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PORTRAYING THE ROLE OF GIUSEPPE ZANGARA IN SONDHEIM'S *ASSASSINS*

by

Casey B. Paradies  
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May  
2012

This thesis, submitted by Casey Paradies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Chairperson: Emily Cherry MFA

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Kathleen McLennan PHD

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Ali Angelone MFA

This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Dr. Wayne Swisher: Dean

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April 25, 2012

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Department Theatre Arts

Degree Master of Arts

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would never have come to fruition had it not been for the careful guidance of Professor Emily Cherry. Thank you for your work and patience not only with this thesis but also in directing this production of *Assassins*. Most of all thank you for giving me the “shot” at playing Giuseppe Zangara. Also a big thanks to Kristen Borysewicz whose unending help with the research made this daunting work less terrifying. Thanks also to my committee members Dr. Kathleen McLennan and Ali Angelone for your guidance.

To Giuseppe Zangara,  
Thank you for your story.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a look at the process an actor goes through in creating a fictional character based on a historical person. It is not intended to be a guide for other actors but instead a look at the work of one particular actor in portraying Giuseppe Zangara in Sondheim and Weidman's *Assassins*. This thesis consists of historical research, character and script analysis, as well as a personal reflection of the performance.



## CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL RESEARCH

It has been said, by many musical theatre professionals and creators, that the musical is an American convention of entertainment. Although many of its roots can be traced to opera and European forms of theatre, the musical can be directly traced to American forms of theatre such as vaudeville, burlesque, minstrel shows, and the follies of Florenz Ziegfeld (*Broadway: The American Musical*). This being stated it would seem odd that the American musical convention would be adopted to tell the stories of people who have been seen as conducting themselves in an un-American way. The acts committed by these non-fictional American people show the dark underbelly of the American dream as their quest for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ended in acts of violence and treason. Yet that is what can be found in Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's musical *Assassins*.

In creating a character for the stage it is imperative that one has a complete knowledge of the character as written by the playwright, or in the case of a musical the composer, lyricist and librettist. When the character happens to be based on a historical person a new challenge is presented. This challenge is to get a thorough knowledge for the person in a historical context and synthesize the person with the character the authors' have created. These two perspectives must complement each other as the historical informs the fictional. It is also important that the historical does not eclipse the character and, therefore, pull the character out of the imaginary circumstances that have been written.

This thesis will analyze Giuseppe Zangara, a man who tried to kill President Elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933. The purpose of this analysis is to create the character of Giuseppe Zangara based on historical information, as well as analysis of the libretto in order to then perform the character in a production of the musical. This thesis will also include a reflection of the process and the resulting performance.

This first chapter will focus on Zangara's early historical life, the events that took place during his assassination attempt of Franklin Delano Roosevelt on May 15, 1933, along with the aftermath that included his trial and execution. It will also look at the history of the musical *Assassins*, from Charles Gilbert's first attempt to musicalize the stories of America's presidential assassins to Sondheim and Weidman's more popular success with reworking Gilbert's musical into one of their own. This chapter will function as a fact sheet of the historical person Giuseppe Zangara was, based on academic research, as well as a guide to how the musical, *Assassins* came into being.

Giuseppe Zangara was born on September 7, 1900 in Ferruzzano, Italy, a village in the province of Calabria which is located right on the "toe" of the Italian boot (Donovan 150). It is a hot and dry area that is comprised of hills with a rocky terrain. Ferruzzano sits on the Mediterranean Sea and was, at the time of Zangara's birth, populated by fishermen and farmers whose main product was olives. Zangara's parents, Salvatore (who had a distinct hatred for authority (Donovan 150)) and Rosina Cafaro, were among the farmers of the village (Picchi 64).

Giuseppe Zangara was plagued by bad health and bad luck throughout his early childhood. Not long after Zangara was born, doctors operated on him to fix a defect on

one of his ears (Picchi 64). This defect led his mother, Rosina Cafaro, to believe that he was unlucky (Donovan 150). Indeed throughout his early childhood, Zangara seemed to be quite accident prone. In his prison memoir, Zangara recalls these unlucky events of his early childhood. At three years old he fell down two flights of stairs. Zangara writes in his prison memoir that “The stairs were built of stone and when I was picked up everyone thought I was dead,” (Zangara, Picchi 236). At age four he fell into a fire and burnt his leg, and then at age five fell down another flight of stairs, at the home of his aunt’s friend, breaking his wrist. Zangara recalled how his aunt told his family, as his mother had, that he was an unlucky child (Picchi 236-237). His mother’s prophesy of him seemed to be true although she never saw these things happen herself. Rosina died in childbirth when Zangara was two years old, along with the child. Zangara wrote that he did not remember her (Picchi 236). After her death, Salvatore, Zangara’s father, married a woman with six daughters (Donovan 150). Zangara’s bad luck would seem to last his lifetime.

At six years old Zangara started school. Unfortunately, this only lasted two months before Salvatore took him out of school to go to work. The economic situation of the family, and his father’s disregard for education, did not leave room for school. Work was the first and foremost duty in their lives. Robert J. Donovan recalls Zangara’s account of his father taking him out of school. “‘I was two months in school,’ he recalled later, ‘when my father come and take me out like this and say, you don’t need [sic] school. You need work,’” (Zangara, Donovan 150). His father valued money over learning, but Zangara always felt that an education could have given him salvation from the hard toil he would face throughout his life (Donovan 151).

Zangara's father, Salvatore, was travelling back and forth to the United States in order to earn money for a more prosperous home life. In his absence he instructed Zangara's caretakers not to let Zangara attend school but instead keep him in the fields and tending to the stock. Salvatore's control over Zangara manifested not only in his denying Zangara an education, but also in the fear that he instilled in Zangara. Zangara confessed that Salvatore beat him often, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness, for even minor transgressions. This physical abuse was coupled with Zangara being forced into child labor (Picchi 65). Zangara described his lack of education, hard labor, and the physical abuse he received in his prison memoir,

While he [Salvatore] was away I started to school. When he found out about this he told my aunt not to send me to school [sic] anymore because he needed me to go into the fields and help with the stock. My aunt replied that I had to go to school but father said he was the boss. However, my aunt told me to go to school and so I went. The next morning my father got me out of bed early and took me with him into the fields...at one time he bought one cow and rented another one for three years from a man by the name of Antonio Romeo. During the next three years I worked for that man. He worked with the livestock and I had to do the hoeing. This work was too heavy for me at that age. One day we lost one of the cows. When my father found out about it he beat me and kicked me like a dog, and told me I was not working hard enough. From that day on he worked me so hard that I became sick. I was beaten and starved and over-worked when I should have been going to school and eating and sleeping like other children (Picchi 237).

From this description of the labor and abuse Zangara was forced to endure it would seem logical that he would blame his father for his lack of a childhood. However, Zangara did not. He instead felt sympathy for his father. He instead blamed the capitalist system for the hard working life the lower classes were forced into (Picchi 65).

This hard labor brought on a stomach ailment that has never been absolutely diagnosed. Zangara felt that the pain in his stomach was in direct connection to the hard labor he was forced to endure (Picchi 65), especially swinging a pick axe (Donovan 153). “It spoil[s] all my machinery – my stomach, all my insides...Everything inside no good,” (Donovan 153). The work he did as a child was not only hard work but seems to have been physically dangerous.

While still a child Zangara was taken to a doctor to examine his stomach. Like Zangara, this doctor explained the pain as overwork. “No good. The doctor tell[s] my father, ‘This boy [will] never be any good again,’” (Donovan 153). With this statement the doctor may seem to have planted an idea in his head that perhaps he would never be able to get well. Picchi explains that not only was the work hard but Salvatore’s temper flared on Zangara quite often. It would seem that the doctor did not know about this abuse. It stands to question that the diagnosis might have been changed had the doctor known about the abuse Zangara was given, but there is no evidence as to the doctor having this knowledge. Zangara still did not lay the blame completely on his father. “According to Zangara, his father physically abused him, sometimes beating him into unconsciousness for minor transgressions. His abdominal pain he attributed to this abuse, but as an adult openly focused his hostility on remote authority figures, and not directly on Salvatore,” (Picchi 65). As stated before, Salvatore had much resentment for

authority. Therefore, it can be assumed that the hatred his father had for authority was being almost transferred to Zangara through the abuse his father laid on him.

This stomach pain Zangara spoke of would not only worsen the older he got but would also become the major reason he felt the need to assassinate the President (Donovan 153). Although he was angry with his father for not allowing him an education, he blamed capitalists for the situation in which his father was placed. By forcing the poor to work so hard, they were not allowed the opportunity to acquire the education they would need to create a better life for themselves and for their children. While the “bosses” were able to send their own children to school to become educated and successful people with money, they forced the likes of Salvatore Zangara to send his son out to work to help earn money for the family (Donovan 150-151). “The capitalists get to be the boss to my father, keep the money from my father, and my father sent me to work, and I have no school and I have trouble with my stomach...and that way, I make my idea to kill the president-kill any president, any king,” (Donovan 149).

His hatred for people of privilege kept him in near isolation as a child. He would not associate with any would-be-playmate that came from a more privileged family (Donovan 150). Donovan points out a memory Zangara recalled about seeing privileged children.

A few days after he was removed from the classroom, he was shoveling dirt beside a road when a carriage filled with children on their way to school passed by, and the memory of their good fortune made him smart with envy twenty-five years later (Donovan 151).

His low status, coupled with the amount he was forced to work, seems to denote that there would have been no time for playmates anyway, and his stomach kept him in painful solitude for his entire life (Donovan 153). There also seems to be a jealousy that kept him isolated from others. This may have been a jealousy over the education of others perhaps; or, maybe it was an inadequate feeling of not being educated himself.

His hatred for the privileged class seems to stem directly from his anger of not being allowed an education. Education allowed for more opportunity in Zangara's eyes, opportunities that he was denied (Donovan 151). He seemed only to serve as a work-horse in the mind of the upper classes. This was a feeling that was with him his whole life. When asked about the government and what should be changed, Zangara replied,

I think the change is: New government. No money so everybody is same likes [sic]. Everybody just the same as the country. I have no sick stomach because I have the right to go to school same as everybody else. Then the children of capitalists make no difference. All born equal. All people just the same. All people can read just the same (Donovan 151).

At age nine Salvatore traveled to America to find work. With his father being gone Zangara asked his stepmother if he could go to school. Unfortunately, Salvatore had told her before he left that Zangara was to stay at work in the fields. When he was eleven years old Salvatore felt Zangara was now old enough to do all the work that was needed on the farm. At thirteen, his father bought a piece of land and built a vineyard which Zangara had to do all the work on for the next three years. This work only made Zangara's stomach condition worse (Zangara, Picchi 238). This continued through his teen years. In his memoirs he wrote,

I had no happiness in my life because I was always thinking that I had to suffer with that sickness and work all the time. I had no affection for my father. I wanted to leave the town I was born in. At that time I was sixteen years old and understood the good from the bad (Zangara, Picchi 238).

At the age of seventeen, Zangara began to travel. For the first time he left home and did some, what Picchi refers to (but never specifies), “un-desired work” in a small town north of Ferruzzano called Giamoto, Cotrona. From there he traveled and worked in various towns around Calabria. Travel was one of the few things he seemed to have passion for (Picchi 65). It would seem that his hard work ethic learned from his father became a valuable attribute to his career. It afforded him the chance to move up in employment status but not in social status. He consistently worked very hard and never complained to any of his bosses or co-workers about his stomach (Donovan 153). His hard work enabled him to become a bricklayer and eventually a mason. This allowed him to be an independent worker (Donovan 151).

Shortly before the end of World War I, at the age of eighteen, Zangara entered the Italian army where he served in the infantry. He was sent to build trenches on the front lines near the town of Monte Grappo in Dalmatia. He was put to work as a laborer and not as a soldier. His hatred of authority was again realized. He did, during this time, learn the trade of the stonemasons. Nine months after his birthday WWI came to an end. After the war, Zangara was put to work again by his father to build him a house. Although he looked for work in other small towns in Calabria, people thought he should be working for his father. Zangara saw this as a continuation of his bad luck, (Picchi 65).



Shortly after his twenty-first birthday, on October 24, 1921, Zangara had his only incident with the law. Picchi states that this seems to involve a possible attempt to dodge the draft although nothing has been concluded about this (Picchi 65). Perhaps this time Zangara was meant to be a soldier instead of the worker he had been in his previous stint in the army. This military service seems to have been different from his previous service. As the war was over, his job in the military seems to have been for actual service than fighting. Picchi points out “at that time, military service was compulsory in Italy,” (Picchi 65). For whatever crime he may have committed he was given a twelve day suspended sentence. Zangara was then assigned to the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Tuscany, in a camp called Arezzo. The constant morning drills and marches hurt his stomach and made his service miserable. The military doctors told him his pain was chronic and had to do with the work he was forced to do as a child (Picchi 65-66). As it was before, doctors seemed not to be able to find exactly what was wrong.

After completing this basic training, Zangara’s assigned duty was as a sort of assistant to a forty-five-year-old captain with, he noted, a twenty-year-old wife, at the Military College of Rome near Vatican City on the Tiber River. This captain was relentless in over-working Zangara. Zangara was forced to make sure the captain’s boots were shined, his clothes were clean and pressed, the housework was done, and that the meals were served. To this end Zangara was treated more like a maid than a military man. The captain was also from the richer class which did not sit well with Zangara. Zangara’s major duty was to wake the captain every morning. Once he slept in and as a punishment the captain locked him in a guardhouse for twenty-four hours without food.

Zangara felt that being the orderly of a man he despised was not suited to him and often requested to be transferred (Picchi 66).

Finally, this request was honored. Zangara, due to his work background, was given a gardening position at a military college. Here he was given his own quarters. His commander asked him to build a second story to the building and three months later Zangara asked for another transfer which put him as a guard for the paymaster's office (Picchi 66-67). Zangara later claimed to have dreamt of stealing the payroll "I needed it,' he says 'for my suffering,'" (Picchi 67).

The idea of assassination was one that seemed to be on his mind for much of his life. During his military service Zangara made his first assassination attempt. In either late 1922, or early 1923, Zangara claimed to have tried to assassinate King Victor Emmanuel III. This was going to be done when the King arrived at a railroad depot to visit his son. However, the bodyguards were all so tall that Zangara, barely five-foot-one could not see the king let alone get a shot at him, "the guards got in from of me and I could not get at him because the guards are over six foot tall and I could not even see the king," (Zangara, Picchi 67) this event is interesting but not able to be verified (Picchi 67). Knowing that Zangara had the intention to commit an act of assassination as early as ten years before his attempt on Roosevelt's life suggests that he was a very calculating and thoughtful man. Unfortunately, this is only documented by Zangara's prison journal and there are no other references to the event.

After being discharged from the army, Zangara applied for an American visa on August 14, 1923 and set sail for the United States on August 16, 1923. Zangara arrived in the United States, in Philadelphia on September 2, 1923. He moved with his uncle,

Vincent Cafaro (the only reference on his visa application), to Patterson, New Jersey. Zangara went to work immediately; it is unknown what his uncle did for work (Picchi 67).

The United States was in an economic boom which led to a building boom in the 1920's. This made it simple for Zangara to find a job as a bricklayer. He was hired to work on a project in Bayonne, New Jersey. This job forced Zangara to ignore his contempt for unions and join the union of Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers. In joining the union he also had to fill out a declaration of intention to become a US citizen, and on September 11, 1929, Zangara was naturalized as a citizen of the United States. He would remain a part of the union until his membership lapsed for failure to pay dues (Picchi 67-68).

From 1923 to 1931 Zangara worked steadily around Patterson; sometimes with large projects and also as a small contractor, hiring his own employees. Some of his projects include the Alexander Hamilton Hotel and the Fabian Theatre. He was able to make a good living for himself, earning up to twelve dollars a day. Because of his stomach he led a simple life of work and not much else. This allowed Zangara to put a good deal of money away, at one point having saved twenty-five hundred dollars (Donovan 152).

He was said to be a good worker although he pitied himself for his stomach pain he never talked about his hatred for the government. He was known for standing on his "soapbox" speaking about the privileges of the rich and the hard plight suffered by the working man but never caused problems on the job and never talked about politics (Donovan 152). His work acquaintances (there were no relationships close enough to be

considered friends) knew him not as Giuseppe but as the American name “Joe” (Donovan 149).

Zangara lived alone most of the time. His love of solitude led him to be a quiet person who did not associate with many people. Donovan points out that this solitary existence was wanted. “...when he was living in Hackensack, New Jersey, he rented two adjoining rooms, one to use himself and the other to make sure that nobody else rented it” (Donovan 152). His only real interaction was with a drugstore crowd who he sometimes played checkers. Zangara was known to this crowd as not being very talkative (Donovan 152).

He did not smoke and only occasionally drank a glass of wine. These things he felt upset his stomach and could possibly even kill him. Zangara had no use for entertainment and never went out with girls. He rarely even spoke to his family. His uncle explained, “He wanted to be left alone to suffer with his stomach” (Donovan 153). He feared winter and rarely went out of doors from fall to spring if he could help it. The cold, especially the night air, upset his stomach tremendously. He also could not drink anything that was too hot or too cold (Donovan 152-153).

At the age of twenty-five Zangara went to Barnert Memorial Hospital in Patterson. Zangara wanted to have checked the shooting pains from the right side to the center of his abdomen, as well as lack of appetite. Although they could find nothing wrong, they did operate for chronic appendicitis and duodenal adhesion. The doctors found nothing wrong with the appendix. While in the hospital, Donovan points out that Zangara ate heartily and did not complain of pain. Shortly after he was discharged from the hospital he complained more about his stomach than ever (Donovan 153-154).

Although Zangara's family was of the Roman Catholic faith, Zangara had no religious beliefs of his own. He did not go to church, and after his arrest for the assassination attempt, he made it very clear he did not believe he had to answer to any maker. After the assassination attempt he was asked if he feared what would happen to him in the afterlife and where he thought he would go he said, "I go into the ground," (Donovan 155).

In 1931, Zangara's life seems to take a downward turn. The economic depression in the United States meant a decline in construction and jobs for Zangara were few and far between. At this time, Zangara began to travel south thinking warmer weather would be better for his stomach. It seems that finding work was not the main issue in his life but rather a lack of interest in working. His stomach pain had become unbearable and his hatred for the capitalists had invaded his mind so much that he no longer cared about anything. He never really searched for a job (Donovan 155). His travels took him to Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Key West, and Panama (Picchi 78). Zangara ended up in Miami where he did have a brief job as a tour guide. He seems to have stayed put in Miami from midsummer 1932 to the end of his life.

In Miami, Zangara became a sloth of the man he used to be. Only eating at one restaurant where he could get a meal for fifteen cents. He lost most of his money by betting first on horses, then on dogs. He had no desire to work, luckily he had been able to put a lot of money away, and he took very menial jobs on occasion. He still liked his solitude. However he lived for a while with a dishwasher in a cottage and then moved to a two-dollar-a-week room in the attic of a boardinghouse close to a Latin neighborhood (Donovan 156).

Early in the winter of 1933 Zangara began planning to kill President Hoover. The depression was being blamed on President Hoover by the people of the United States. Hoover just did not seem to be doing anything to stop it. With all the bad feelings circulating over the depression, which the American people as well as Zangara blamed Hoover for, no doubt his desire to kill a president, or King, had resurged. The problem with killing Hoover had to do with the weather and the location of President Hoover. Hoover was in Washington, D.C. The cold weather of Washington D.C. in winter was, in Zangara's mind, not good for his stomach, and therefore his plan had to take a backseat until at least spring when it would be warm enough to travel without detriment to his stomach (Donovan 156-157).

One day (Donovan surmises Monday, February 13, 1933) Zangara heard a newsboy call out that President-Elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt would be visiting Miami after a fishing trip. Since his motive was to kill any authority figure, and not a particular leader, he would save the trip, and stomach upset, by staying in Miami and killing Roosevelt instead (Donovan 157). As the President-Elect's visit got closer, Zangara paid close attention to the newspapers. The newspapers revealed all the details about when the ship Roosevelt was arriving on would dock and where, how he was to be driving in a motorcade to Bayfront Park, that he would make a speech, as well as details of his departure (Donovan 157). It would seem Zangara was able to meticulously plan out how he would kill the President-Elect and, in his mind, would set his suffering, and indeed the suffering of the poor, free.

Not long after his decision was made, Zangara went to the Davis Pawnshop and bought a .32 caliber revolver. He also bought ten bullets; the gun could fire five at a

time. The gun had a fluted nickel-plated barrel and a black handle and was similar in appearance to the gun Leon Czolgosz used to kill President McKinley (Donovan 158). His speed at purchasing a gun would seem to show his determination. At this time, through lack of work, Zangara's funds were all but depleted. With this in consideration, it can be concluded that his mind was completely focused on his decision to try to kill Roosevelt. Zangara was so focused that he was willing to spend money on a gun although his monetary funds were running low.

On February 15, 1933, after packing his few belongings into one small bag, including newspaper articles about FDR's arrival to Miami (one of which carried an article about a death threat to Abraham Lincoln from John Wilkes Booth that had been recently found) Zangara set off to Bayfront Park to assassinate President-Elect Roosevelt (Picchi 59). That day the crowd of over twenty-five-thousand people from all over the United States had been gathering at the 40 acre Bayfront Park to see the President-Elect speak at an amphitheater on the south end. There were also bands in attendance to play for the crowd and Roosevelt. The event had been thoughtfully planned out and made to celebrate and support the soon-to-be leader of the United States of America (Picchi 3).

Unfortunately for Zangara, he miscalculated the time of when people would arrive. He had no idea that people would be lining up all day for the event. When he arrived, an hour and a half before Roosevelt was to make his speech, he saw that not only all the seats up front were taken but that the aisles had begun to fill up as well. This left the unlucky Zangara at a disadvantage (Donovan 159). As mentioned before, there was a height disadvantage when Zangara tried to kill the King of Italy. He was barely 5'1" and also very skinny. Zangara tried to shove himself up the second of the three aisles on the

left but fifteen feet from the front he was stopped by Mr. H.L. Edmunds from Ottumwa, Iowa. Edmunds made it clear to Zangara that not only was it not polite to shove in front of the women and children who were there first, but he was also not going to let him move further. This put Zangara at a disadvantage to have a good aim (Donovan 160).

Roosevelt arrived riding in the back of the third car of the motorcade at around 9:30 p.m. As promised, Roosevelt gave an informal, short speech of only one hundred and sixty-two words and got back into his car. It was about 9:35. A few people stepped forward to shake his hand and speak to him as well as reporters asking him to repeat his speech, which he declined (Donovan 162). Included in these people was Anton Cermak, the mayor of Chicago, who had stopped to speak to him (Picchi 14).

By now, Zangara had crawled onto a chair to try to get a shot at Roosevelt, but his small stature still left him at a disadvantage. Even standing on a chair, people were as tall as him, if not still taller. This forced Zangara to nearly stand on his toes to try to find a good shot at the President-Elect. As people began to clear out and FDR was about leave in the motorcade, Zangara finally got a clear shot at the back of this head (Donovan 162). He fired all five rounds before being tackled to the ground (Picchi 17).

Five people were hurt by these shots including two more people who were so close to Zangara that they were burnt by gun powder. Although all five bullets hit a person not one hit Roosevelt. One of the people hit was Mayor Cermak. It entered in his right armpit and went into his right lung. The other people who were hit were Mrs. Joseph H. Gill, who was hit in the abdomen and Mr. Russell Caldwell, Miss Margaret Kruis, and Mr. William J. Sinnott who were all hit in the head but surprising only received minor wounds (Donovan 163).



Two people, Lillian Cross, and Thomas Armour, claimed to have pushed Zangara's arm in the air which prevented him from hitting FDR (Picchi 28-31). This is probably false because with his gun pointed into the air it is surprising he would have hit anyone. The debate over who did this, if it happened at all (which according to Zangara, it did not) still is going on today. A policeman who helped nab Zangara said he was not grabbed until after he had finished firing (Picchi 30). If someone had pushed his hand into the air as they claim, there would be no way that all five bullets would have found their targets near and around Roosevelt. Zangara claimed that the real reason he missed is that the bench he was standing on teetered with all the commotion and threw him off balance and therefore off aim. If he had been standing up on his toes trying to get the shot not only would this throw off his balance but as he weighed just over one hundred pounds, the kick of the gun as it shot would have also made him a little shaky, especially since, again, he fired all five rounds (Zangara, Picchi 252).

Roosevelt was pushed down into the car when the shots rang out. He noticed that Mayor Cermak had been hit and while trying to get him help waved to the crowd to signify that he himself was alright. Zangara was taken down by bystanders and police. Feeling the need to get Zangara out of the area before he was lynched the police handcuffed him and tied him to the trunk rack of one of the limousines in the motorcade where three policeman held him down riding on the back of the car. This was decided to be the only way they could get him out of there as the cars were full of the dignitaries that had been celebrated. In fact, the car which Zangara was tied to contained some of his victims (Picchi 23-24).

Zangara was taken to Dade County jail where he insisted that he was not sorry that he tried to kill Roosevelt but instead he was sorry he did not kill Roosevelt and would like to have another chance. During his interview at the jail he said that he did not mind Roosevelt as a man, just as a president. Zangara made it very clear that given the chance to do it over again he would and his only regret was having missed. All this was said as he stroked his stomach (Picchi 47-48).

Zangara refused legal counsel when brought to court but was appointed three lawyers to defend him. The counsel consisted of Lewis M. Twyman (President of Dade County Bar Association), James M. McCaskill (former President of the association), and Alfred E. Raia (who could speak Italian). Zangara was not happy about this as he had specifically asked for no lawyers, just the judge (Picchi 106). Zangara was also treated by two psychiatrists, Dr. Agos and Dr. Moore who reported,

The examination of this individual reveals a perverse character willfully wrong, remorseless and expressing contempt for the opinion of other. While his intelligence is not necessarily inferior, his distorted judgment and temperament is incapable of adjustment to the average social standards. He is inherently suspicious and anti-social. Such ill balanced erratic types are classified as a Psychopathic personality. From this class are recruited the criminals and 'cranks' whose pet schemes and morbid emotions run in conflict with the established order of society (Donovan 165).

The question of Zangara's sanity, like his stomach ailment, was never certifiably or satisfactorily answered.

Zangara's first trial was overseen by Judge E.C. Collins on February 20, 1933 and, after pleading guilty, was sentenced to eighty years in prison for four counts of assault in attempt to assassinate the President-Elect. However, when Mayor Cermak, who seemed to be on the way to recovery, died on March 6; Zangara once again plead guilty and this time was sentenced to death for the murder of Cermak in attempts to assassinate Roosevelt. Although Zangara's sanity was still in question, at the time of his trial he was treated as a sane man and therefore was also treated as a monster who had committed a crime against the country and humanity. The death sentence did not scare Zangara who did not want any appeals (Donovan 165).

Zangara was put to death in the electric chair on March 20, 1933, at Raiford prison, five weeks after the shooting. It is the fastest legal execution to occur in the United States (Picchi 187). He walked into the death chamber and handed three notebooks to the prison superintendent. In these notebooks he had written a very short thirty-four chapter autobiography. He chased the chaplain out of the death chamber and walked himself to the electric chair saying he was not afraid of it. He was disappointed that there were no cameras to take his picture. He had grown use to the fame of having his picture taken and being filmed. Zangara cursed the capitalists and then announced his goodbye to the world (Picchi 188-191). His last words were, "Go ahead. Push the button" (Donovan 168).

No one claimed Zangara's body and he was buried in the prison yard (Donovan 168). Before he was buried his body was given an autopsy. His brain was examined and nothing was found to be wrong that would have caused insanity or psychic behavior. The autopsy also revealed that aside from some indigestion there was nothing wrong with

Zangara's stomach. He was a healthy, sane man (Picchi 194). His story was never really told completely until the publishing of Blaise Picchi's book *The Five Weeks of Giuseppe Zangara: The Man Who Would Assassinate FDR in 1998*, but he would come back to the public's attention twice as a character in musical theatre.

### **Zangara in Musical Theatre**

Fresh out of Grad school in 1977, Charles Gilbert was looking to write a musical that was new and original. Of the popular musicals of this time *Pacific Overtures*, by Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman was one that inspired him. While looking through a book of biographical sketches on presidential assassins, he was inspired to write a musical about their lives along with a fictional assassin who was based on Lee Harvey Oswald.

Gilbert's musical, *Assassins*, was picked up by an alternative theatre, Theatre Express, and produced as a main stage production in 1979. Although the show itself was not highly praised, the critics seemed to think that it showed promise and seemed to hope it would continue. Gilbert, however, did not continue working on it (<http://chasgilbert.com/chasgilbert/articles/assassins.html>).

In 1988, after sending *Assassins* to a Musical Theatre Lab in NYC, Gilbert received a letter from Stephen Sondheim asking if he could be allowed to write a new musical based on Gilbert's idea. Gilbert not only agreed to give them the material but also offered to help in the collaboration. Although Sondheim and John Weidman declined Gilbert's collaboration, they did talk with him often during the development of their version. The result was a brand new musical and Gilbert was given the credit for his original idea (<http://chasgilbert.com/chasgilbert/articles/assassins.html>).

The partnership of Weidman and Sondheim seems to be a thing of fate set into motion by the director Hal Prince. John Weidman was a third year law student at Yale, and a young playwright, who had majored in East Asian history. He had written a play about Commodore Matthew Perry who, in 1852, was sent by President Fillmore to Japan to establish diplomatic and trade relations. The play, which was to be directed by Hal Prince on Broadway in the fall of 1974, was first suggested to be written from the view point of the Japanese to make it more interesting. But the turn of fate would be when, Prince decided that the play would work better as a musical and introduced Weidman to Sondheim (Zadan 209-210). Weidman speaks of the fateful collaboration thus,

It was three drafts later that I had come into New York from New Haven for the play's final casting session when Hal asked me to meet him at his office. He said that he was feeling uncomfortable about doing this piece as a straight play and thought it needed to be musicalized. And I was stunned more than anything else. I said 'isn't it a little late in the game to come to this conclusion?' I left his office and bought myself a drink. But as soon as Hal told me that Steve Sondheim was interested, and we started talking to him, I became very excited about reshaping the material (Zadan 209-210).

The resulting musical was *Pacific Overtures*. Sondheim's knowledge of music and Weidman's knowledge of history made them quite suitable to write a historically based musical, which captured not only the time but the essence of the characters through music and dialogue (Zadan 210). After *Pacific Overtures*, they then set out to rework Charles Gilbert's musical *Assassins* into a new musical. Their collaboration would become the musical known today.

*Assassins*, has been called an anti-musical about anti-heroes. “How it says what it says is accessible, often funny, and always tuneful. What it says, however, is terrifying” (Stempel 548). Much of the music is based on classic American styles, and many, like Gilbert’s songs, based on folksongs written about the different assassins. The recurring theme of ‘Hail to the Chief’ reiterates as a haunting melody throughout the show (Horowitz 57). The “Ballad of Guiteau” is based off the poem “I am Going to the Lordy” Which Guiteau himself wrote the morning of the day he was hanged (Donovan 60-61). Zangara’s song “How I Saved Roosevelt” is written in the style of a Souse march “El Capitain” and is said by Sondheim to be the most historically accurate song he and Weidman have written. Sondheim states,

‘How I Saved Roosevelt’ is a good example of one of the things that’s nice about Assassins; Everything in it is actually true and happened-not when people meet across a hundred years, that didn’t happen-there were five bystanders, each of whom claimed that they had saved Roosevelt’s life (Horowitz 67).

With neither a through-line plot, nor storyline the show comes off as a revue of sorts. It is written as a concept musical that humanizes the darker characters of American history. Weidman states,

Thirteen people have tried to kill the President of the United States. Four have succeeded. These murderers and would-be murderers are generally dismissed as maniacs and misfits who have little in common with the rest of us. *Assassins* suggests otherwise. *Assassins* suggests that while these individuals are, to say the least peculiar-taken as a group they are peculiarly American. And that behind the variety of motives which they articulated for their murderous outbursts, they share

a common purpose: a desperate desire to reconcile intolerable feeling of impotence with an inflamed and malignant sense of entitlement. Why do these dreadful events happen here, with such horrifying frequency, and in such an appallingly similar fashion? *Assassins* suggests it is because we live in a country whose most cherished national myths, at least as currently propagated, encourage us to believe that in America our dreams not only can come true, but should come true, and if they don't someone or something is to blame" (Stempel 549).

The show asks the audience hard questions about things like the American Dream and about the people who acted pathologically when they were denied theirs. It does not seem that Sondheim meant it to be a "feel good" musical. Even the final song does not let the audience up. Sondheim explains this as,

...not to make a sort of moral point of view at the end. If one attempted to draw a moral line it would either be a simple-minded and banal and sententious or it would be smug and I think underserved on our part... [the show should end rather] on a note of extreme sadness-sadness for the people, sadness for the situation, and sadness for any set of circumstances that invites or promotes or encourages the kind of horrifying acts these people did (Stempel 550).

The original production opened off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons in 1991 at the same time as the Persian Gulf War. Andre Bishop, artistic director of Playwrights Horizons at the time of *Assassins*, writes,

At the time we didn't know if this would help the show by delivering nightly audiences who were stirred up and willing to be stirred up even further, or hurt it because people were feeling patriotic and scared and might not want to see

something that presented a darkly comic vision of the killing off of a number of American Presidents (Weidman vii).

This may seem to have hurt the show as it only ran for seventy-one performances ([http://www.lortel.org/lla\\_archive/index.cfm?search\\_by=show&title=Assassins](http://www.lortel.org/lla_archive/index.cfm?search_by=show&title=Assassins)).

Similarly the next big American production of the show would come at a time that America did not seem ready for it. The revival and first Broadway mounting of the show was slated to open in the fall of 2001, but the events of September 11, 2001 postponed the show. Sondheim and Weidman said of the postponement,

*Assassins* is a show which asks the audiences to think critically about various aspects of the American experience. In the light of Tuesday's [September 11, 2001] murderous assault on our nation and on the most fundamental things in which we believe, we... believe this is not an appropriate time to present a show which makes that demand (Stempel 551).

Between these two productions was the original London production that added a song for the people. Although the chorus of *Assassins* is greatly overlooked as they play bit roles to help the stories continue they do serve an important role. In 'How I Saved Roosevelt' they come off as comic and stupid, but a song that was added to the London Production changed this. With the song "Something Just Broke", that was sung after Lee Harvey Oswald assassinates President John F. Kennedy, the chorus is finally given a chance to reveal their feelings on the assassinations. Through this song Sondheim puts "the whole country on stage" (Horowitz 67), and the effects of presidential assassination are reflected and discovered by the people affected by it. Perhaps it is through this song and the plights of the "monsters" portrayed in this show that *Assassins* becomes the fear



of America, the terror of America, and in some ways perhaps the truth of America. The dark truth we the people do not like to think about or admit but are constantly there in the back of our minds (Horowitz 67).

The legacy and stories, of these assassins has been brought to audiences in the form of entertainment. Although there is comedy, the deeply rooted fear that the person next to us could become a murderer through the various trials they have gone through or are continuing to go through can be a frightening prospect. The thought of entering their heads in order to portray them is a frightening and yet thrilling prospect as well.

Here the history of Zangara the man, as well as history and influences of the Sondheim and Weidman's musical have been presented. Understanding that the man and the character are two separate entities is something that must be made clear. The second chapter will take information related in this chapter, along with clues from the script and score to create the "character" of Zangara using Sondheim's music and lyrics, Weidman's words and what history can tell us of him. With an analysis of the character and the background of the man a synthesis is created of a singular being.

## CHAPTER II: ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will use the text of the play to analyze the character of Giuseppe Zangara and the world of the show as dictated by Sondheim and Weidman. By using the historical information I will be able to make informed choices in character analysis and development. This chapter will focus on Zangara and how he fits into this world as well as his relationships and functions. .

*Assassins* is a musical that tells the story of nine of the thirteen men and women who either tried to kill the president or succeeded in killing the president. Unlike what most Americans learn through history, this musical shows the stories of the assassins and would-be assassins through the perspectives of the assassins themselves. This musical invites the audience to objectively look at some of the reasons behind the assassination attempts and objectively consider the things that can drive a person, like Giuseppe Zangara, to kill.

The first thing to do when identifying the world of a play, is discover the given circumstances dictated within the play itself. The given circumstances are the context the character lives in. They are all the facts of the characters life, including their history, relationships and environment (Deer 15). By understanding the what, where, and when of the world that Sondheim and Weidman created one can begin to find how the character of Zangara functions in the world.

The environment is a little muddled in this musical. The show takes place in a cluster of many environments that are often surrealistic versions of actual places.

Therefore, it is important to look at what creates the mood and feeling of the environment instead of the geographical realities of where the action is happening.

The show mostly takes place in a sort of limbo. This limbo is a place where the assassins, whose timelines span a century, are able to be present with each other. The presence of the Balladeer, who travels in and out of the different assassins stories, helps to ensure the idea of this limbo. The first scene, as dictated by the script takes place in a carnival type setting; to be more specific a shooting gallery at a fairground (Sondheim 1). This gives an all-American feel immediately at the beginning of the play. The calliope music that plays at the top helps the American carnival feel (Sondheim 1). There is a sinister tone that underscores this limbo that can be heard in the music. This calliope music is a, carnival-style version of “Hail to the Chief” (Sondheim 5-6).

The “Hail to the Chief” motif will continue to arise in different scenes. The song is used in different rhythms and styles to reflect what is happening within the play or what has just happened. The music becomes more ominous as Leon Czolgosz enters and the proprietor appears (Sondheim 1). With the next two characters, Hinckley and Guiteau, the music becomes more light-hearted and fun (Sondheim 9-10). It is during this more fun uplifting music that Zangara first enters (Sondheim 3).

The light music, as well as the jeering of the proprietor, gives this environment an unwelcoming feel, at least towards Zangara. However, Zangara is able to purchase his gun (Sondheim 3). This suggests that the environment is one of financial opportunity. It does not matter what a person’s feelings are for another person when it comes to money gained. The music stays jaunty as the rest of the would-be-assassins arrive at this carnival in limbo, until the arrival of John Wilkes Booth.

As Booth enters, the music returns to the “slow, faintly sinister VAMP that is heard at the beginning” (Sondheim 3). By slowing down the music the audience is directed to the importance that Booth carries with his presence on stage. As the song progresses, between the Proprietor and Booth, the music becomes, once again, increasingly light-hearted, jaunty, and welcoming. This suggests that the mood of the environment is a free place where all people are welcome to be. There is an air that all dreams can come true. It can be assumed that through the lyrics “everybody’s got the right to some sunshine” that Zangara, along with the other would-be-assassins, has bought into the idea that his troubles will be solved by him killing the president of the United States. Zangara joins the other-would-be assassins in song (Sondheim 7).

The environment of this scene, although geographically non-specific, is a place of sanctuary. Not only can this limbo be said to be American, with the sort of American carnival feel that is obtained from the music, but it is a place of dreams, where these characters can come together and relate. In a way it is sort of a home-base for the characters. In this environment they are able to be themselves and discover the means to getting their dreams. It is here that the assassins are able to witness Booth’s assassination of Abraham Lincoln. His success in the assassination of Lincoln is the first attempt and success of an assassination which would seem to give the other assassins the sort of go-ahead to also try to assassinate a United States President.

This is highlighted in the next scene that Zangara and the other assassins appear in. As Booth lies on the floor of a barn, dead from having shot himself rather than surrender, the assassins appear in the background (Sondheim 14). The environment, although particular to Booth, is one that allows the assassins to appear at critical moments

of the other assassins' lives. This furthers the idea that this environment has neither restriction of space or distance, in the physical world or in terms of time.

The third scene, which takes place in an un-defined bar (Sondheim 14) takes this further when all the assassins are present in one place. Unlike the limbo of the first scene this space is more defined. There are drinks and chairs and a bar present. This suggests that even in this American limbo there are places that have some sort of definition. It is possible that these characters have some idea of what a bar (or maybe restaurant) looks like. Therefore, though undefined by time period, there could be a collective idea as to what defines a bar space. So the basic essentials of a bar would make sense to all characters involved. The only time period identifier would be the drinks that the stage directions suggest for the characters. For instance, Samuel Byck is suggested to be drinking a Budwieser, Sara Jane Moore holds a can of Tab, John Hinckley drinks a bottle of coke, Charles Guiteau has a shot of whiskey, and Zangara "clutches" a glass of buttermilk (Sondheim 14). This implies that although the bar is timeless, each character can bring their pieces of their own individual world into this limbo. That being stated, it can be assumed that each character inhabits this limbo as well as inhabits their time. The appearance of Booth in this scene (Sondheim 17) can also be a representation of the non-linear time that is presented in this musical. Booth, who shot himself in the previous scene, as witnessed by the other assassins, is alive and well and giving some of the same advice as in the first scene. This moment is not treated as some miracle of resurrection, but instead it is treated as a common occurrence. It is his dialogue to Leon Czolgosz that catches the attention of the assassins and not the fact that he is once again alive. So time in this environment is not an issue. The past and future meet in the present and therefore

the death of the assassins is not an issue. They can die, and then show up somewhere else in this limbo and meet within, what could be seen as, moments.

Zangara's execution in scene four has a very peculiar sort of environment attached to it in that time and place converge. The scene of Zangara's execution, which took place on March 20, 1933 at Raiford Prison in Raiford, Florida (Picchi 187), is joined with the scene of testimonies that are being sung by the bystanders that took five weeks earlier in Miami (Sondheim 19). This would suggest that in this environment not only can things happen in a non-linear way but separate historical occurrences can happen at the same time regardless of which happened first or how much time there was in between. Zangara shoots at Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and is electrocuted in a matter of moments. Therefore, this environment crosses not only time barriers but spatial barriers. Zangara, like Booth, also appears after his death. This time he appears in the same sort of limbo as in the first scene (Sondheim 57).

In the first scene, as previously discussed, this limbo is a place for the assassins to dream and express their desires. Although the environment is the same, in scene fifteen, the mood of it has changed. The assassins have failed to have their voices heard, and with the song "Another National Anthem" they begin to classify themselves as different from most Americans. They tried to have their voices heard but they are not celebrated for their efforts.

ALL: We're

The other national anthem, folks.

The ones that can't get in

To the ballpark (Sondheim 61).

The music begins with a lamenting quality underscored by dissonant moans in the music (Sondheim 118). These moans could be interpreted as the sad moans of the other people who have gone unnoticed in their quests for the American dream. This music has made the environment hostile and frightening. Each of the assassins plead that they had sound reasons for what they did and demand they get some sort of absolution, “I want my prize” (Sondheim 58). This limbo environment that allowed them to freely dream of changing the world has now become an environment that allows them to freely express their discontentment. In this free environment they are able to beseech the Proprietor for answers and once again gain strength not as individuals but now as a group (Sondheim 60). The Balladeer is also present to make his case against them (Sondheim 58).

As the assassins come together they are also able to force the Balladeer out of their environment (Sondheim 63) making their space, their limbo, a place that is uniquely their own. Their own unity drives them to be able to appear in the Texas School Book Depository in scene sixteen (Sondheim 70). The assassins appear to Lee Harvey Oswald in this space. This space, unlike the other environments, is one that is detailed. According to the stage directions there are books on shelves and in boxes, a clock a radio, and windows (Sondheim 64). This is the first fully realized environment in the musical. Compared with the other environments described in the script, the detail denotes an air of importance.

The importance is from the desires held by the assassins to finally be heard. From the moment Booth shuts off the radio, no music is heard until the assassins appear (Sondheim 139). The music has a persistent feeling that adds to the importance of this environment. It suggests that something monumental is going to happen. Although the

assassins appear in the barn with Booth, this is the first time they appear, out of limbo, and are allowed to speak and express their needs (Sondheim 70). It can be said that they have been able to escape limbo and function in the real world. Instead of being mere observers, they are now able to be participants in a very real situation and are allowed to function in the real world. This idea of the real world is best supported in the fact that after the assassination of Kennedy, Oswald then appears to in the limbo for the first time. This power to step into the real world could be suggested by the strength they gained in the previous scene with the song “Another National Anthem”. They have found a purpose and this purpose has given them the strength to come together and appear in the real world.

After Oswald shoots John F. Kennedy, the assassins appear one more time, along with Oswald, again in their limbo. This time, the environment allows them to celebrate (Sondheim 86). They have won their prize and have come back to rejoice. This suggests that this limbo is like a home to them. They have a place in the world. It is not a place of geographical definition that functions in a particular time period but a place that is more surreal than that. They are always present and new assassins can make this their home to. As stated before, this place seems decidedly American. Therefore, this American environment could be deemed the darker side of America that although not always seen, is always there.

This American limbo makes a geographical location hard to pinpoint, although there are specific geographic locations they are not the focus of the musical. As stated previously, there is no real geographical station for the musical as a whole. Time and space do not apply here. It seems to just be America in all its times and areas. The



musical is about American assassins and the scenes in limbo have the assassins together. If the events in the musical take place in America and are a part of American history then it seems that the logical.

Not all the characters in the musical are American. Their acts however affected American history. Although Zangara was Italian, he tried to assassinate an American President-Elect in America. The other characters, American or not, also were in America at the time of their assassination attempts (Weidman 3-4) and the President they tried, or succeeded in assassinating were American. This being stated, although one can realize that America is not the only country to deal with assassination, these assassins are part of the history of America and apart of America's story. They embody part of American history that is often unspoken. Therefore their limbo would logically be a part of America.

Zangara sees the body of Booth in the barn where, according the libretto, he shot himself; but it is not stated where this barn is. Although it is stated where Zangara tried to assassinate Franklin D. Roosevelt (Sondheim 19), the focus is on the act and not the place. It is also not stated where Zangara was executed. This seems to suggest that where things happen is not as important, to this musical, as what happens and why it happens. That being said, the idea of an American limbo is the geographical center. It does not switch time and space but rather encompasses it.

The only real geographical place that seems important is that of the Texas School Book Depository. It can be said that this place has become an indelible picture in the minds of Americans today. As previously stated, this is the scene that has the most detail in the setting. It is also an important point in the musical as it is the place where the

assassins convince Oswald to assassinate Kennedy (Sondheim 75). The events that transpired with Oswald in the depository before he shot are not known, so the realistic details of the scene would seem to juxtapose the fictional event of the appearance of the assassins begging Oswald to assassinate Kennedy. Again, although there are some geographical areas denoted, what can be determined to be the important aspects of the play are the actions, not historical setting.

Dates of the events do not seem to serve much of a purpose here either. Being based on historical events there would be recorded dates of each assassination attempt but in this musical they are not mentioned. It does not seem that the audience is expected to know these things already, but again it seems that the date is not the focus only the act. Zangara attempted to assassinate Roosevelt on February 15, 1933 (Picchi 59) and was executed on March 20, 1933 (Picchi 187). Not only are these dates not mentioned but they happen simultaneously in the musical (Sondheim 20). There is also no mention of the date of Kennedy's assassination, although it is the climax of the musical. This would seem to ask the audience to look more at the act and not the historical fact.

Economy would seem to be a big issue to the characters, but the economic environment is hardly mentioned in the libretto. As each of the assassins, while inhabiting the world of the American limbo, retain who they are in their historic time it is hard to find a collective economic environment in which to place the musical.

Zangara lived in a bad economic environment according to history (Donovan 155). As mentioned in the first chapter, he was not only born to a poor family but also tried to assassinate Roosevelt during the depression. This, however, is not mentioned in the musical. Economic difficulty is more attributed to the character of Czolgosz

(Sondheim 17). Good economic status is not mentioned at all. This makes sense because the story is from the point of view of the assassins and they would not focus on the good in the world but only the devastation in the world that is driving them to kill. It seems that money may have been part of the motivations some assassinations perhaps, but it is not what Sondheim and Weidman wanted to focus on. Zangara's motivations are connected to his lack of financial security which is directly in line with his anger of being denied an education. In this way, for Zangara, economic status is very important to him. Although money does not seem to be important in this world that the assassins inhabit so it does not become a focused issue for every character it is important to recognize that for some characters it is a large part of their motivating force.

Again, this musical deals with various times in America's history and it would be difficult to deal with the economic environment of each time period in order to have a cohesive musical. In order to make a cohesive world in can be decided that the economic conditions are poor for the assassins as a whole.

Another aspect to look at is the political environment. This is an interesting idea to look at with this musical. As the assassins are taking aim at United States Presidents, it could be said that the show is overtly political. However, politics do not seem to be the real motivation factor for the assassination attempts as much as the government as a whole. The assassins are unsatisfied with the way in which the government is being run regardless of the particular politics of the time. In looking at the government as a whole one is able to find cohesiveness in the musical rather than actual politics of individual people. It may be better to say that the capitalist system is to blame for the. Zangara blatantly blames capitalists. Therefore, instead of blaming a particular set of politics it

could be thought of as the ideals of the government is what drove the assassins' motivations.

In what is said in the libretto, Zangara's motivation is not political government but instead his stomach. In the song "Another National Anthem", Zangara states, "I did it because my belly was on fire..." (Sondheim 57) In the electric chair he also blames the rich for his stomach pain (Sondheim 20), and announces that he is willing to kill the person he feels is in charge, no matter who that might be. "Roosevelt, Hoover – No make no difference. You think I care who I kill, I no care who I kill, as long as it's king!" (Sondheim 21).

The only assassin who expressly seems to be politically motivated is Booth, "I did it to bring down the government of Abraham Lincoln and to avenge the ravaged South..." (Sondheim 56). The motivations and political climate is so different from character to character that it is difficult to glean any sort of political environment that would be all encompassing to the musical as a whole. Therefore, though politics in this musical are important, a singular political environment cannot be determined aside from the idea that these characters feel that their government has wronged them in some way. Perhaps what could be said is that the government takes the place of a bully and therefore the political environment can be deemed hostile and uncaring.

Zangara's own political belief is one of leadership. He hated capitalism and blamed the capitalist government for not helping the poor. Therefore, as mentioned before, he would target the leader of any group that would seem to be of a capitalist nature and kept the poor down. This led Zangara to his threat to kill any "king" as he said, but what he really looked to kill was the leader of the capitalists. It can be

determined that the capitalist ideals held by the government define the political nature in which these characters live.

There is a distinct lack of religious environment throughout the musical. Although Guiteau has a strong belief in religion (Sondheim 47), the rest of the characters have no proclaimed religious standing that is stated from the libretto. Zangara does not mention religion at all. It is known that he did not believe in a god or religion in his real life (Donovan 155), and is not assigned one in the musical. Perhaps the lack of religion is what is most important here.

Religion seems to give the world order and these characters, and this musical, function out of an accepted world order. Therefore, the lack of religion enhances the ideas that life is not laid out and the notion of “normal” does not hold sway in the world of the musical.

The previous action of the musical relies on each of the characters past. As discussed in the first chapter, Zangara had a troubled childhood full of physical misfortune, hard labor, and abuse. He was not allowed to have an education. He suffered from a stomach ailment from the time he was very young that was attributed to the hard physical labor which he had endured. He immigrated to America and was forced to join a union and become a citizen which angered him. The depression seemed to have not only hurt his employment opportunities, but made him sort of a wanderer.

The libretto denotes this in Zangara’s song “How I Saved Roosevelt”, “When I am a boy, no school. I work in a ditch, no chance. The smart and the rich ride by, don’t give no glance. Ever since then because of them, I have a sickness in the stomach...” and later “Zangara have nothing, no luck, no girl, Zangara [sic] no smart [sic] no school...”

(Sondheim 20-22). These back stories are important to denote as it seems to drive them onto a solitary road that leads them to the American limbo in which they are able to inhabit and become a singular force.

The given circumstance of this musical sheds light on the world in which it is taking place. From the American limbo that encompasses time and space into a singular plane of existence. This plane could be described as constantly being in the present. Things are happening in the present moment. The geographical location and dates do not matter as much as the actions that are being carried out. Although economics and politics are the drive for some of the characters it is hard to delineate a collective economic and political environment for the world that is being presented. The lack of religion relates to a lack of order in the world, physically as well as socially. The previous action must be considered by each character to understand what has brought them together and what is driving them towards the act of assassination.

After an understanding of the character's world has been determined, it is important for an actor to carefully analyze the script in order to fully understand the character's objectives both in the play as well as in each scene. This starts with an understanding the form and style of the musical, its dramatic structure, the major and minor conflicts within the musical as well as themes, symbols, images, and motifs. Following this is an in-depth character analysis that is specifically for the character of Zangara. This includes his objectives, physical attributes, social behavior, emotions, physicality, morals, and animal qualities, as well as whether or not the character changes throughout the course of the musical. Again these analyses will be directly involved with

Zangara and not with the other characters in the world. This will also take into account some of the historical context, when decisions are not delineated in the libretto.

It is important to first identify the form of the musical in order to fully understand the text. The form or genre of this musical can be called a “concept musical”. Stempel quotes Martin Gottfried, a New York theatre critic as defining the concept musical as

...a show whose music, lyrics, dance, stage movement and dialogue are woven through each other in the creation of the tapestry-like theme (rather than support from the plot). This has been a conscious development in a line of musicals that began with *West Side Story* (Gottfried, Stempel 517)

In other words the action on stage is woven together to create a story that does not rely on a traditional plot.

*Assassins* is this kind of musical. It is made of non-linear storytelling. The seemingly two well-known assassinations, Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy are connected through lesser known assassination attempts. The characters are based in history but are presented as characters instead of being presented as completely true to history. The fragmented storyline and over-the-top characterizations allow the audience to become more aware of the metaphor the musical is presenting rather than telling the audience a story. This allows for a greater theme to be presented instead of having the audience search for a meaning.

Zangara is a singular small character that is suffering from a stomach ache that was seemingly given to him by the hard labor he had to endure because he was poor and his family needed money. This same story could be applied to many other Americans who must work very hard in order to survive. The same feelings that Zangara feels may

not be too far away from what other people are feeling and audiences can relate to the feeling of being held down by their economic and social status. Therefore, Zangara's story is one that is still relevant today.

In thinking about the style of the musical it is important to remember that there are many definitions of style based in a variety of world and generational views. These styles have used different story telling devices as well as different acting styles (Deer 283-284). For the purpose of this musical one could use the geography of where the action is happening.

The style of the musical is uniquely American in which every song relates to an American musical theme that is engrained into the culture. Zangara's song "How I Saved Roosevelt" is based on the John Phillip Sousa march "El Capitan" (Sondheim 19). The theme of "Hail to the Chief" is presented in different styles to underscore what is happening on stage (Sondheim 5-6). By using decidedly American music, the audience is able to pick up clues that constantly remind them that they are this is an American story.

With the form in mind the actor can now begin to look at the musical as a whole and find the dramatic structure of it. This includes the protagonist, antagonist, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, as well as beginning and ending stasis. By identifying these, the actor can begin the process of building the character within the world that character is living.

The protagonist in this musical can be said to be the assassins. They are the characters who are fighting against obstacles to achieve an objective. Therefore, Zangara is a protagonist and wants to kill the President-Elect, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in order



to heal his stomach pain and release himself from the “bosses”, (Sondheim 57). Likewise the other characters want to kill a president in order get something that they are missing in their lives, or to improve their lives (Sondheim 56-58).

It can be determined that the antagonists are comprised of the societies in which these characters live. The assassins do not seem to be able to attain the American dream as others are because they live on the outskirts of their societies. They have deep needs that are not being met by their world. This world includes their government and the way in which society works.

Zangara looks at Roosevelt not as a direct threat but as the figure head of the government that is holding him down. Hoover is the president, and soon Roosevelt will take his place. “Roosevelt, Hoover – No make no difference” (Sondheim 21). Therefore the antagonist is not one person. The act of assassination seems to be more to make a statement and be heard than to truly right a wrong.

The beginning stasis of the musical is one of angst. The musical begins with the assassins in turmoil over their lives as described by the Proprietor (Sondheim 1-4). They are looking for a way to right their grievances and make a better life. The assassins seem to be lost and wondering until the Proprietor offers a way out.

The intrusion occurs within the opening song. The intrusion is what sets the action into motion. As each assassin is a protagonist the intrusion can be said to be the moment each gets their gun. Zangara wonders into limbo hurting but when The Proprietor presents him with his gun and the option to kill a president, Zangara finally has hope as well as an idea and the means to gain this hope (Sondheim 4).

By gaining their guns the assassins are able to set out on their personal journeys to attempt to right the wrongs they feel have been served them by their government. The rising action consists of them fighting and ultimately losing. Zangara attempts to shoot Roosevelt but instead kills the mayor of Chicago, Anton Cermak and is executed in the electric chair for this (Sondheim 19-23).

The climax comes when Lee Harvey Oswald assassinates President John F. Kennedy. The assassins, having lost their personal battles have gathered to plead Oswald to commit this act in order that they can find relief. As long as someone can connect to them and stand against the government, the assassins will still live instead of becoming, as Sara Jane Moore states, “footnotes in a history book” (Sondheim 77). As the assassins cheer him on, Oswald moves to the window and shoots. The assassins are connected and they have won (Sondheim 80).

The ending stasis is triumph. Though the assassins have returned to their place in limbo they have, through Oswald, had their voices heard. In the final song “Everybody’s Got the Right” the assassins convene to address the audience and urge them that “everybody’s got the right to their dreams” (Sondheim 88).

The Major conflict of this musical could be seen as man verses society. Man is embodied by the assassins and society is embodied by the world in which they live. In Zangara’s case, he is fighting the capitalist government that has physically wrecked his body by forcing him to do hard labor since the time he was a child. It also denied him an education. His fight then is to rid the world of this government by taking down its leader, or in this instance, the governments soon-to-be- leader.

Similar fights against the government are being fought by the other assassins as well. Booth wants to avenge the South (Sondheim 56), Czolgosz wants to fight against the power of men who have “so much service when other men have none” (Sondheim 56), Guiteau wants to “preserve the union” (Sondheim 57). Although others, such as Hinckley, want more personal things (Sondheim 56), they all see the government as their main obstacle. Somehow, by taking down the government all will be righted in the eyes of the assassins.

A minor conflict could be seen as man verses man or even man verses self. The characters are all struggling to connect to other people. For some, they are fighting for connection to other people in the world such as Sara Jane Moore and Lynnette Fromme (Sondheim 57), while others are drawn to assassination due to their own vanity or lack of self-confidence such as Hinckley (Sondheim 41).

Zangara shows his fight for connection in scene sixteen when he pleads with Oswald to assassinate Kennedy. Zangara is so full of passion that he can only speak in his native language, Italian. This idea of connecting to Oswald is furthered when the other assassins translate what Zangara is saying to Oswald. With his words Zangara not only connects to Oswald, but the other assassins as well (Sondheim 75-76).

These major and minor conflicts are the driving forces that lead the assassins to decide that assassination is the only effective way to fight.

The major theme of this musical can be said to be the idea of what it means to be an American. The assassins are not only social outcasts in their own time, but also in history. Their motivations that lead them to assassination come from real pain that is shared by others. The difference with these people, for people who have not tried to kill

a president, is that they have been pushed to the brink. It would seem easy to say that they are insane; however, their motivations come from a deep emotional sense to pursue the American dream.

Their American dream has been denied them and it is up to them to get a piece of the American dream by any way they can. They literally have another national anthem, like the song states, that does not glorify the free and brave but instead the people who have been lost on their paths. “If you can’t do what you want to then you do the things you can” (Sondheim 63). Zangara uses the only way he can think of in order to set his stomach at ease and improve his life. These characters have to find their own way, and their way is to assassinate the President in order to get to their dreams.

Symbols are used as physical representations of a greater idea (Carlson193). For instance the guns may symbolize hope for the assassins, but may strike fear in the audience. They are the means to the assassins’ ends. Although they are a tool used for the assassins to fulfill their intentions they are also a symbol of destruction. This juxtaposition of power and death carries on the theme of the extreme these characters will go through in order to achieve their goals. Zangara’s gun is his tool to use to bring down the capitalists but ultimately his own destroyer as he is executed for killing a man. As it destroyed the life of Anton Cermak, it also led to his own death.

Two more symbols that are important to Zangara are the buttermilk he drinks in the bar in scene three and the electric chair in scene four. The buttermilk symbolizes the constant pain in his stomach that is driving him to assassinate Roosevelt. While the other assassins drink alcohol he has to drink the buttermilk to sooth his stomach. Therefore a pleasurable activity such as drinking is denied him. The electric chair is not only a

symbol of death but, but of restraint. As Zangara sings to the audience about his reasons for trying to kill Roosevelt, he is being held back by the restraints of the chair. He is not able to fully move; instead he struggles against the restraints in order to tell his story. This struggle to be heard is the same struggle he has dealt with all his life.

Images are told to the audience instead of presented on stage (Ball 69). This musical uses them to tell the stories of the actual assassination attempts. The audience does not see Zangara stand and fire his but instead it is related to the audience through the Proprietor (Sondheim 19). Zangara also tells the audience of his horrible childhood (Sondheim 20), he also tells the audience about his lonely life as an adult.

The Balladeer relates many images as he tells the stories of Booth and Guiteau (Sondheim 8 and 47). Images are used to tell the audience many things about the assassins. Some images are left up to the imagination of the audience. Though Oswald fires while the assassins watch, the audience is not presented with Kennedy's death (Sondheim 80). This image is left to the imagination of the audience.

Motifs are sounds, words, images, that keep reappearing in order to further the ideas of the musical. Zangara and the other assassins insist on a prize in the opening song as well as in "Another National Anthem" (Sondheim 4 and 58). The prize is never defined for the audience but can be attributed to what the character wants. Zangara's prize is a healed stomach and a better world for the poorer classes.

Another motif is a musical one. "Hail to the Chief" is a melody synonymous with the United States President. It is played in a carnival style at the beginning of the show (Sondheim 1), again at a much faster pace before Booth assassinates Lincoln (Sondheim 7) and once again after Oswald assassinates Kennedy, only this time as a funeral dirge

(Sondheim 80). This musical motif is always played around Zangara and the other assassins. This very American music conjures the idea of the Presidency and what it means. The three different styles seem to keep the idea of the president and America in the audiences mind while commenting on the situation it is being played in. The musical theme of “El Capitan” plays throughout Zangara’s song. This motif seems to “rub in” Zangara’s failure.

After the world the character lives in has been discovered as well as the style of the play has been fully understood, the actor can start to build the character that he/she will portray in this world. This analysis includes the characters wants, physicality, social and emotional behavior. This is where the details of building the character are filled in.

It is important to start with the super objective or main goal of the character. Zangara’s main goal is to assassinate a president in order to heal his stomach. Zangara wants to assassinate President-Elect Roosevelt in order for his stomach to be healed and his life to improve. It is important to remember that he wants to assassinate “a” president and not one in particular. As quoted before, Zangara did not care if the president he assassinated was Roosevelt or Hoover, just as long as it was the top guy. By being rid of the president, Zangara would be able to change the world and make it better for the lower classes as well as him. Though the plan fails on Roosevelt he still has the hope of Oswald shooting Kennedy and bringing down the government, even if it is not his own time.

The libretto describes Zangara’s physicality as tiny and that he often clutches his stomach, (Sondheim 3). This makes sense in historical context. As mentioned in the first chapter, Zangara was not quite 5’1 and was very skinny. His stomach was a trouble to

him throughout his life and therefore the idea of him clutching his stomach is well founded. The actor can use this information in order to find a center for the characters physicality which will inform the way the character moves, and walks.

Looking at social behavior helps the actor inform choices on how will react to others on stage. Throughout the musical, Zangara does not socialize or speak out to many people. He does speak to Booth in the third scene when Booth urges him to assassinate Roosevelt (Sondheim 18). This is an interesting interaction because, as discussed in chapter 1, when Zangara was packing his bag, before his assassination attempt, he packed a newspaper-clipping of Roosevelt's schedule that included a small article about Booth. In this article, a death threat letter from Booth to Lincoln had been found.

It is as if Booth was urging Zangara to assassinate Roosevelt in history as well as in the musical. The only other time he speaks to another character in the musical is when he tries to convince Oswald to kill Kennedy (Sondheim 75). Again, this is on the request of Booth. He is so impassioned that he cannot express himself in English and must instead speak in his native Italian. This suggests that not only is he not a social person, but also that he has trouble expressing himself like everyone else which may be part of the reason for his solitude.

Social behavior can be linked to emotional or psychological behavior. As pointed out in the first chapter, Zangara was a quiet mousy person. Although he was angry he never was one to express his anger. In the musical he is written to be a more bombastic character than he was in real life. This may reference the historical cartoon image that was painted of him in the papers after the assassination attempt. It would seem to be

rather boring to have a character on stage that was as mousy as Zangara was in real life and that also may be the reason for creating his character in such a bombastic way.

In the musical he is demanding. He does not ask for his gun/prize in the first scene with the Proprietor, but instead demands it (Sondheim 4). When Zangara is strapped to the electric chair, his anger is allowed to come flooding through. This is his one chance to try to tell the world why he tried to kill Roosevelt (Sondheim 20). Although he could be played as insane, it is important that an actor does not go right to insanity.

As discussed in the first chapter Zangara was not insane and to play him as such, could disconnect him from the audience. He is a deeply passionate man as seen in his pleading to Oswald (Sondheim 75). His emotions are deep and very real but he does not show them to too many people. This may have to do with his social behavior as well. It seems he just does not trust too many people and therefore stays away unless his passionate emotions are called upon.

As already mentioned there is no indication of his being religious in the script. It has also been discussed in the first chapter that he did not believe in any sort of god. This aside, it does seem that he has an understanding of right and wrong. Although he tried to assassinate a president there is still an understanding of justice. He sings, from the electric chair about how he has been wronged and is now being killed for trying to right that wrong. It is in the fact that no one cares about his death that Zangara could think that if he were perhaps a capitalist he would have had people care more about him, no matter how many poor people he stepped on. "And why there no photographers? For Zangara no photographers! Only capitalists get photographers! No right," (Sondheim 23). Although he has committed a terrible act, he can only see what has been done to him and



how he is still being ignored. He believes that all people should be equal. He believes in justice for wrongs done to him and other people. He believes in the rights of Americans and stands for equal rights for all Americans based on the American fact alone and not on political party (Sondheim 22). Therefore, it can be said, that Zangara does have morals, they just may seem a bit skewed due to the way he fought for him.

Zangara does get to change by the end of the show. Although he is unsuccessful at assassinating Roosevelt he is successful, along with the other assassins, in convincing Oswald to assassinate Kennedy. In this Zangara has won. There is no note in the libretto to denote this but Zangara sings one solo line in the final song, “Anybody can prevail” (Sondheim 86). In this line the word anybody refers to himself. He prevailed; it may be in a round-about way, but because of Zangara and the other assassins their voices were finally heard.

In talking about the productions specifics I, the author, will converse about this in first person as this production will be specific to me. There are many things I will be asked to do in this production that will be challenging. This includes specifics to my own performance and techniques that I must work on in order to play the character.

There are a few problems that I am anticipating. My voice type is baritone, which is a lower male voice, and Zangara is written for a tenor. Zangara must sing notes that sit in a break in my range. This means that the high notes are in a place in my vocal range that comes between my head voice and chest voice. Although I can sing these notes I normally have to change my chest voice to my head voice in a very short amount of space. In “How I Saved Roosevelt”, there are some big high/low switches that are

sometimes difficult to sing in a clear tone when negotiating between the two vocal registers.

Having spent the majority of my theatrical training in dance and movement I am trained to express myself with my body. In this musical, as Zangara, my biggest emotional moment of the show has me strapped to an electric chair. I will need to find other ways of expressing myself, as well as work on new ways to move my body. His physicality is also much smaller due to his slight height. It will be difficult for me to find new ways of moving and expressing.

I also will have to learn a monologue in Italian and I must be able to deliver it as if I was speaking my native language. I will be working with dialect CDs and books, to learn how to affect an authentic Italian accent. That hopefully will help me with that the actual Italian that I must speak.

Luckily the technical elements, for my character seem quite easy. I do have to be electrocuted. I will be in my chair and I will be flooded with white light from below and behind me, while smoke covers me as well. With this effect, the audience should barely be able to see me as I die. This will be fun to work with. Also, I will be carrying and pointing a gun, and must do that with conviction. I have handled guns before, but never hand guns. This will be an interesting tool to learn.

Approaching this role is one of the hardest things I have had to figure out as an actor. This role is terrifying. I feel that it will be difficult to honor Sondheim and Weidman's play and keep the figure as historically accurate as possible. Although I realize this is a character and not a true representation of the real man, I still feel it is important that I do justice to the role and to the person.

From studying the man I have gained an understanding for him and want to appropriately portray him within the context of Sondheim and Weidman's musical. Therefore whenever possible I will be using as much historical context as I can when my questions about him cannot be answered by the libretto. I will be attempting to find ways to play him as honestly as possible. It is in playing him honestly; truly pursuing his objectives that justice will be served to the character and the man.

In this chapter, the spine of the play or story has been discussed along with the aspects of the musical as well. In the given circumstances it was made clear that the action happening on stage is more important than historical time-lines or geographic location. What matters is the motivation force behind each assassin and what each of the assassins has gone through previous to the beginning of this musical in order to be motivated to assassinate the President.

The genre and style of the musical has been defined and analyzed as well as the dramatic structure, conflicts, themes, images, symbols and motifs. These help color the world in which the character will function. An analysis of the character of Zangara was discussed in order to find a way into him and bring him to life. Finally production aspects of the production I will be portraying Zangara in were discussed in order to solidify what I would need to prepare for going in. The next chapter will be a reflection of my process and outcome of my performance.

### CHAPTER III: REFLECTION

In this thesis I have analyzed the historical context of Giuseppe Zangara, his musical world, as well as the character. I have also had the opportunity to portray him in the University of North Dakota's production of *Assassins*. This final chapter will function as a reflection to the work of the previous two chapters as well as my performance, this chapter will be written in first person and take into account my own personal thoughts and observations. It will serve as a reflection of my experience from rehearsals and performance. I will discuss what I thought went well, what did not go well, and things I would do differently if I were to ever have the opportunity to perform this role again. I will also discuss responses from the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival respondent as well as our director, Emily Cherry.

*Assassins* was an absolute thrill to perform. This is a musical that does not seem to be done often. I surmise that this is not only because of the controversial nature of a musical that glorifies American assassins but also because of how difficult the show is musically and dramatically. The concept musical is a challenge because of the lack of a conventional through-line plot and the music is very difficult to sing.

Performing the role of Giuseppe Zangara was one of the most difficult roles I have ever portrayed. The music, the constraint of my body, as well as the Italian dialect and language were difficult technical aspects to work on in order to create an honest performance. This was made more difficult by my own insecurities about playing the role. It is important that an actor goes into a role with a sense of confidence. This was

not always the case with my work on Zangara. It was my director who helped me to find my way into the character and help me find the confidence to play him.

I would like to begin with discussing what I thought went well with my performance. As mentioned this role was very difficult for me, however, I feel that I was able to triumph over some of these difficulties. One of the challenges of this role was the physicality of the role. There are no real clues to his physical movement in the libretto and therefore I had to use what I learned from my historical research in order to give him a physical life.

Finding a physical life for characters I play is an important part of my own creative process. I spent most of my training as an actor, not only in musical theatre, but more specifically, as a dancer in musical theatre. This extensive dance training has made me a physical performer. That being said, when I approach a role, my first clue to creating the character is to find and create the physicality.

In my research I discovered that Zangara was a quiet man who kept mostly to himself. There were no specific mannerisms discussed and therefore I took this quietness and thought about it in terms of physicality. I tried to find ways that would keep my energy low in my body and controlled. I attempted to keep my legs slightly apart, but not in a wide stance. This kept my body in a relaxed state. I did not want to slump my shoulders and appear weak so I kept my torso upright and carried my head with my chin angled down a little further than I normally would. This again was not to make the character look weak, just small. By this slight relaxed stance, my personal energy was drawn inward. Drawing the energy inward makes an actor more subdued, and therefore smaller.

It would be easy for an actor to make Zangara look weak instead of small and quiet. Zangara does not have a lot of dialogue or much of a written character arc; therefore if he is played with too little energy in his scenes with the other assassins he is likely to get lost. For instance, in scene sixteen, when the characters appear in the Texas School Book Depository, Zangara could get lost in the group. The other assassins are more vocal in this scene. His most vocal moment comes when Zangara steps forward and pleads with Lee Harvey Oswald. Although he does not have much dialogue before this he still needs to have a presence about him that makes his plea honest and believable. A plea for a person to kill a president cannot come from a weak character. The character must have some credibility that could be lost if he appeared weak.

I did not want him to become a weak character. He was just quiet. There seems to me to be a danger in portraying quiet characters. When actors are too quiet on stage they do not seem to be acting anymore but hiding. This was a fear of mine. The trick was in being present. A person who is quiet usually seems to be carefully listening and observing. In order to keep Zangara present I needed to be actively listening and reacting to everything that was happening on stage. Since he was very present in every scene he was in, he was able to observe and only contribute when he felt the need to. In analyzing when he chose to contribute I was able to find his objectives in each scene. In this I was able to find the fine line of keeping Zangara quiet and yet not weak by finding his objectives and fighting for them. In short, I let him speak for himself.

I also thought that I was successful in executing the Italian dialect. A dialect book and CD was provided for me. The book helped but I learned it mostly by listening to the CD. I have an ear for accents or dialects and it was easy for me to pick it up by just

listening and repeating. One thing that really helped with this was that much of Zangara's dialogue seems to be written in broken English. For instance, when Zangara proclaims, "I want prize. You gimme prize!" (Sondheim 4), you can hear the broken English. By leaving out the word "a" between "want" in the first sentence and "prize" or "gimme" and "prize" in the second sentence, the language becomes foreign and creates its own rhythm. Although the accent was a little scary to perform, there was a fear that it would sound contrived, it was something that I became confident in the more I spoke in it.

Although I do not feel that any part of my performance was not clear, I felt that aspects of my performance could have been more solid. This pertains to my solo song and monologue which was in Italian. Although I think I was able to portray them well, I also think that there were some aspects of these moments that did not come to completion.

Zangara's song, "How I Saved Roosevelt" is the highest song I have ever had to sing in a musical. I knew from the time I was cast that this would be the biggest challenge I would have with the role. In preparation for this I started taking voice lessons during the rehearsal period. These lessons were originally designed to coach me on this particular song; they turned into regular voice lessons. I needed to learn how to use my head voice with this song. I also needed to learn how to connect my chest voice with my head voice so I could sing the intervals without hurting my voice. Unfortunately, I do not think I knew how difficult this song would be and I feel that I started my coaching too late to be as effective as they could have been. Although I was executing the technique in rehearsal, in performance I had a hard time connecting what I was doing in my lesson

with the acting element. In order to use a vocal technique in performance, it needs to be learned so well that the singer does not have to think about it. I did not have the time to master this technique and therefore when I began to act my old vocal techniques came back.

In order to master a technique it needs to be honed until it is second nature. Without the sufficient time of identifying the technique and practicing it, it became very difficult to apply it. Although I do not feel that my song was poorly performed, it was pointed out to me by my voice teacher that I had “re-written” some of the melody to make it work in my voice. I had not realized this. When I began singing the song I was more focused on playing my objectives and communicating than I was on my vocal technique. Even though some of my vocal technique was used most of it was dropped when I began to perform.

The other part of my performance that I think was lacking in preparation was my Italian monologue. I used internet sites such as google.com and listened to the way they were pronounced. One thing that I did not do was ask anyone to rehearse it with me. I wish I had done this because without another person it took me longer to find the rhythm of the monologue, and that made the memorization of it take longer. Although I read it every day and studied on my own I did not get the chance to say it out loud. This lack of speaking made the monologue harder to perform in rehearsal, but easy to forget and impossible to time with the dialogue that was happening underneath it.

While Zangara begs Oswald to kill John F. Kennedy in his native language of Italian, the other assassins translate what he is saying to English. This moment shows the solidarity of the assassins working as one force. Although I received many compliments



on my monologue, I felt that it was never timed well enough and I felt that, although I tried to play my objective, I was so focused on getting the words out that the acting was not as complete as I feel it could have been.

If I had the opportunity to do this role again, there are many things I would do differently; most of these pertain mostly to my voice. I would start the process of vocal coaching as soon as I could, instead of waiting until rehearsals began. I would also carefully go through the Italian monologue and make sure I was speaking it out loud every day to someone who could help me and therefore have the time with the cast to time the other dialogue and make it a synthesized dramatic moment.

Throughout the first two chapters of this thesis I spoke of the importance of honoring both the historical figure of Giuseppe Zangara as well as the Sondheim and Weidman's character. Having now performed the musical I feel that does not need to be a main goal for an actor performing this character. I realize now that Sondheim and Weidman did do justice to the historical figure with the character they created. As I began this process, a cerebral part of my creative process kept telling me I had to play Zangara as he was in history. This began to feel more and more unnecessary the more I worked on the Zangara and realized that, although this character was a fictional account of him as a man, it was still a truthful account. Sondheim and Weidman created the character from Zangara's historical context and presented him in a new way, which is what is important. Therefore, where I to portray this character again, although I would still do historical research, I would trust Sondheim and Weidman's work immediately instead of question their creation.

In this production my research helped inform choices in objectives as well as props. In one instance our director wanted to give each assassin a prop that connects to their character. These props would be given to the assassins when they were given their guns. When the director was stumped on what to give Zangara I found, through my historical research, that Zangara plotted the assassination attempt through reading newspapers on what the event at Bay Front Park would entail including Roosevelt's arrival, where he would give his speech, and where he would depart. As stated in the first chapter, when the police raided Zangara's apartment, after the assassination attempt, they found such a newspaper clipping in his travel bag. When I told the director this, she decided The Proprietor would give me a newspaper clipping with my gun. This not only gave me a prop but also helped my motivation in the first scene when The Proprietor not only handed me the means to make my stomach better, the gun, but also the target that would cure me, Roosevelt.

A terrifying aspect of this show is how it will be received. The show itself is not political, but deals with issues such as the civil war, economic hardships, and classism. These issues seem to have a political twist to them. In the conservative environment of the greater community of Grand Forks, North Dakota, it was a constant question in my mind if the audience would be open to this musical. I was surprised at the positive response we received from our audiences. Months later, people still spoke highly about the show and how it left them with questions about how far they would have to be pushed in order to become a potential assassin.

I was most nervous for the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival respondent to critique our show. This musical carries very strong feelings and people can

derive very different meanings from it. These meanings are very seldom the same. Our respondent was very enthusiastic about the show. In fact he did not have a negative criticism.

He spoke to each actor and designer and was very enthusiastic about the work that had been done. He was also impressed with the ensemble acting. For myself, in particular, he asked me to speak in my normal voice. He said he appreciated that I had a natural Italian accent that was not overdone for laughs or stereotypes. This was a testament to my good feelings about the work I did. He never mentioned anything negative about the production or my performance which was a nice validation to the work I had done.

The director of the production was a great help in realizing the ideas that I had in conjunction with the production. One thing that helped the most was portraying the stomach ache. Having had many stomach pains in my personal life I understood what it felt like but was lost on how to honestly portray it on stage. I searched youtube.com in order to see other people; however I kept coming up with stomach pains that were caused by an outside influence. The director spoke to me in terms of being in such pain that the character would not want anything to touch it. This also helped in reviewing what I learned from historical research. Zangara claimed that everything hurt his stomach. Wine, weather, and hard work all made him feel worse. This helped with physicalizing Zangara. I seldom used sudden movements and walked in a way that my stomach felt dislocated from my body.

Another physical thing that the director helped me accomplish was that of being restrained in the electric chair. The director helped me with ideas of using my head,

shoulders, and torso to help physicalize the objective of telling Zangara's story. In giving me ideas she also gave me the permission to explore and play. This resulted in my body being able to connect to what I was singing and a fully realized character could be portrayed on stage.

It seems cliché to think of an actor's need for motivation, but the director was there to help keep me in the context of the musical as a whole. One piece of advice that she gave me that helped motivate my actions on stage and keep me in the world with the other characters was the pain Zangara is in. She told me once to remember that Zangara's stomach motivates his anger which in turn makes the pain worse. This small piece of clarity helped me to realize his movement on stage. Zangara has the least amount of stage-time of the assassins and therefore I was left alone during much of the rehearsal process. That being stated, these small tidbits that the director could give me gave me a place to come from while playing and working with the character.

The greatest piece of advice from the director that helped keep me in the world of the play was when she reminded us that each scene is happening now. There is no past and no future in this world, there is only the present. This helped to motivate my character's wants and pick strong objectives to fight for in each scene. This stasis we were all in was ongoing and we had nothing to live for but the moment. This helped me realize the importance of each scene and why Zangara needed to be there.

Many friends and family members came to see the show and told me that after seeing the show, they left with questions about their ideas of the American Dream, what makes a person commit terrible acts and how they felt bad that they sometimes rooted for the assassins. This was one of our director's goals and, indeed, one of mine. I wanted

people to walk out questioning what could drive a person to commit an act of assassination and question if they could ever be driven to it. It was important for me that the audience saw the assassins as people and not as something evil and I think that goal was accomplished.

Throughout this thesis I have looked at the man Giuseppe Zangara, discussed the musical Assassins, defined a world and created a fictional character based on him. This process has been both exciting and frustrating. There seems to me to be a responsibility when an actor is portraying any non-fictional character. As actors we are often telling the stories of people who never had the chance to tell their own stories. This is the challenge of playing a role such as Zangara. That is why it is important to trust the musicals writers. Through them an actor can become a vessel to let the story of a downtrodden man like Giuseppe Zangara be heard.

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