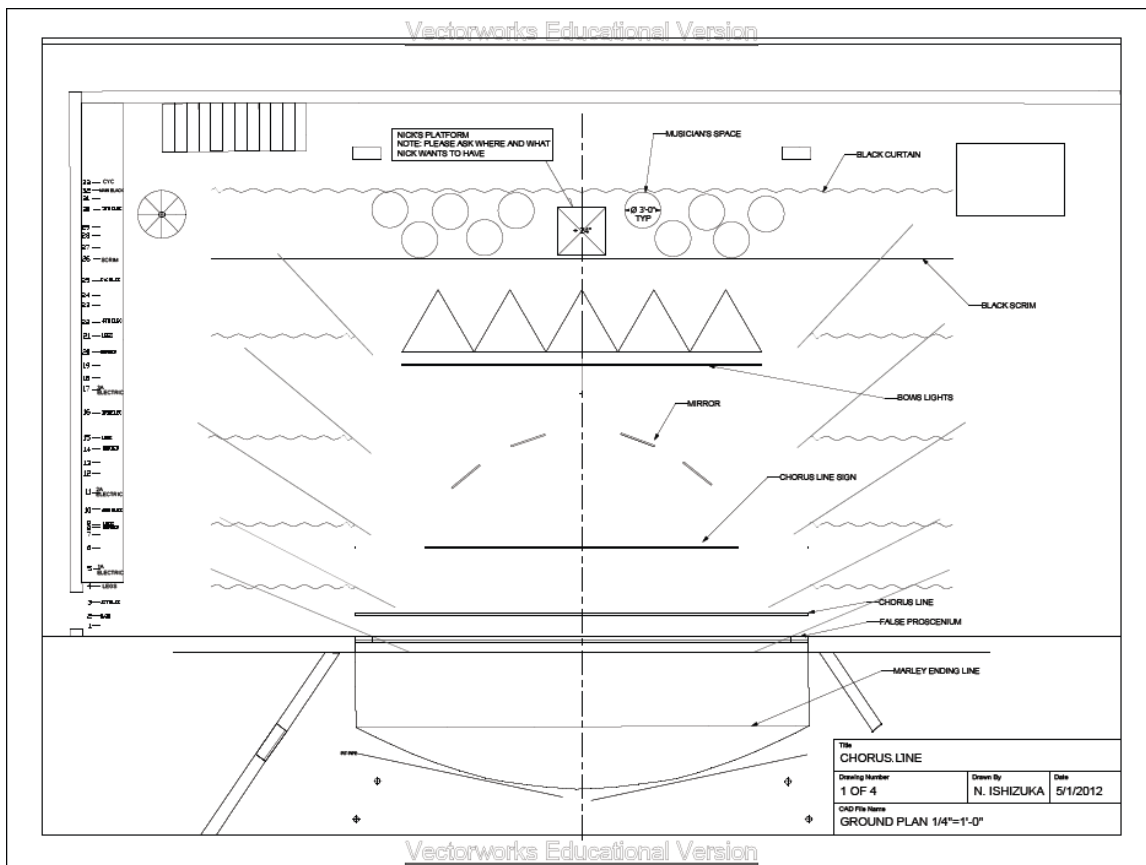


Figure 5. Ground plan

APPENDIX C

FRONT ELEVATIONS

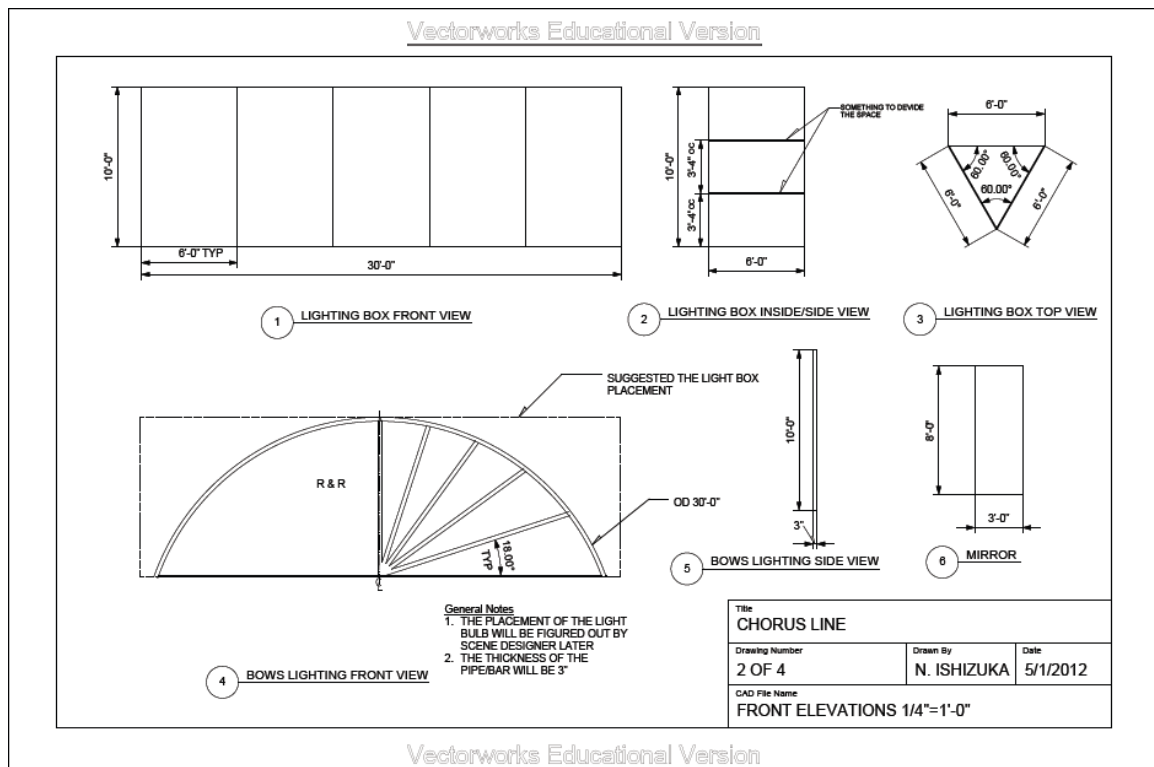


Figure 6. Front Elevation of Periaktoi and Bows Lighting

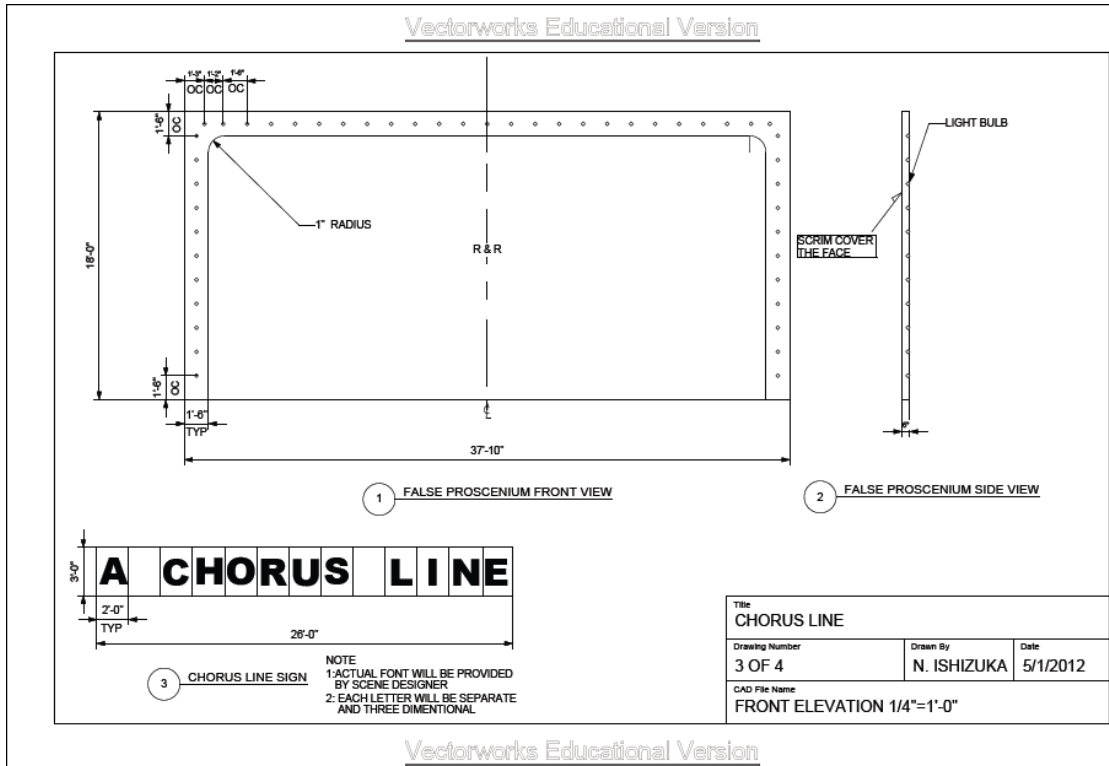


Figure 7. Front Elevation of False Proscenium and Sign

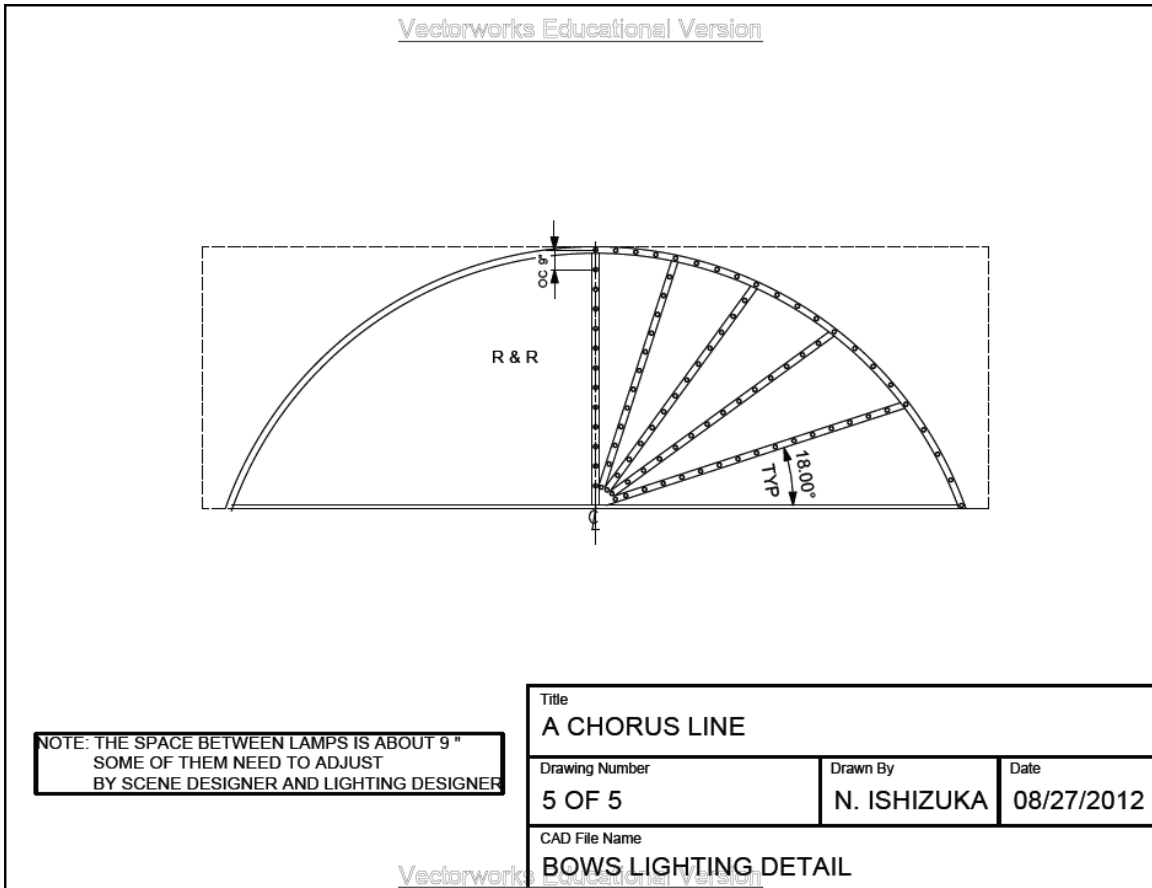


Figure 8. Front Elevation of Bow Lighting Detail

APPENDIX D

SECTION DRAWING

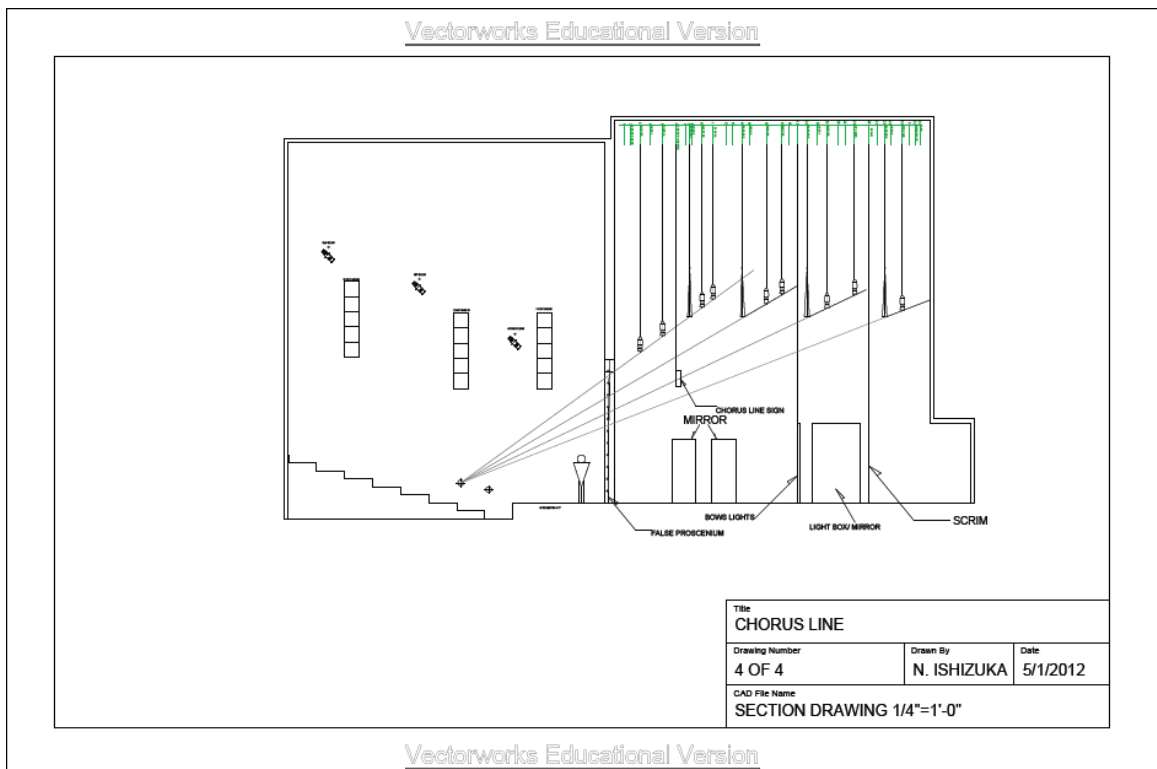


Figure 9. Section Drawing

APPENDIX E

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 10. False Proscenium



Figure 11. False Proscenium Details



Figure 12. False Proscenium detail



Figure 13. False Proscenium Detail



Figure 14. Actors with the chorus line



Figure 15. Dance studio scene



Figure 16. Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love



Figure 17. Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love



Figure 18. Mirror Scene

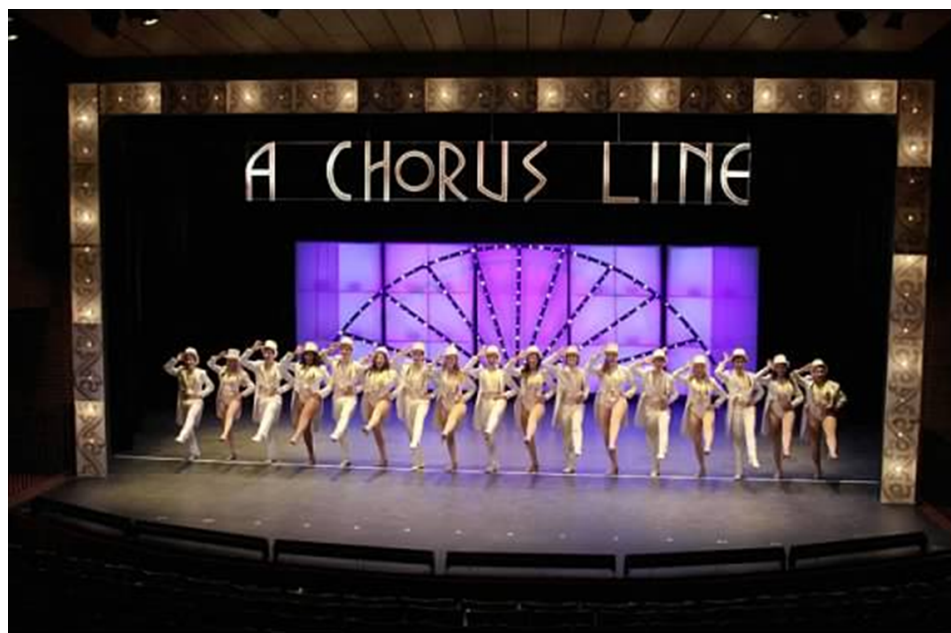


Figure 19. Finale

APPENDIX F

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APPENDIX G

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