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RUNAWAYS - THEN AND NOW
**A COMPARISON OF THE 1978 ORIGINAL NEW YORK PRODUCTION AND
THE 1992 UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA PRODUCTION**

A Thesis Equivalent Project

Presented to the

Department of Dramatic Arts

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Dan P. Hays

July 1993

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THESIS EQUIVALENT PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with Elizabeth Swados's musical, Runaways. The original production was performed in New York City in 1978 after a ten month long workshop where actual runaways were interviewed and their stories recorded for later use in the production. The musical was a surprise hit, even though the reviews were mixed. It was successful, at least in part, because of its departure from what is normally expected of a musical. Following the influences of such musicals as A Chorus Line and Hair, Runaways was one of the original "concept musicals" which began to flourish in the 1970s. This musical was different than the more well known hits of Rodgers and Hammerstein because: it had no "book;" it was more serious in nature than most popular musicals; it contained an eclectic mixture of music, ranging from reggae to blues to country; it used a combination of professional young actors and real runaway teenagers; and it was an ensemble approach, meaning that the monologues and songs were not connected by a storyline, but rather the connection was the cast themselves.

In order to keep the vitality of the original performance, the script, which would seem quite dated to a contemporary audience, had to be revised. The original script includes references to events and people that would have been in the headlines in 1978, but would appear to be historical references in a modern setting. Several options were possible in order to make this script work: to place the action in 1978 and create a period piece; to place the show in a completely different time period and rewrite dialogue and song lyrics to be appropriate; to update the script and make the references current to 1992; or to disregard time altogether. In the UNO production, a completely different method

was employed. The village of runaways was comprised of troubled young people from different decades extending from the 1950s to the present. This time setting, where people from different times were allowed to interact, proved to be a technique that brought some of the innovativeness back into the dated script. Although the simultaneity of time was not clearly evident to audience members, the importance of this technique was felt in the process and was responsible for the production's final shape.

This thesis is a comparison of the two productions--the 1978 original production in New York and the 1992 production at the University of Nebraska at Omaha--with a special emphasis on the technique of juxtaposing characters from various time periods. There is a detailed examination of the original production compiled from research and from a viewing of a videotaped performance of the original Broadway company. The design elements, the directorial concepts, and the cast composition of both productions are carefully analyzed.

The UNO production is examined as to the rehearsal process, the evolution of the production from auditions to performance, the design elements, the development of character histories, and the influences, especially of Brecht, Artaud, and Meyerhold, on the directing choices. Overall, the UNO production was successful in finding an innovative approach to the script which remained true to the original, yet, through the use of characters with similar problems but from different time periods, was expanded to more of a universal theme.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1978 Elizabeth Swados opened a new musical on Broadway which was innovative, energetic and dealt with issues often seen on the nightly news but seldom used as the subject matter for musical theatre. The groundbreaking musical was entitled Runaways. The reviews on this show were mixed--ranging from contempt to fascination and even exuberance. Mel Gussow in his New York Times review called Runaways "a triumph. It is an eloquent and mature vision."¹ Jack Kroll in Newsweek gave a glowing review saying: "To call [Runaways] far and away the best musical of the season is to insult it."² However, Edwin Wilson in the Wall Street Journal complained that it was "too much of a one-note play"³ and Douglas Watt in the New York Daily News said "[Runaways] certainly has its moments, but the show still strikes me as an overlong graduate production by the sociology department of a well-endowed university."⁴ Julius Novick, the critic from The Village Voice, mirrors my observation of the original production by stating: "the show lacks moments of burning glass intensity, of surprise, of discovery. . . . [It is] less than a complete success, but it is more than mere good intention."⁵ It is clearly evident that the intention of Runaways was to confront the issue of young people's troubled lives in a manner that made the audience think and feel without abandoning the idea of entertainment.

As a final project for my master's degree program in Dramatic Arts, I chose to direct Elizabeth Swados's Runaways. Trying to reach an audience through the messages inherent in this dramatic work and make this audience confront relevant social problems was not a primary objective for me at the outset. However, as I worked on this project, and as the stories became more than just dialogue on the pages, the awful truths of the runaways'

worlds became more and more important to the cast and to me. I would be hesitant to say I directed this musical because I wanted to make a political statement or expose social injustices of the world. I did find as rehearsals progressed, however, that I wanted each audience member to reflect on this world that is so very unfamiliar to most of us--a world of abuse that exists and which seems to be increasing.

This paper examines the reasons that led me to this project and the influences that played a part of my direction. Included is a description of the particular processes used in rehearsal, their effectiveness, and how I envision this experience will influence my subsequent work. Most important, Elizabeth Swados's original production, compiled from research and from a viewing of the original production on videotape in Lincoln Center's Performing Arts Library in New York City, is carefully examined and detailed. I compare and contrast the New York and UNO productions, examining concepts, production elements and directing choices. A detailed examination demonstrates the specific differences that resulted from the time setting for each production.

First, I would like to defend my choice of projects. I have a strong desire to become as knowledgeable about the American musical theatre experience as possible. My undergraduate degrees are in Vocal Music Performance and in Theater, and my main source of income is as a professional choreographer. My resume is quite extensive, and I can list most of the well-known musical theatre productions as credits. I have served as musical director, choreographer, actor, orchestra member, and director for nearly all the "tried and true" musicals of the twentieth century. I have been involved in the production of many of the lesser known musicals as well, and have even played the title role of a world premiere musical entitled Geech The Moosical.

I have done nineteen different productions of Godspell alone. I toured Oklahoma and The Music Man for almost a year, performing both over 100 times during that tour.

For obvious reasons, I felt it was important that my final project should be a musical, but I had little interest in doing another musical which afforded me few challenges. I was also interested in expanding my circle of experiences as a director. I felt that directing another of the Rodgers and Hammerstein or Jule Styne musicals would limit the possibilities to explore in and experiment with new directions. Therefore I searched for a musical that was not as well-known or commonly produced as those mentioned above. The criteria I set for choosing my project were: 1) the play would need to provide a directing challenge; 2) the play would need to provide a chance for creative thinking; 3) the play should offer a chance to work outside familiar boundaries (i.e. Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals); 4) the script should favor an ensemble approach; and 5) the play should involve music in some manner--either as a musical, or as a play that utilizes music in some manner.

Many scripts were considered, and eventually I pared my list down to four plays which met these criteria. I submitted proposals for these final four possibilities, detailing the challenges each play afforded me: The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940, A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine, Doonesbury, and Runaways. The faculty at UNO approved my first choice, Runaways. I found it to be the most challenging of all the scripts considered. It is a musical which requires a strong directorial approach. The script is very skeletal and the stage directions are very vague and often confusing. For example, the script is divided into sections which I call "episodes" and each is given a specific title. Episode number three is entitled "PARENT/KID DANCE." The script reads as follows:

(All--sing "aaaah" through end of running line. masked dancers [Lazar, Deidre, Nikki] U. S. on platform, company enters, dances, then forms running line U. S.)

LAZAR. (Exit U. L. --Jackie'Paula exit U. R. --Manny.)
 Faster! (All run in place faster.)
 Faster! (Reach arms overhead.)
 HELP!

No other directions are offered to help explain the purpose of this episode. The musical score does not offer any more insight than the script. This is just one example of several cryptic scenes which the director must decode and make comprehensible.

Runaways was designed as a "concept musical" in the 1970s. Like A Chorus Line and Hair, the author compiled a group of unrelated stories, monologues and songs, and used an ensemble to string them all together. Unlike other "book musicals," there is really no connecting storyline. It was clear that a director's vision was necessary to mount this production and I found the challenge of coming up with creative and innovative ways to direct Ms. Swados's script quite appealing. This, then, satisfied three of the criteria: it provided a directing challenge; it demanded creative thinking; and it was written for an ensemble approach.

The last criteria were fulfilled by Runaways through Elizabeth Swados's powerful musical score. This musical was definitely outside of my familiar boundaries. The music provided an extra challenge because it is uncoventional, eclectic, and outside the realm of safe territories for a trained musician like myself. The score includes a mixture of reggae, disco, country western, punk, folk, soul, rap and popular rock music. At the outset I made the decision to steer away

from choreography and the tricks of the musical trade which I have immodestly adopted. All of these challenges were extremely exciting and at the same time almost completely unsettling.

The main directing challenge was to provide an entertaining, yet thought-provoking, production which would force spectators (and performers) to confront some uncomfortable issues without delivering a sermon or evoking guilt. Runaways is basically an outpouring of stories, mostly true, from homeless children and teenagers, told through sketch, monologue and song. I felt the script had many powerful images and haunting stories that needed to be heard. There is an important message about the hardships that make a young person leave his home and family contained in this play. The messages embodied in these young peoples' stories were very topical in 1978, and yet I found these same messages to be equally as topical in 1992. This thought proved to be a guiding force in the final form of my production.

Most of the references in this extremely dated script--Son of Sam, Patty Hearst, etc.--were contemporary in 1978. However, without these specific references, the stories of these runaways could have conceivably come from an orphan in 1911, a "rebel without a cause" in the late 1950s, or one of the boys in the workhouse gang in Oliver Twist's time. I discovered that the story of the runaway belonged to no particular era. This thought led me to another challenge: creating a venue, with dated material, which would speak to an audience in 1992--an audience that would be comprised of members of several generations.

In my early work on the script, I came to the conclusion that I could not direct the show in the same style Elizabeth Swados had used in 1978. My choices were: to direct the show and place the action in 1978, retaining all dialogue as written; to place the show in another time period (i.e. 1850 or

1911) and rewrite the dialogue and music to fit; to disregard time altogether; or to update the script to 1992. I finally decided in order to fulfill all of my objectives, I needed to express the idea that the situations and surroundings of the runaway have changed throughout the years, but the reasons young people have run away have essentially remained the same. For this reason I chose to create a setting in which characters from several different decades could interact. This juxtaposition of eras, which I call the "simultaneity of time element," provided many challenges and proved to be a major influence on the final project. It allowed me to present Ms. Swados's material in a way which kept the vitality and the essence of the original work, and at the same time, incorporate the idea of the timelessness of the runaways' worlds. It was my intention that the production of Runaways in 1992 would be, like the original, presented through a nontraditional and innovative approach to directing. I also maintained an objective to make the rehearsal process as important as the finished product. This challenging project certainly succeeded in providing a fertile testing arena for my directing skills.

The creative force behind the original production was Elizabeth Swados. In order to decipher her script and translate it to a 1992 stage, I found it necessary to discover as much about the author/composer/director as possible. I discovered immediately that Ms. Swados is a young, innovative theatre practitioner who utilizes her many diverse talents. She does not like to be categorized as a composer, as that comprises just one of her many facets of creative output. She directs, writes children's books, scores films, choreographs, and often performs in the orchestra of her own musicals. Ms. Swados has an interesting background which includes working with such impressive theatre personnel as Andrei Serban, Peter Brook, and Joseph Papp. Mel Gussow, in his New York Times review

proclaimed that she had stepped "right into the front line of American theatrical composers" with her production of Runaways.⁶ Chapter Two gives an in-depth examination of Elizabeth Swados and her 1978 production of Runaways. I also explain the elements of the original production as I saw them on an archival videotaped performance housed in New York City's Performing Arts Library. Through my research I found that some important observations could be made about Ms. Swados's concepts, influences, and her original purposes in creating Runaways. This background information had direct and indirect influences on my own production.

A comprehensive account of my own production is detailed in Chapter Three, including my original concept, the final product, and the creative path that took me from the former to the latter. In addition, the obstacles I encountered, their resolutions, and the rehearsal techniques and research used in my directing approach are examined.

Finally, Chapter Four gives a comprehensive analysis comparing and contrasting the two different productions. Several influential elements, especially the simultaneity of time setting, were less successful or, at the very least, different than I had originally envisioned them. I explore the effects of the successful as well as the unsuccessful elements of the 1978 and 1992 productions. In a summary of the entire experience I include some important observations and evaluations made by audience members, adjudicators, cast members, and faculty advisors. A comparison is then drawn on the different approaches to topical situations employed by Ms. Swados and me in our respective productions and the ways in which each production spoke to its contemporary audience.

NOTES

- ¹ Mel Gussow, "Whither Youth," New York Times 10 March 1978: C-3.
- ² Jack Kroll, "Babes Up in Arms," Newsweek 27 March 1978.
- ³ Edwin Wilson, "Runaways," Wall Street Journal 30 March 1978.
- ⁴ Douglas Watt, "'Runaways' is a hard kiddie show," New York Daily News 15 May 1978.
- ⁵ Julius Novick, "Swados's Sweet Truths," Village Voice 29 March 1978: 73.
- ⁶ Gussow C-3.

Chapter 2

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION OF RUNAWAYS

Elizabeth Swados, the composer, author and director of the original production of Runaways, is a fascinating, innovative, and multi-talented performing artist with irons in many artistic fires. Among her many endeavors she has written a children's book, The Girl with the Incredible Feeling; scored several films such as "Step by Step" and "Sky Dance"; worked as a composer in residence for an experimental New York City theatre group called La Mama; and written, composed and directed several musical theatre pieces that have been quite successful. Besides Runaways, she has had successful runs in various cities with Doonesbury, a musical based on the Gary Trudeau comic strip characters and Rap Master Ronnie, a satiric look at the Reagan years in the White House. Doonesbury opened on Broadway at the Biltmore November 21, 1983 and ran for approximately three months.⁷ Rap Master Ronnie opened in New York in September, 1984 and has had successful runs in many major cities, including Chicago, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle and London.⁸ Runaways, which garnered Swados several Tony nominations, began as a workshop piece supported by the Joseph Papp organization. It grew into a surprise Off-Broadway hit, and eventually moved to Broadway for a successful run. An examination of Ms. Swados's background and influences and the process of evolution that resulted in the musical Runaways is the focus of this chapter.

Elizabeth Swados was born in 1951 in Buffalo, New York.⁹ She is currently a resident of New York City, but works extensively on both coasts. She graduated from Bennington College with a Bachelor of Arts in 1972. She made a name for herself while working with La Mama Experimental Theatre Club in New York City. Often she would write music for Andrei

Serban's adaptations of Greek classics such as Agamemnon and Medea. In 1977, a year before the opening of Runaways, Ms. Swados won an Obie Award for her production of Nightclub Cantata at the Village Gate Theatre.¹⁰ Although her success as a composer has won her the greatest praise, when asked in an interview if composing was her main interest, she replied that composing was only one aspect of her interest in the performing arts. Ms. Swados pointed out that she also writes words as well as melodies, directs, does "all that stuff . . . Also, the theatrical idiom that I work in is a combined art; it's not one thing. Because of the way I work, all those things are necessary."¹¹ She has a Wagnerian-like philosophy of the integration of the various arts that approaches my own creative ideologies. I found that Ms. Swados and I also share another belief about our craft. As she masterfully states it: "There's a feeling that one should either be extremely 'cultural' or one should be entertainment oriented. I feel the two can be combined."¹²

Elizabeth Swados has had a varied theatrical background and her past experiences have influenced a great part of the final shape of Runaways. In an interview with Laura Shapiro for The Rolling Stone, Swados discussed the personal impact of spending a year touring Africa with renowned English director Peter Brook. Brook and Swados, along with their company, travelled from rural village to rural village. In each new setting Brook's group would perform for the natives. In return, the members of the host tribe would often allow the foreigners to view their rituals and ceremonies. The performing of the rites of the villages impacted Swados greatly, and the result can be clearly seen in Runaways in the overall concept. The tribal influences are especially notable in the dance sequences and in the use of primitive sounds and African rhythms. She also was deeply impressed by the strong sense of community in every village. In this same interview with Shapiro, Elizabeth

Swados described the cast of her musical as the "Runaways village," an obvious African-influenced image that I adopted for my own production.¹³ Interestingly, in an interview for Contemporary Authors, Swados stated that her early influences could not be traced back to plays or theatre. She claimed to draw her inspiration mostly from her experiences with the rituals in Africa and Indonesia and her own religious services in the Jewish temples from her childhood.¹⁴

The idea of presenting a musical with no plot was certainly rare in 1978, but it was not completely original. In a review of Runaways in the New York Post in 1978 Clive Barnes asserted that musicals with "no book" were certainly becoming the trend in the contemporary theatre scene. He traced the lineage of the concept musical from A Chorus Line and pointed out that all non-book musicals were influenced directly by Hair.¹⁵ Many reviewers made mention of the influences of Hair, A Chorus Line, and for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf on Swados's Runaways. For instance, the use of music as a vehicle for emotional outpouring and an ensemble of counter-culturists was not original, for Gerome Ragni had originated these ideas in 1968 with Hair.¹⁶ colored girls used street poetry as its vehicle and predates the Swados musical by four years.¹⁷ Even the compiling of true stories in the audition process and shaping this compilation into a musical about the people who were interviewed was not an innovation by Swados as Michael Bennett had done that in 1975 for A Chorus Line. However, Runaways combined all of these unique innovations, plus added an element of addressing current social problems. Swados added another unique touch by using young children and teenagers, very few of whom were experienced stage performers, to tell the stories of the runaways.

Under the auspices of Joseph Papp, Runaways first opened off-Broadway in the Public Theatre Cabaret on March 9, 1978 and eventually moved to the Plymouth Theatre on Broadway on May 6, 1978.¹⁸ Ms. Swados wrote, composed, directed, choreographed, and served as musical director for the production. She also played guitar in the orchestra throughout the run. The set, described by one reviewer as a "secret playground,"¹⁹ was designed by Douglas W. Schmidt and Woods Mackintosh. It was simply a group of platforms which rose at regular intervals like bleachers at a high school football field. These platforms were flanked by a wire mesh fence in the background. The downstage area from the stage left wing to the stage right wing was left completely open. The upstage platforms were treated like bleachers and were not utilized to any great degree.

The original off-Broadway cast was composed of nineteen performers of various racial backgrounds. Several of the cast members came out of the original interviews and were actual runaways. Some of the cast members, though only teenagers, were already veterans of the stage. The remainder of the cast was chosen from auditions, resulting in a variety of backgrounds and levels of experience. The cast ranged in age from eleven years old to the early twenties. The ensemble was complemented by an orchestra of six musicians.²⁰ Upon moving to Broadway, cast members were added to the core group in order to supplement the sound for the bigger Broadway houses.

The script of Runaways is best described as a series of episodes. Each episode is different. Several episodes are told through monologues; several others are told through sketches; and still others are told through pantomime, song, dance, poetry or chant. All of the stories were taken from confessions drawn from approximately 2,000 street children²¹ over a ten month period.²²

Four of those months were spent on the road interviewing and auditioning young people from a variety of backgrounds. The other six months were spent in rehearsal improvising and rewriting the script until it took its performance shape. When the show moved to Broadway, more script changes, including at least one new song, were made.

The original production was a surprise hit, getting much more press than Elizabeth Swados had expected. The audience response was both gratifying and confusing. She found it ironic and disturbing that parents were applauding children who were telling of incredible abuse and neglect. Always a bit hesitant to revel in its success, she grimaced when people called this dramatic work 'art,' but explained "we're very caring about doing everything as truly and passionately as possible."²³ The show proved to be an introduction to fame for several of her young talented performers. Swados admitted to feeling some guilt for the transition of several of her young performers from regular children into the unstable world of Broadway gypsies.

In describing the thesis of her production Swados remarked: "Runaways is about anybody who's in transition, anybody who's separated."²⁴ She felt that all of these runaways had common fantasies--fantasies about belonging.

The reviews from both openings, on and off-Broadway, lend particular insight into the original productions. It is interesting that the sentiments are as varied and extreme as the emotions in the show. Runaways received great notices from several credible sources, calling it one of the best new musicals of the season and lauding its author as a new bright star on the Broadway circuit. Other reviews, however, treated the production as mediocre at best, and only enlightening at times. One reviewer likened the

production to more of a graduate project in sociology than a theatrical offering. Still others condemned the work outright.

Thanks to the magic of videotape and the New York Public Library's dedication to archiving Broadway productions, I was able to view the original show through the admittedly limited scope of the archival video. The situation is, of course, less than ideal, as viewing a theatrical performance on videotape can never recreate the live experience. Also, because of the rules of the Public Library, I was permitted to view the tape in its entirety only one time. However, by combining the information collected from the various reviews and articles about Runaways and my notes from the videotape session, I am able to comment intelligently on the design elements.

The basic unit setting for Runaways was seldom changed, and then the look was altered only by adding a bench or large properties like a burning garbage can to it. Julius Novick in The Village Voice review described the setting as ". . . an urban playground. The performing space is surrounded by a high wire fence and contains bleachers, a basketball backboard, park benches and a pigeon coop, all painted institutional green. The effect is bleak, but with possibilities, and these possibilities are realized by Jennifer Tipton's often-beautiful lighting."²⁵ Although the lighting was impossible to judge from my viewing, I would say that the set was not very interesting, and more ignored than utilized by the director. In my notes I described the set as a series of platforms on several levels, not unlike the telephone set for Bye Bye Birdie. The levels could have provided some interesting acting spaces, but were seldom used in any creative way since most of the episodes were delivered from down front and center. Occasionally when the full cast was on stage, a nice stage picture would be created by draping cast members on the various levels. This did not happen often enough for my taste. One

particularly nice feature of the set was the upstage fence which served as a pigeon coop with live birds and framed the upstage area in a visually interesting manner.

There were some confusing choices made in the area of costuming. The costumes were designed by Hilary Rosenfeld and consisted mainly of everyday street clothes that would have been worn in 1978. As Mel Gussow stated: "The authenticity extends to the costumes--sneakers, leg warmers and Levis. . . ."26 There was an abundance of flared jeans, T-shirts, overalls, bandannas and colored tights. Most of the costuming was adequate, but three costuming choices that Ms. Rosenfeld and Ms. Swados made seemed out of place. In all fairness to Ms. Swados and her production staff, I must note that I seem to be the only person to have raised these objections.

First, all of the runaways were decked out in new sneakers. This play certainly predates the fad of designer sneakers as the mark of the street elite. Possibly they were new for safety reasons; good shoes were certainly a concern in our production. However, unlike our production, the Broadway cast was not required to climb or perform any feats that carried the slightest danger factor and would therefore make good footwear a necessity. I think the sneakers were a conscious, albeit inappropriate, choice by the designer and the director.

Secondly, the character Lazar was outfitted outlandishly. He is written to be a comic character throughout the script, and certainly was portrayed as a slightly off-center young man in the original production. His costuming, however, did not enhance his character choices. He was wearing a letter jacket, with a cub scout shirt and a tie. He also carried a briefcase and wore glasses. The look was semi-grunge, semi-C. P. A., and semi-Goodwill.

Unlike the reality of the other characters, Lazar's costume seemed to be "designed."

The third and most confusing costume choice of all was for the singer of "THE BASKETBALL SONG." This character wore a basketball team uniform, which made me twitch with confusion. I couldn't help wondering why, if this child was a runaway, he had his school's team uniform. There are so many images that are transmitted by this team uniform: images of discipline instead of blatant disregard of authority; images of being a member of a group instead of an individual who is out only for himself; and images of belonging to a social group instead of living the isolation of the runaway. Ms. Swados explained that the reason this song was included in the show was that basketball seemed to be a pastime common among street children. It was an activity that allowed them to escape from the horrors of everyday life. The image of the rough, street ball-handling seen on inner city outdoor courts sends out strong images quite different from the images of five school buddies practicing in a comfortable gymnasium and listening to instructions from a professional coach. This basketball uniform jarred the audience out of the streets and into a more conventional world, with no apparent purpose other than to include a costume change. I found the choice to be annoying and out of sync with the rest of the production.

On the positive side, one of the strongest elements in this show is the music. Elizabeth Swados has a real talent for portraying emotions through a melodic phrase and she uses background melodies to enhance whatever mood the actors need to create. In this particular musical she has chosen to incorporate a different style of music for each separate episode, not unlike Webber and Rice's Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat from nearly a decade earlier.²⁷ The music, for the most part, was quite effective

and helped to convey the stories and the moods of the runaways. Seldom was a song included simply for a break from the dialogue or as a piece of "entertainment." The one possible exception was "WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO DID HAIR?"

This satiric poke at the '60s hippies who gave up their quest for peace and love and became the money-hungry yuppies of the late '70s is an early punk number that just doesn't quite work. Its position in the show was obviously moved from its original place. It was performed right after the rape and murder and the subsequent delivery of "DO WE HAVE TO DIE?" in the version I saw. In a review of the original pre-Broadway production, however, Jack Kroll states: "Mark Anthony Butler's graffiti song magically modulates into David Shecter's rending rendition of punk rock."²⁸ The graffiti number appeared several episodes earlier than the rape in the version I saw, although they were both in the second act. Maybe if the "HAIR" song were returned to its original place it would have worked better.

This poorly written punk number had lots of problems in my estimation. First, the lyrics were trite and mildly offensive, not satiric. Here are a few examples: "Where is the promise of a magical age?/Why do astrologists eat vegetables and fart funny? . . . McDonald's offers three free weeks of EST with a fish cake" . . . "Empty happiness is turned into stupidity." The idea is a clever one, but the writing and the execution truly missed the mark. My opinion is shared by several reviewers who also disliked this song, including Clive Barnes from the New York Post: "a sour note is struck when the (sic) Miss Swados quite insultingly tries to deny th[e] influence [of Hair]. It was the one moment of bad taste and insecurity in her show."²⁹

To complicate an already questionable song, Ms. Swados rearranged this number so that it followed one of the most poignant moments in her

show--the rape and murder of Nikki. In the Broadway version Deidre entered, discovered her friend had been murdered, and delivered the haunting eulogy about the horrors of the street, ending with the question "Do we have to die too?". Then the outlandish Lazar ran out on the stage, used a grease marker to 'X' out the eyes of both Nikki and Diedre, warbled a "West Indian warbling call," handed a microphone to the mourning Diedre and the two of them proceeded to lead the group in the "HAIR" number. The two singers danced all around the dead body, never acknowledging it. The point could have been that death is commonplace on the streets and doesn't phase the toughened street people. However, Ms. Swados did not choose to make that point, or any other as far as I could see. It looked like there was an attempt to perform the song and disregard that the body was still lying down front and center. The song by itself was not the same quality of the rest of the show, and its placement in the order of events made it ridiculous.

Several members of the orchestra appeared on stage at some time during the show. Cast members played violins, drums and other instruments on stage as well. The incorporation of the band into the stage action and the use of cast and orchestra to produce the sound effects was very effective. The bass player played a string bass, allowing him to move on the stage with the actors. As Lidia and Luis delivered their "Spanish Argument," the bass player would slap the wood of his instrument, creating both a visual and aural accompaniment that enhanced the explosive mood. A toy piano was used as accompaniment on several songs, giving the pieces an ironic quality of childlike innocence behind lyrics that expressed the horrors these runaways had endured. Humming, percussion, chanting, screaming, guitar strings plucked and sustained, pounding fists, reciting children's games like "Ring Around the Rosie," and wind chimes were all used to create chilling effects.

Most, but not all, of these innovative uses of sounds enhanced the dialogue. Walter Kerr noted that the "FOOTSTEPS" monologue at the beginning of the show was accompanied by percussion. It forced the performer "to bark out her story" and denied her the use of any inflection.³⁰ However, I found the majority of Ms. Swados's use of background noises as effects quite powerful and this innovative use of sound proved to be very influential on my production.

The area that was most lacking in the New York production seemed to be in creative staging. In general, monologues and sketches were presented from center stage and the choreography was limited to aerobics movement. Laura Shapiro commented that the choreography was nothing more than running in place³¹ and T. E. Kalem described it as "basic jogger, marathon-style."³² Watt considered the staging effective. He enjoyed the unison foot-stamping and "speeded up running in place."³³ Julius Novick called the dancing "conventional steps,"³⁴ but it is not clear what he meant by that. I believe Jack Kroll is closest to what Swados had in mind for the choreography. He called it "heightened orchestration of the behavior patterns of city kids."³⁵ There was an overabundance of running in place. The movements were simple, since the cast was not chosen for their dancing skills.

I was deeply disappointed in the choreography. As I critiqued the dance movements and staging techniques, however, I tried to keep in mind that the choreographer of 1978 did not have MTV, break-dancing and other street dancing from which to draw. And to her credit, Runaways predates the height of break-dancing, rap, and lambada crazes, yet there are elements of all these dance styles in the production.

The influence of Swados's trip with Peter Brook into African villages was certainly visible in the movement. In the second episode, "I HAD TO GO," two masked characters danced on an upper platform while another character delivered a story about the fighting of his parents which drove him away from his home. The dancing had nothing to do with the meaning of the lines; it was stylized but unconnected. Following this monologue was an episode entitled "PARENT/KID DANCE" in which the company entered and joined in a tribal dance. At the end of the dance all were screaming and running in place as one person drove them on by shouting "Faster." Again the piece was not connected to anything and served only to make me question the meaning of this episode. In the "LULLABY FROM BABY TO BABY" song, a sort of tribal movement was once again evident. There were two people signing the message of the song--one in American Sign Language, the other possibly using an African form of non-linguistic storytelling similar to hand signs of the Native Americans.

Choreography in other instances was simply inappropriate. During "THE BASKETBALL SONG," the style of movement used was calisthenics. The girls in the upstage area sported pompons and attempted a rendition of a street drill team, but the result was trite. In the song, "ONCE UPON A TIME," the actors split into groups and played the acting game of mirrors where each participant tries to replicate his or her partner's movement. This, like the earlier choreography, did not connect in any way to the lyrics about the anonymity and horrors of the life of a runaway. In "FIND ME A HERO," several actors rode carousel horses and motorized tractors while others marched in place. Unbelievably, the song ended with trenches--a claptrap commonly found in tap numbers and vaudeville, but completely out of line with the folksy music of this number. It was quite evident that Runaways

could have used a choreographer who could make the numbers speak as effectively as the music.

The staging of the scenes and monologues could have been more effective as well if Ms. Swados had utilized her levels instead of having the actors deliver all their lines from center stage. The opening of the second act was the most creative use of staging. Entitled "THE SLEEPING LINE," the characters all laid down in a tight formation with their feet at the edge of the stage. As each monologue about a nightmare was delivered, the character who was speaking would suddenly sit up. At the end of the monologue the speaker would lay down and the next would rise. At times, several actors would sit up and deliver a particular word at the same time as the monologist for emphasis. Also, there was a brilliant touch in foreshadowing the rape during this segment. One character walked down the line of sleeping runaways and fell full body onto the girl who would later be his victim.

Other staging techniques were creative, but overused. Often at the end of an episode, all the characters would hug their knees to their chests and turn to face upstage. This was effective the first time, but as it was repeated, the strength of the move lost its power. Eventually it became annoying. Unfortunately, there was not much else in the way of innovative staging. Christopher Sharp characterized this lack of staging as: ". . . little attempt to form all the raw material beyond setting it to some lively music."³⁶

Lastly, I'd like to address the characterizations of the runaways. I found the parallel criticisms of my own production and those of the reviews of the original to be amazing. I believe because of the nature of the show--bits and pieces of eighteen peoples' lives shown through song and monologues with no plot line to enhance character development--a significant number of

audience members are not able to distinguish one character from another. Conversely, many audience members expressed how easily identifiable and clearly delineated each runaway had become by the end of the UNO production. Both opinions were certainly evident in the reviews of Ms. Swados's production. Possibly because of the rigidity in staging, Christopher Sharp stated that "Each young person delivering a song or a message comes off as a narrator rather than a character."³⁷ Walter Kerr tried to explain to his readers the reason for the monotony he saw on stage. He explained that while trying to seem authentic, Ms. Swados thought it was important to have a main body of non-professionals and drill them to performance level. This six months of drilling, in Mr. Kerr's view, produced monotonous, drilled, homogenous "marchers in a parade." He further explained that Ms. Swados was trying to avoid an evening filled with self-pity, and in turn created "muted, evasive. . . stony-cold" runaways.³⁸ On the flip side, Richard Eder commented on how the music, movement, and the children all worked together to ". . . make 18 distinct and unforgettable portraits."³⁹ It is impossible for me to clearly judge if each character in the original production was distinguishable from the others because I went into the viewing with extensive knowledge of the play and its characters. They, of course, seemed very different to me because I knew beforehand characteristics and certain actions attributed to each.

The rigidity of delivering each monologue from the downstage center spot limited the dimensions of the characters. The show also had an overabundance of screaming. Many actors, in their search for the inner turmoil of their characters, found inspiration through ranting and raving and abusing their young vocal cords. By the end of the evening, I am sure the audience must have been worn out from watching actors jog and scream for

two hours. There was a delightful departure from the screaming when Iggy, a young tomboy, delivered her "I WENT BACK HOME." This monologue talks of how upon returning home, her parents ignored her and made callous and verbally abusive remarks. In response, she kicked in the glass of the television. The parents then threw her in a bathtub, poured boiling water on her, and scraped the dirt off her back with shards of the broken glass. This piece is often done as an audition monologue in a manner not unlike the screaming described from the rest of the show. However, the actress that played Iggy stood completely still, her eyes downcast at all times and her voice just barely audible. It was a powerful moment; and it certainly provided a welcome rest from the din of screeching heard throughout the rest of the production. Swados and her cast could have benefitted from Gielgud's quote to Richard Burton:

Have a care to shouting. You shout brilliantly; both you and Larry Olivier do--two splendid cornets . . . But those hunting calls you do so well can be tiresome when sounded too often. Don't overuse it. It's a wonderful weapon but it's your last weapon. Use it only when all else fails.⁴⁰

I kept this quote in mind throughout my rehearsals, because my actors also found it easy to resort to fury and pain through their vocal cords.

Curiously, there was a complete lack of interaction among the cast members in the original production. I remember reacting very strongly at the end of the second act when, upon finishing "LET ME BE A KID," the entire ensemble turned upstage and held on to each other very tightly. It was the first time in the show that anyone had even acknowledged the presence of other runaways. It was startling to see such affection between these characters who had never spoken or touched each other at any time other than when presenting a dialogue. From that moment to the end, an

ensemble was presented, but it was too late to make an audience believe there was any connection. As I set out to design the overall concept of my production, this revelation was one of the most influential of all.

In conclusion, there were several specific details of the original production of Runaways which were well done and proved to be influential in my own production. Overall, I found the production to be lacking in many ways, and the reviews from the period back me up in almost every criticism. The innovation seemed to stop before the actual production started, as evidenced in the elements of costuming, set, and staging. The viewing of the videotape, and the amount of research I did provided me with a valuable foundation on which to build my own production, using elements of the original production that worked well and discarding, adapting or avoiding those which were not effective. I feel it is necessary to temper this entire criticism with the knowledge that many of these objections to certain practices are coming from a time when concept musicals are commonplace and stage practices and choreography have evolved naturally to a new place. It would be naive to think I could view a production and not bring the biases of my present theatrical experiences with me. However, the fact that I saw a somewhat flawed performance did not discourage me in my pre-production planning. As a matter of fact, it was one of the reasons for making me excited to begin production work. This was a chance for me to explore and experiment and see where my ideas would lead me. Had the original production been entirely satisfying, I think the challenges would have been different and the project possibly less exciting.

NOTES

⁷ Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronology 2nd ed. (NY: Oxford U Press, 1992) 714.

⁸ Jon Z. Haber, jacket notes. Rap Master Ronnie, American Entertainment Industries, Hollywood CA, 1986.

⁹ Francis C. Locher, ed. Contemporary Authors, vol. 97-100 (Detroit: Gale, 1981) 522.

¹⁰ Locher 522.

¹¹ Locher 523.

¹² Locher 523.

¹³ Laura Shapiro, "Runaway kids find home in Broadway Theater," Rolling Stone 15 June 1978: 56.

¹⁴ Locher 523.

¹⁵ Joan Marlowe and Betty Blake, eds. New York Theatre Critics Reviews, vol. xxxix no. 21 (NY: 1978) 279.

¹⁶ Kurt Ganzl and Andrew Lamb, Ganzl's Book of the Musical Theatre (London: Bodly Head, 1988) 813.

¹⁷ Trevor Griffiths and Carole Woddiss, The Back Stage Theater Guide (NY: Watson-Guptill Publishing, 1991) 324.

¹⁸ Locher 522.

¹⁹ Jack Kroll, "Babes Up in Arms," Newsweek 27 March 1978.

²⁰ Julius Novick, "Swados's Sweet Truths," Village Voice 29 March 1978: 73.

²¹ Walter Kerr, "'Runaways' Runs Into Trouble," New York Times 20 May 1978: II:5:1.

²² Marlowe 280.

²³ Shapiro 54.

²⁴ Shapiro 56.

²⁵ Novick 73.

²⁶ Gussow C-3.

²⁷ Ganzl 213-214.

²⁸ Marlowe 280.

²⁹ Marlowe 279-280.

³⁰ Kerr II:5:1.

³¹ Shapiro 56.

³² Marlowe 282.

³³ Marlowe 279.

³⁴ Novick 73.

³⁵ Marlowe 280.

³⁶ Marlowe 281.

³⁷ Marlowe 281.

³⁸ Kerr II:5:1.

³⁹ Marlowe 278.

⁴⁰ Samuel L. Leiter, "Get Someone to Teach You How to Act!: Sir John Gielgud Directs," Theatre History Studies vol viii (1988): 53-70.

Chapter 3

NOTES ON THE PROCESS USED IN CREATING THE 1992 UNO PRODUCTION OF RUNAWAYS

As indicated earlier, I felt a strong need to make my presentation of Runaways speak to the problems of today; to show that these problems are not just contemporary problems, but have existed in some form for many years; to find innovative, unusual ways to present the episodes without sacrificing the message; and to work on the process as a primary objective while making the end product a secondary goal. Although I found fault with many aspects of Ms. Swados's production, I respected her insight and progressive thinking which led to the creation of Runaways. My goals, aimed at challenging my creativity and taking risks in my directing, were inspired by the pioneering work of Elizabeth Swados. I was also very fortunate to take a class in Contemporary Theatre Aesthetics at the same time as my rehearsal period. This class, and especially the theories of Brecht, Meyerhold and Artaud, inspired me to apply new methods in my directing. In this chapter I outline the process of rehearsals, the research and development of my concept, the obstacles and solutions encountered, and the actual production itself.

The whole project got off to a rocky start. At the beginning of the semester audition dates were changed and I found myself with only a few days to prepare for the auditions. Since one of my objectives was to cast a racially mixed cast, I had to spread the word to potential minority groups immediately. Our university has not had a great number of actors of color audition for their productions, so my task was challenging. I phoned several organizations such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the African-American Student Organizations and organizations which represented Native American

and Hispanic students. The groups I spoke with were very interested in helping, but the auditions fell on the second day of regular classes and the information was disseminated to only a few students. Most students were busy trying to find their classes, get registered and acclimated to the campus, and were not yet thinking about co-curricular activities. The theatre department produced a couple of students with Hispanic heritage, and a couple of African-American actors auditioned through my personal contact. I was disappointed in the turnout of minorities for my audition, but was determined to work with the group who had availed themselves.

During the audition, each person was required to sing. To my amazement the male auditioners were generally more talented than the females, so one of the obstacles I had expected—trying to flesh out enough men for both Our Town and Runaways—was easily overcome. The director of the other first semester show and I had to find our casts out of the same pool of auditioners, without crossing over in our casting. Another potential obstacle was quickly dismissed; we were able to fill our casts while having only one actor that appeared on both lists. This actor was not essential for my show, so the situation was quickly remedied. My cast started out as fifteen actors with a small racial representation. The cast included two actors with an Hispanic heritage and one African American actor who eventually dropped out of the cast. The ensemble sported several talented singers, which I felt was essential, and a few semi-singers who were strong actors. A few of the cast members were both strong singers and actors. One of the first challenges in the rehearsal process was to raise the level of acting in the singers and the level of singing in the actors.

I began my pre-rehearsal work with research connected to the simultaneity of time element. I found only a few other directors and

playwrights that had explored this approach to dramatic presentations. The area seemed relatively untested, so I became determined to maintain my approach of having the runaways exist in a time warp in which decades could intermingle. The production team questioned this choice, and fought me until they were convinced that the simultaneity of time element was essential to maintain my preconception of the play.

Armed with this knowledge, the design team began putting together their ideas. At weekly production meetings we brainstormed many possibilities on ways to enhance the time element. Professor Bob Welk designed the setting and the lights. The initial idea which I presented to spark a discussion was to locate the action at a base of a broken down train trestle. I wanted a vague look, something that could suggest Chicago, San Diego, or even Rulo, Nebraska. I also suggested that the trestle should be vague enough to suggest the indoors, such as that seen in the subways, or the countryside, or the inner city. I preferred the setting to be a neutral, non-recognizable place whose atmosphere seemed broken and deserted. Joanne Gordon, in her book about Stephen Sondheim, described the set for Company as sleek, sterile and cold. She wrote that the set reflected the detachment of society and seemed to depict "crowds struggling upward to nowhere."⁴¹ I thought this was a good image, minus the "sterile" quality, for Runaways. She also described the setting for Follies as metaphoric rubble. "Is the theater torn down? Will it be torn down tomorrow? Or was it torn down yesterday? Keep it ambiguous. . . ." ⁴² Both production descriptions helped to sharpen my focus on the desired look for Runaways.

Professor Welk suggested setting the action in a deserted area where a company had begun construction on a building, but had abandoned the property for some unknown reason. He suggested using a loose mesh fence

material with reinforcement bars and pillars that are used when pouring concrete for supports. This design excited me. I requested several different heights of platforming at the floor level, with a series of high platforms that ran the distance in the background. In order to get a similar look to the train trestle, Professor Welk designed an overhanging platform about 10 feet high that was accessible by climbing the loose mesh fence. He built this all around an open area, with a surrounding wall, in which the band members were placed. Above the "pit," a rough hewn bridge was constructed which provided an extra performance area. A single light, like a poor man's trouble light, was hung over the bridge area. To cover the areas under the high platforming, we hung plastic sheets like those used to cover areas under construction when stores are remodeling. The entire area was littered with unrecognizable newspapers and trash, and all of the props were positioned in the nooks and crannies about the stage. The setting worked well; it suggested abandonment, isolation and disregard. It also did not limit our setting to a specific time period or geographic location. The band was visible at all times and was therefore able to participate in the dramatic action, yet their electronic equipment and percussion instruments were partially hidden so as to minimize distraction. The various levels created an excellent potential for dynamic stage pictures and allowed each of the runaways to stake out his or her own "residence." The set provided a large range of opportunities for creative staging and actually guided my direction in several instances.

The lighting, also by Professor Welk, was more exciting than I had imagined. Because of the new space, the computer system, and an excellent design, the lighting enhanced each episode. We had a number of specials for monologues or featured action. Professor Welk was able to use several

stark colors—yellows, purples, and hot pinks—to accent the "unreal" episodes. I requested a noticeable difference between lighting that depicted real moments and those moments in which the actors were not in real time. An example of the latter was the rape of Gretchen in which the actors went in and out of slow motion accented by "real" and "unreal" lighting. Also, each of the monologues in "THE SLEEPING LINE"—a series of revelations of the runaways' individual nightmares—was done on a different part of the stage in a separate pool of colored light.

At times in the production, part of the stage was lit realistically while another part was flooded in a more theatrical light. This effect was best achieved in the "LULLABYE FOR LUIS" song. As Luis was dying from a drug overdose, an otherworldly entity enticed him to dance with her on the upper platforms flooded with red light. Meanwhile on the lower levels, several of the other members of the ensemble worked in natural lighting to keep an imaginary Luis awake and alive, until at the last moment the two worlds collided and Luis was thrust out of the unreal world back to his lonely world of the runaway. The lighting, like the set, exceeded all of my expectations.

The design for costuming was the area in which I feel we were less than successful. Again, the process was our primary objective and many of the costume choices came about through creative exercises which enhanced our production. However, the final step into production did not provide the necessary visual information to help the audience understand the element of simultaneity. Instead of the usual design and subsequent building or finding of costumes, the initial step for costume design came through each actor's research into his or her decade. Professor Kathleen Gossman was the costume coordinator and she put together some initial worksheets that each actor had to answer. The first step was for each character to decide on the

year in which he or she ran away. Upon completion of the surveys, the years which the actors chose for their characters ranged from 1956 to 1992. Each actor then had to decide on a name for his or her character; research headlines from his or her specific year; and list movies, sports figures, political happenings, and entertainment news from his or her era.

Later they were given a second worksheet which asked for the following information: character's nickname; age; where he or she was born; and in what location he or she had settled after running away. The actors also were asked for information regarding their survival as a runaway: How do they eat? Where do they sleep? How long have they been on the street? Do they prostitute themselves? Do they steal? What keeps them sane? As rehearsals progressed, character choices became more defined and each actor created a unique personal history for his or her character. Professor Gossman took the initial information from the questionnaires and purchased or found many basic clothing items which she felt were consistent with this information. She purchased pants of various sizes, socks, vests, many different kinds of shirts and blouses, and other clothing items with no particular character in mind.

As part of an acting exercise one evening, all of the items were thrown into a mail cart. The actors were led in an exercise of guided imagery to set the mood and get them into character. Professor Gossman then explained that a new shipment of clothing had been delivered in the early morning to a local Goodwill store. The runaways were free to steal anything they would like, but were responsible for watching and protecting themselves--there were no other rules. The ensuing action--characters stealing from each other, threatening each other, hiding, isolating themselves, and coercing fellow runaways to get something for them--was an interesting exercise that

provided a strong beginning of learning street survival skills. The cast was informed that the costumes which each character possessed at the end of the exercise were the ones the actor was going to wear during the show. In order to find clothing that fit or was appropriate meant negotiating or taking those things which an actor wanted. Later in the process, the costume coordinator would build on what each character had acquired, adjust or re-outfit those that were absolutely not appropriate. The actors were not given this information at the time of the exercise.

A third biographical questionnaire was handed out to cast members later in the rehearsal period. Actors were asked to finalize their characters' names, the age when they ran away, the date they ran away, the most treasured item they have in their possession and their state of mind. Then each actor was asked to write a short summary describing new information or discoveries made during rehearsals. Some of the responses as to the state of mind of the characters were: stable, lost/tormented, hopeful?, "father to others," frustrated, manic depressive, scared, hostile and confused. This information helped Professor Gossman to find "icons" and accessories for the various characters, some of which were incorporated into their costumes.

The costuming should have helped to visually place each character in his or her time period, but it unfortunately failed to do so. By production week, several characters had costuming accessories that suggested their time period, but most were vague to the point of imperceptibility for the audience. For one character a head band and a cut-up fatigue vest with a hand-painted peace sign suggested late 1960s; however, the elephant bell bottom pants were noticeably missing. A tough street girl from the late 1950s, covered in denim and Harley Davidson patches, came off more as a dykish eighties motorcycle broad than a toughened fifties tomboy. All in all

the costumes themselves did not help to further the idea of characters from various decades, but the process of costuming the actors aided each actor to develop and explore his or her character. As Bonnie Marranca stated: "How one sees is as important as what one sees."⁴³ If I were to do this project again, I would demand of the costumer a more clearly identifiable representation of each period, but for this particular project the focus was to remain on the process primarily and let the performance grow out of this process. This policy dictated that some aspects of performance, like the costuming, might not fulfill all of the director's expectations.

Professor Gossman and I decided not to allow the actors to wear makeup. This decision was not well accepted by the cast members, and eventually a few people wore light coverings of makeup. One character, from the middle 1980s, moussed her hair in a punk fashion and wore large black lines of mascara around her eyes. When questioned how a runaway would have gel and mascara, she answered that her character stole these items. Another female character wore an abundance of makeup which she rationalized as necessary because she survived through prostitution. Both of these choices were consistent with their characters' personal history, and therefore were allowed. Several other characters used makeup to create tracks on their arms to denote their drug addiction. Otherwise actors went without makeup, and the look was somewhat stark and somehow not quite healthy.

Rehearsals were of prime importance since the process was the primary focus of my directing. I had specific goals and a general guiding vision for the production, but I avoided my usual directing scheme of carefully mapped out sequences and allowed the cast to explore, make choices, and improvise. This method proved to be quite exciting and, from my point of view, the

spontaneity and freedom that the actors experienced propelled them to new levels in their theatrical work. Each rehearsal was carefully planned as to the content and the work that was to be done; however, the framework involved in reaching the goals for that evening's rehearsal was only loosely planned, creating an environment that promoted more free expression and actor involvement than in past rehearsal processes.

These ideas were gleaned from several respected directors. John Gielgud, in his directorial approach, would often encourage the actors to try new things and have an actual say in rehearsal choices. He saw that the actors could bring fresher, more interesting ideas to the project than either the director or playwright might have envisioned. He contends that a director must open himself to these possibilities.⁴⁴ Gielgud has been likened to Peter Brook and Tyrone Guthrie in his spontaneity of invention with his staging. I adopted this technique and allowed my actors to explore and develop their own staging, with my guiding voice when needed. From the outset, actors were told to find their own niche, their own "personal spaces," and to make them their own. Some characters became quite territorial and ferociously guarded their space, while others chose a more nomadic existence, sleeping wherever they felt comfortable at the time. I made very few of those decisions.

Actors were also encouraged from the beginning to participate in the episodes and songs in whatever manner they chose, or to not participate if they so chose. The actors were allowed to make separate choices, unlike most musicals in which the entire chorus reacts in similar ways. Until we made the choice to cut the song "WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO DID HAIR?" several actors chose not to participate because they felt it was a satire on their time period. When the drug dealer, Luis, was near death due

to his drug overdose, each actor was allowed to do and feel what he thought was appropriate during the song. Some actors helped Luis to stay alive, out of friendship or the need to keep the drug connection; some actors watched indifferently as they had no feelings one way or the other about Luis; and the actress who played Miriah, the doll-carrying, most vulnerable runaway in the village, chose to lash out and kick Luis for his earlier mistreatment of her.

The following paragraphs deal with the actual rehearsal process, including details of exercises used and their effects. Many of these exercises were taken from Dr. Cynthia Melby Phaneuf's Doctoral Dissertation on Ensemble Acting. Other exercises were devised and adapted from past acting classes with influences from Meyerhold, Brecht and Artaud.

We started our rehearsal process, as is typical of musicals, by learning the music. The beginning of the rehearsal process was important as we had to form a strong ensemble feeling and the actors needed the reassurance of something fairly stable since this directorial approach was untested. Learning the music was a nonthreatening, straightforward process in which people began to make natural links--the strong singers attracted those who were less sure, the altos bonded with altos, etc. The music provided an excellent foundation for the ensemble and served as a touchstone, something that remained pretty much the same, as the uncertainty of the dialogue portions began to be explored.

After the cast had become fairly comfortable with the musical portion of the play, rehearsals began each night with some kind of warm-up designed to enhance the work that the actors would be asked to do. Two of my goals that had to be developed through the warm-up process were seemingly at odds with each other: I needed my cast to develop an ensemble feel, and at the same time, I wanted the actors to understand the isolation, the lack of trust,

and the self-dependency of the runaway. As the cast grew as an ensemble, an overly friendly, uninteresting world of the runaway began to emerge. So as a director, I had to find a way to connect the actors and yet separate the characters. This was accomplished, in part, through the warm-ups.

We often would begin the warm-ups by exploring the space—walking, running, hiding, sleeping, etc. To this would be added acknowledgements of others, finding friends, lashing out at enemies, avoiding those who are most frightening. Finally, we would form a circle. The actors would be asked to look around at the others, sending messages to each individual through their looks of hostility, friendliness, vulnerability, indifference. It was the beginning of realizing how each character felt about another. This exercise evolved into one character walking around the circle. At some point he would stop and face another character. At this point the aggressor would say a line of his dialogue to the other character, who would respond with dialogue of his own. The focus was not so much to make sense of unrelated dialogue, but to create a tension or attraction between the two characters. This was repeated until all were involved.

The cast did exercises designed to warm up the body physically and mentally as well as create a "connection." A typical evening included an exercise in which the group held hands as they stretched up, down, bent over at the waist, etc. Then the group came together, still holding hands, and by all raising the right arm and swinging it over their own heads, turned the circle so backs were to the center. We also worked in small groups creating "pictures." This exercise, in which each group must quickly form an interesting stage picture using tight, multi-leveled stances, helps the actors to become physically and aesthetically aware of their presence in the overall picture. This warm-up exercise definitely helped the actors of Runaways to

enter creatively into the staging process. Lastly, before we started work on the script and music, we played a children's game called "statues." In this game, one person spins another person around and then releases him or her. The spinning person freezes in whatever shape he or she lands in, and others are asked to form statues surrounding him or her. When a particular group of actors was ready to join the original participant, I would ask them to represent an action through their statue. The actions might be: to object, to hate, to need, to reject, to listen, to accept. The spontaneous statue thus formed would be a physical representation of the suggested action. Not only did it get the actors to focus on actions and objectives, but it again introduced the participants into aesthetic physical choices wherein each actor is a unit in a whole picture.

As the rehearsals progressed, and choices became clearer, the warm-ups took on more importance. Conflicting relationships and alliances between small groups became easily perceived. Those who enjoyed conflict attacked, those who resisted conflict found means to hide or escape. The group maintained its ensemble feeling, but progressed to the point of having separate identities. It took a lot of prodding to get them to the next level, however. The actors resisted allowing their characters to have feelings, such as bigotry, that were undesirable to them as actors. Finally, toward the very end of rehearsal, a few actors found the courage to allow their characters to hate people for their racial background, their disability, their appearance, or their personality and yet not let these negative feelings bleed over into the ensemble connection.

As I studied the aesthetics of Antonin Artaud, I decided to try some of the methods of his "theatre of cruelty" wherein actors are "cruel" to themselves to uncover the ugliness in their souls. I used guided imagery, a

method of exploring one's own past through sensory images, to dig into what I termed the "tar pits" of each actor's existence. The group was asked to lay down and close their eyes. I asked them all to remember an actual incident in which they felt lonely, or excited, or terribly frightened, depending on the focus of the scenework for that rehearsal. The actors were not expected to explore how they felt at the time; instead, the guided imagery focused on the easily perceived sensual experience. The actors were asked: what did they see; was the temperature cold or hot; what sounds could be heard; if one reached out forward what could one expect to feel, etc. After several minutes of quiet exploration, the actors paired up and shared their experiences. It was amazing to see the depth of emotion each actor would reveal. For many of the actors, I believe these guided imagery warm-ups led them to the level of emotional depth they displayed in the production.

I also explored some Brechtian technique in order to separate the actors from their characters. We tried having actors put "he said" or "she said" in front of their lines of dialogue to make the actor report and comment on the dialogue rather than live it. In fact, the song "ONCE UPON A TIME" is written in just such a manner. I do not think the Brechtian technique was nearly as effective as that of Artaud, but it did force the actors to examine their dialogue.

Meyerhold proved to be a great influence on my production, but less so in an acting sense than as an influence on my directorial choices. We did explore, in a very limited manner, an adaptation of Meyerhold's "biomechanics" in which movement is used to elicit certain emotions. The experimentation with this method led directly to the staging used for "THIS IS WHAT I DO WHEN I'M ANGRY." This episode is a chant in which a couple of the characters explain their method of stress relief through breaking

windows. By experimenting with my version of biomechanics, the cast eventually developed a series of movements, not unlike T'ai Chi, that accompanied the chant. After the movements were set, I asked each actor to face a different direction. The result was quite effective; actors performed movements which are assumed to alleviate stress, bring about relaxation and a spiritual cleansing, but ironically ended with a karate-like stroke as the actor chanted "And I shove my hand through the glass." The entire episode was accented with percussion sounds linked to the movements, ending with a sharp crash as the hands broke the glass.

As we approached the staging in the show, I found I was often questioning my decision about the process, wanting to set the choreography and pre-plan the staging. I kept in mind another thought from Sir John Gielgud: If directors do all the work beforehand, actors might become lazy and the consequence is failure to grow in their roles.⁴⁵ However, letting the actors explore did not let me relax through the rehearsal period. I had to check myself constantly because it would have been easy to allow laziness on my part to be rationalized away as allowing spontaneity. I found I needed to be as prepared for a rehearsal as if I was pre-staging everything, and yet remain free to allow the process to work its magic.

I began staging the big episodes first, as we were still becoming an ensemble. We started with the monologue entitled "Footsteps" which tells of a young girl's nights of riding out her parents' stormy arguments in her bedroom. When we first began with this episode, the cast improvised sound effects and comments to add to Lily's monologue. After several repetitions the cast discovered improvements, additions, and innovations which led us to the final product. As Lily spoke, one person began slapping the floor, suggesting both footsteps and heartbeats. Two characters began

"screaming" gibberish at a barely audible level as Lily spoke of her parents' arguments. Then, very subtly, one actor began whispering sexually suggestive comments about "Daddy's little girl," "playing their special game" and "making Daddy happy." These chilling comments came out of the improvisation exercises and led the actress that portrayed Lily to realize that sexual abuse was behind her character's nighttime fears and was the predominant reason for her choice to run away.

Each episode, including the songs, was explored in a similar matter. Most often, the staging was suggested by the actors, and came to a final realization with my guiding hand. At times, especially in the first two episodes, the staging choices were completely dictated by me. The first monologue, by the hearing impaired character, The Pope, was delivered from the tech balcony above the set in a spotlight. The idea here was to suggest that this character had not yet arrived in the runaway village. The second episode, "I HAD TO GO," was staged with the speaking actor at the downstage front and center spot, while three actors who impersonated the characters spoken of in the monologue, were on the bridge directly behind. The three actors on the bridge portrayed the monologue as if they were puppets, with very stylized movements. I dictated this action as I felt it was important to show, at the beginning of the play, that what the audience was going to see was not a "realistic" musical. The production was going to be filled with unusual theatrical presentations, multiple focuses in scenes, and texts presented with many layers. I wanted the audience to be aware what was coming from the outset, so I staged the first two episodes carefully to prepare the way. However, these two episodes were not staged until later in the rehearsal process as I wanted the cast to be confident that their choices would be respected.

The most important rehearsal discovery came through a lecture and subsequent question and answer period by a local resident who had survived more than twenty years on the streets. Giovanni is a reformed heroin addict from the East Coast who shared his true life experiences with the cast. Giovanni explained that his father had battered his mother until he felt he had to intervene to save her and consequently stabbed his father with a kitchen knife. As a young boy he was then handed over to an abusive state institution where he witnessed his peers being raped by guards and older boys. He escaped to the streets where he sold drugs, stole, and prostituted himself to survive. Not only was he informative about drug usage and life on the streets, but also he provided a great observation opportunity for the actors. Giovanni talked honestly and openly about his life on the streets and tried to appear that he had come to a resolution about all the traumas of his life. However, as he spoke about never having a normal Thanksgiving dinner, all of the actors could easily see the pain behind that revelation. Any time he approached a subject in which he was clearly not resolved, like later witnessing the murder of his mother due to a drug deal gone bad, he changed the subject or quickly threw off an amusing comment. The pain was still easily perceived, however.

Giovanni changed our perceptions about a lot of things. He cleared up any questions about intravenous drug use, overdosing, and the effects of heroin. He also dispelled some myths and stereotypes. He said that runaways are not dirty, raggedy people. They steal nice clothes and keep themselves clean in order to have access to stores and restaurants. Fitting in with the regular customers, then, becomes an absolute survival technique. Also, he showed how those who hook for money need to look appealing and those who are planning to rob the suburban weekend warrior looking for

cheap drugs need to be nonthreatening in their appearance in order to gain their intended victims' trust. Criticisms were leveled at my production for having runaways who were too clean and well kept, but from our exposure to the truth about runaways according to a credible witness, I believe we were honest in our depiction.

As we neared production week, most of the choices had become ingrained and rehearsals became a chance to pare down and improve these choices to make the most coherent production possible. Toward the end I began to impose my choices on more of the situations, but by and large the show was formed through the ensemble approach. There is no doubt in my mind that the production was richer, the actors more confident and creative, and the overall effect stronger because of the primacy of the process.

Directorially, I relied heavily on my instincts, my research, and the writings of Brecht, Meyerhold and Artaud. The influences of these three theorists were more directly felt on my directorial concepts than in the actors' work. This is discussed in much greater detail, along with a detailed comparison of the 1978 production and the 1992 production, in Chapter Four.

NOTES

41 Joanne Gordon, Art Isn't Easy: The Achievement of Stephen Sondheim (Southern Illinois University, 1990) 41.

42 Gordon 79.

43 Bonnie Marranca, "Introductory Essays," The Theatre of Images (NY: Drama Book Specialists, 1968) xii.

44 Leiter 65.

45 Leiter 63.

Chapter 4

A COMPARISON OF THE 1978 NEW YORK PRODUCTION AND THE 1992 UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA PRODUCTION OF RUNAWAYS

The UNO production of Runaways had many similarities to the original production directed by Elizabeth Swados; yet the two productions contained marked differences in several key areas. This chapter focuses on the main contrasts between the two productions. I explore the differences between the two directors' concepts, processes and ultimate goals for their respective productions. Finally I examine, in depth, the core difference between the two productions: the topicality of the original production versus the element of simultaneity of time in the latter version.

There are several areas of obvious contrast between these two productions. The original production was rehearsed and performed over a ten month period in 1977 and 1978; the UNO production was rehearsed and performed in the fall semester of 1992 over a period of approximately ten weeks. In 1978 concept musicals were still a rare commodity; but by 1992, with the successes of Ain't Misbehavin', Cole, Sophisticated Ladies, The Me Nobody Knows, and A Chorus Line, concept musicals had become commonplace, maybe even passe. In 1978 none of the common buzz words like the Cripps and the Bloods, AIDS, Desert Storm, and crack cocaine had ever graced a headline. The differences found in this world through the last fifteen years have significantly altered the poignancy of a script which was written to be an indictment of societal problems in 1978.

Elizabeth Swados, through her association with Joseph Papp's foundation, began with only the germ of an idea for a musical about runaway children. She spent months interviewing runaways, compiling stories, and auditioning young people for a show that was being written unknowingly by

those being interviewed. After the New York cast had been chosen, the script was improvised, honed, revised and rearranged constantly, even throughout the performances. By contrast, the script with which I started had already been through all of this process; it was a finished manuscript with a complete musical score. In order to make this musical applicable to current social issues, I employed an improvisational approach to mounting the production similar to the one Ms. Swados had used to create it. However, I wanted to remain somewhat true to the original text. Whereas Ms. Swados was writing a script from scratch, we were trying to adapt already existing material without abandoning the powerful sentiments in her words and music.

There was also a major difference between the processes and objectives of the two productions. Ms. Swados was forming a performance through a process that she had experimented with numerous times. The element of the performance was the unknown to her as she had no idea what the final result of the interview, writing and improvising process would be. I, on the other hand, had the workings of a performance, in the incubational format of a script and music, waiting to be realized through my staging. I took this script and music and reworked it, with the final objective being the experimentation of the process, not the performance itself. So, for Ms. Swados, the process was the tool used to create the final masterpiece--the production of Runaways. I was much more interested in the tools, hoping that they would help me to reshape the "masterpiece" which had already been realized fifteen years earlier.

Another key difference between the two productions is found in the composition of the casts. The striking difference between the NY and UNO casts resulted in several production choices that would not necessarily be obvious to those outside of the production. First of all, Ms. Swados used a

mixture of professional young actors, inexperienced but talented young people, and real runaways in her cast. My cast was comprised of mostly midwestern college students with an interest in the dramatic arts. The New York production had a decidedly "East Coast" quality that pervaded it. This cast had a genuine feel and look for what most people would perceive as a New York City street punk. I think that there is a certain aura that is distinguishable between people who have lived in New York City for their lifetime and those who grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. Many of my cast members had never been to New York City, so trying to "act" as though they had grown up on the streets of the East Coast would have been damaging to the genuineness of our portrayals. Therefore, our cast was allowed to choose where their characters had lived their unstable lives. Not surprisingly, most of the cast chose Midwestern areas which were closest to the realities that they could portray. Certain script references to New York landmarks or streets were easily changed to adapt a more Midwestern tone to the production.

The age composition of the casts made a significant difference in production as well. Ms. Swados had a cast that ranged in age from eleven into the early twenties. The age range of my cast was generally from eighteen to the early thirties, although one cast member turned forty during the month of production. One of the most striking moments in the New York production was the monologue entitled "I WENT BACK HOME." This was delivered by an eleven year old girl, making the graphically described horror of being neglected, and verbally and physically abused, even more powerful. There is also an important character in the script that is supposed to be a pre-teen. She carries with her a doll, and through her imaginary surgeries on this doll, the audience becomes aware of her history of abuse. An eighteen

year old actress, who admittedly comes off much younger than that, played this role in our production. She did an excellent job, but the horror of such a young child living with her abusive memories was never realized at the same level as would have been possible with a child of the character's real age.

Another major problem presented by this difference in cast ages was the writing of the music. The music was scored for mostly young voices, meaning that most of the boys' roles were written for undeveloped voices. This placed several of the songs in difficult ranges for the male cast members. If the songs were to be performed as written, many of the men could not have sustained the high tessitura, as it stayed in what would be considered an alto's range. But transposed down an octave, the range then became quite low and much more difficult to project. Transposition was not a viable solution in most cases, as this would have affected the other singers, especially the females, who joined in at other times. Solutions came about through several means: adding voices, generally alto voices, to the most difficult parts to project; transposing or speak-singing difficult passages; reassigning roles to match voices; and splitting songs into sections sung by different characters.

There were other choices directly affected by the maturity of my cast. Several songs had games such as "Ring Around the Rosie" or "Duck Duck Goose" which were used as background chanting. This was used effectively in the original production to contrast the childlike innocence which we associate with these games and the abuse and neglect found in the lyrics of the songs. However, a cast comprised of twenty year olds singing "Duck Duck Goose" presents a different message--possibly one of mental instability. That was not the message we wanted to convey, so we had to substitute more age-appropriate material that could still carry a sense of

irony. During rehearsals the cast improvised routines and games that they felt their characters might engage in during idle periods. Challenge games--like "thumb wars" or the game where one person holds his hands, palm down, over his partner's hands and tries to remove them before the partner can bring them around and slap them from the top--proved to be acceptable forms of play that led to interesting acting choices. Other characters exercised with the equipment found in the abandoned site or danced or acted out fantasies. These improvisations led to the staging used in the song "LET ME BE A KID."

The ethnic mix of the New York cast also gave a color to the show which was not possible for the UNO cast. The original production of Runaways had several Hispanic and African American cast members. There are several parts of the script that demand a specific cultural representation, especially the Spanish speaking roles of Luis, Lidia and Manny. There are also sections in the script that call for separate groups designated by "White Kids," "Spanish Kids," and "Black Kids." The racial diversity in Ms. Swados's cast allowed her to explore several issues that are not necessarily race-specific, but certainly gave an authentic presentation when portrayed by children of color.

I was fortunate to be able to find one actress who has an Hispanic heritage and was fluent in Spanish. I had another actress with Hispanic blood, but she was the only choice for the role of the youngest runaway, a very defined role by the script. This casting choice limited us to the amount in which we were able to identify her heritage. I had a young black actress who auditioned, but proved to be unreliable, so I could not cast her. I cast a thirty-nine year old African American actor, hoping to at least have a small representation of his race; but time conflicts and health problems forced him

to drop out of the cast a couple of weeks before we opened. Reworking the race-specific parts of the script became a necessary challenge.

The first necessary problem to overcome was the role of Luis—one of the most defined roles in the show. Luis is the drug pusher in the original script. He speaks many of his monologues in Spanish, and has a relationship with Lidia. There is also a song entitled "NO LULLABYE FOR LUIS BOY" which would have lost its impact by changing the title character's name to Lloyd or Louie. The solution was to cast a non-Hispanic in the role and treat him as a product of a Puerto Rican-Caucasian union. This actually worked extremely well as the actor was able to speak Spanish when necessary, but allowed him to speak English also. The talented actor that played Luis was able to deliver the monologue entitled "SPOONS" and still be consistent with the character's history. This actor chose to create a very unlikeable drug pusher, who abused his girlfriend, Lidia, and whose attitudes could be traced back to the fact that he was not accepted in either the Puerto Rican or the Caucasian worlds. I thought this was the riskiest casting choice of the entire production, and yet I did not hear any complaints or criticisms about this casting choice.

Manny's role was absorbed into the role of Luis when it was race-specific and into other roles when it was not. The sections that were obviously meant for black actors had to be modified or deleted. The song which has a rap feel to it, "ENTERPRISE," was reworked and split up among several of the cast members. The monologue "GRAFFITI" belonged to the cast member who had to drop out of the show and unfortunately could not be revised and reassigned at such a late date in the rehearsal process, so it was deleted completely. Chant sections like the "MULTI-LINGUAL GAME

CHANT" with the lyrics "oongawa oongawa this is black power, destroy white boy" were easily discarded with no harm to the script.

Overall, the casting of the UNO production worked well and was utilized to its fullest. However, one of the first objectives stated in the proposal was not achieved: our cast did not have a wide range of racial representation. Unfortunately, this limited several production choices. On the other hand, the solutions we found for the inherent problems presented by having so few actors of color were creative and, in point of fact, satisfying to the director and to a majority of audience members, judging by the feedback I received.

One of the biggest differences between these two productions, and certainly the difference which I found to be the most interesting and influential in the process, was the time setting. Elizabeth Swados set her runaways in the contemporary world of 1978 in order to accentuate the problems that were present in their immediate time. When I read the script, and later watched the videotaped performance, the datedness was so apparent that the intended messages had lost their poignancy. In the episode "CURRENT EVENTS," one character relates all the horrific headlines of the recent past. In the script, references are made to the blackout, Son of Sam, Patty Hearst, the Shah of Iran, and Helter Skelter. When this monologue was spoken in 1978, these touchstones of contemporary social problems were more current, more readily identifiable, and, in fact, reflections of the immediate world of the reader/spectator. However, these same words now ring of history, of problems of the not-so-distant past; but they are certainly less than immediate. This lack of immediacy was reinforced as the UNO cast read through the script. Nearly all of the above references had to be explained as the cast members did not know their significance.

Another example of material that was current then, but now appears dated is the song "I AM THE UNDISCOVERED SON." Ms. Swados composed a song in which the runaways fantasized about who they would choose for a famous relative if they had one. Some names, like John F. Kennedy and Judy Garland, were meant to be historic references even then, and these worked equally as well in both productions. However, other references, like "the undiscovered son of Eddy Fisher" who is starring in a science fiction movie with his sister Carrie, were meant to be contemporary. The reference here, of course, was to the movie Star Wars from 1977.⁴⁶ Despite the history versus contemporary elements, this song worked well in our production as all of the references were related to runaways who came from the period in which the famous people would have lived.

The script that Ms. Swados wrote had an immediacy to it that cannot be recreated anymore without script revision or interpolation of current affairs. However, instead of updating the script, or making the production a period piece, I wanted to keep the immediacy of the original production without destroying the text. I therefore chose to create a runaways village inhabited by people from different time periods. Meyerhold's productions have been described as not trying to mirror reality, but to create their own reality. Following his lead, but trying to keep the situations and stories as real as possible, I developed the idea that each character had not only run away from his home and his problems, but also from the time period in which he had lived. Although the audience lived in the world of 1992, the character of Ernie in our production still lived in 1969. Avalon thought it was 1963, Lily lived in the audience's contemporary world of 1992 and Luis lived in the time of the original production, 1978. Other characters came from the late 1950s, the middle seventies, and all throughout the 1980s. Time became a non-

existent factor after these characters had run away. This was explained in the program notes, but otherwise was not readily apparent to the casual spectator.

Although I would have liked this time element to have been apparent to audience members, the importance was not in the performance, but in how it influenced the acting and directing choices in the rehearsal process. As I assigned episodes to different characters, the period from which each character ran away had to be kept in mind so that the tomboy from the 1950s did not talk about events that happened in the 1970s, etc. Sometimes, as in the case of "CURRENT EVENTS," certain passages had to be split among characters in order to keep it from being anachronistic. Alexander, who delivered the current events monologue in the UNO production, spoke the majority of the monologue; but other characters took the lines about the killing of JFK and Martin Luther King or the kidnapping of Patty Hearst. Other lines, like the Son of Sam were substituted with similar events from Alexander's period, the 1950s--which in this case was the murder spree of Charles Starkweather.

The innovative process of simultaneity of time led us to layer each monologue with additions of events that were significant to each character. As Alexander spoke of Charles Starkweather, Luis (from 1978) shouted out "Son of Sam," Joy (from 1970) yelled "Charles Manson," and one of the characters from the 1990s added "Jeffrey Dahmer." Each character used references to events similar to those which Alexander spoke of but which were more immediate to him or her. This added an interesting level of sound to the monologue, as the single voice of Alexander was enhanced with the chronologically appropriate "echoes" of the other cast members. This technique of layering sounds kept the entire cast animated and into the

action during monologues. It also helped to motivate the main character in this particular episode as he eventually broke down from the realizations of all the evils in his world.

The UNO production began with a less than successful attempt to acquaint the audience with the idea that each character came from a different time. The pre-show music was from the various decades and, like the music in the production itself, represented various genres including punk, pop, blues and rock and roll. Then as the stage went to black, the band began to produce "unworldly" sounds using a bell tree and synthesized white noise. The cast members entered in the dark and began to chant their names, the years in which they continued to exist, and certain key phrases which identified their characters. This created an interesting way to begin the action, but it was not clear enough to introduce the time element to an unsuspecting audience. After reflecting on this, I think a better solution might have been to highlight each actor with a special light, allowing the audience to see and hear each character individually. The noise would have still been layered, the idea nearly the same, but the identification would have been more effective through this highlighting process. This solution might have helped to introduce the simultaneity of time element in a clearer manner.

Often the problem of trying to keep the chronological events consistent with the characters would lead us to innovative solutions that probably would not have been discovered otherwise. For instance, the actor who played Avalon was the only person I felt could carry off the difficult speaking of "UNDISCOVERED SON" while the chorus sang his dialogue in a Gregorian chant-like pattern. However, the references to people in the song were often not from Avalon's time period, 1963. We solved this by making Avalon relate each verse to someone from the appropriate era. In other words, the fantasy

of Muhammed Ali was drawn out of a character from the late 1960s, whereas the Eddy Fisher/Star Wars reference came from a character out of the late 1970s. When Avalon described John F. Kennedy and mimed a gunshot to the head, he was expressing his own fantasy, one based on an event from his own time period.

The characters coming from differing time elements also led the actors to make interesting acting choices and to create very clear personal histories of their characters. We discussed how the ideas of equality of races have changed throughout the last forty years. It would appear that the characters from the 1950s would have a different tolerance level of various races than those who were radicals in the late 1960s or politically correct advocates in the 1990s. Also, since we had one character who was portrayed as hearing impaired, profound differences in the way people perceive his impairment would be displayed according to each character's time period and background. As rehearsals progressed, and character choices became more apparent, certain relationships, antagonistic and friendly, began emerging tempered by the social conditions of each character's time period.

A few other instances will demonstrate discoveries that were influenced directly or indirectly by the time element imposition. The actor who played Ernie, the basketball loving "protector" from 1969, created a history that encompassed the sentiments of many of the young men of his era. Ernie was basically a good guy who decided he did not want to go to Vietnam. His father was a WWII veteran who couldn't understand how he had raised a draft dodger. The resulting misunderstanding between the two men drove Ernie away. His character did not hook, steal, do drugs or have many of the unsavory characteristics of the other runaways. In fact, he became the protector of the weak. However, his social setting, the turbulent 1960s, had

branded him as an outcast. Throughout the production, his choices were all based on this information.

The Alexander character was a misfit from the late 1950s who had a dream of becoming a famous musician. The last section of the "REVENGE SONG" is written to be performed as an impression of Stevie Wonder. The actor who portrayed Alexander decided to give it an Elvis twist, staying consistent with his time period and his fantasy, and at the same time providing an entertaining, comical rendition that audiences appreciated.

The simultaneity of time element created a truly interesting challenge for the actors and the director. In the end, whether the audience perceived this time setting innovation was of little relevance; it had worked its magic in the process. It is my belief that the time element did not interfere with the audience's ability to understand the characters; instead, it gave a depth to the character that might not have otherwise been discovered.

NOTES

⁴⁶ Desmond Ryan, Video Capsule Reviews (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1985) 291.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY

The musical Runaways proved to be an interesting, educational challenge that provided an excellent opportunity to expand my directorial skills. In fact, by working on this project, I have been forced to reexamine my directorial approaches to musicals altogether. In this final chapter I summarize the entire experience, drawing in opinions from spectators, adjudicators, faculty members, and cast members, as well as myself. Further, I examine the original objectives presented in a project proposal and show how some were met, some were exceeded, and others were not reached. I demonstrate the areas in which I felt successes were attained and those areas of production in which expectations were not met. Lastly there is an explanation of how working on this project has been educational and what effects I will carry with me into my future professional work in theatre.

As stated earlier, rehearsals for Runaways at the University of Nebraska began on October 12, 1992 and the performances were held December 3-5 and 9-12, 1992 at the Experimental Theatre in the Fine Arts Building. I began the initial research during the spring semester preceding the rehearsals. At the beginning of October I went to New York City to view the videotaped performance of the original production which is housed in the archives of the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center. This particular performance was videotaped at the Public Theater Cabaret in Martinson Hall under the auspices of the New York Shakespeare Festival Production. Although the actual date of the taping of the performance is not known, one can assume it precedes the opening of Runaways on Broadway, which was at the Plymouth Theatre on May 6, 1978. The off-Broadway production

opened on March 9, 1978,⁴⁷ so the video must have been taken sometime between March 9 and May 6, 1978.

After the UNO production had finished its pre-determined run, I voraciously collected feedback from various sources: audience members, performing arts faculty, students from the Introduction to Theatre classes, ushers, and the cast members. Following is a general summary of the criticisms and commendations which I read in students' papers, gleaned from faculty recommendations or noted from casual conversations.

The UNO faculty was tremendously supportive of my efforts. Dr. Douglas Paterson and Dr. Cindy Phaneuf were the dramatic arts representatives from my graduate committee. Both of these professors attended rehearsals frequently and offered suggestions that proved to be invaluable. They commended me often for maintaining my objectives and letting the process remain the primary objective. Dr. Phaneuf tried to convince me to let out the choreographer inside of me to work its magic. I resisted this advice for a long time. Finally I acquiesced and choreographed one of the songs. The resulting production number was absurd and the whole feeling of process and cast involvement was diminished. We immediately struck the choreography and went back to the process to restage this song.

Dr. Phaneuf's main criticism remained that the show needed a choreographer's touch. I, however, was extremely pleased with the almost chaotic, but entirely staged, look of the show. She also helped me to use the Artaud image of the fire in the lantern, the intense burning on the inside which provides such illumination and heat, as a tool to keep the cast alive and vital.

Dr. Paterson commended me for maintaining my principles. He wrote in a recommendation that this was one of the rare examples of a student who not only meets his professors' expectations, but believes in his work enough to go beyond his tutor's advice. Dr. Paterson also constantly reminded me that each segment, and the production as a whole, had to start at one point and progress to another point. He often pointed out the episodes that seemed to be stagnant and helped me to find ways of making these segments move from point A to point B and beyond. Both professors felt there were areas of the show which needed to progress further than they had, but I think they also understood the limitations of the cast members.

The other two members of my graduate committee were Dr. Cina Crisara from the Music Department and Professor Josie Metal-Corbin, director of UNO's "Moving Company." Dr. Crisara commended my work as music director. She was very aware of the varying caliber of musical talent in the cast and congratulated me for being able to hone the talent in my cast into a viable musical group. Dr. Crisara lent her expertise with suggestions on how to improve the sound of the band. Her suggestions were exactly what was needed. Professor Metal-Corbin could not attend as many rehearsals as the other committee members, but her suggestions were equally as helpful. All of the professors congratulated me on a successful run and were especially pleased with the focus of my project and the extent in which I was willing to take risks.

The opinions of the general public toward my production varied almost as much as those of the reviews which I have read about Ms. Swados's original production. Many spectators did not like the script itself, finding it full of blame or lacking humor. The majority of criticisms dealt with the fact that the musical had no plot. One local musician and actress, however, was so

pleasantly surprised at the power of the production that she became an advocate of the show. She was so moved by the stories of the runaways and so intrigued with the manner of presentation that she convinced her reluctant husband to accompany her on her return. He was equally enthusiastic after the performance. The actress also thought it was important for her high school students to come see this musical, not only for the dramatic hints they might be able to collect, but also as a socially relevant message that she felt they needed to hear.

A common criticism, again heard often about the New York production, was that the characters were not clear enough to be distinguishable. Many of the students who wrote papers complained that they did not have enough information about each character to identify him or her. Certain faculty members expressed this same concern. However, when detailing the specifics of the production, many of these same students wrote about their favorite characters, showing that at least some of the individual characters had made a strong impression. It is very possible that many of the characters were too generic for an audience member to be able to successfully recall following the production. This criticism was levelled at the original production as well. I believe that this is partly due to the talent level of the individual cast members and partly due to the nature of the script.

Almost all critiques pointed out the character of Avalon as being the favorite or the most identifiable. The actor who portrayed Avalon is one of those rare finds--a natural talent who has a flair for comedy and drama equally. He had more episodes to help delineate his character traits than most of the other cast members. It is my belief that the audiences identified with the character of Avalon more than any other because his role was so well defined and well acted, and also because there was a story line

connected to this character. Throughout the production, Avalon was the one who kept the story bright, injecting humor when the episodes were getting too heavy. However, as the play progressed, he began to show signs of some kind of instability. Toward the end of the production, he committed a rape and murder of the character with whom he had the clearest relationship. As a director, I struggled with the choice of whom the murderer would be. I questioned whether choosing Avalon would create more of a story line than was intended by Ms. Swados, and I believe now that my perception was correct. The audience was able to identify and empathize with Avalon not only because he was extremely talented and had some of the best episodes, but also because he was the embodiment of a plot--something many of the audience members could not find elsewhere in the production.

The manner of presentation was so unfamiliar to many novice theatre-goers that it confused them from the outset. In general, however, young people who have grown up on the untraditional images on MTV, were less daunted by the production elements than the regular theatre-goers. Many of the more mature audience members had pre-conceived ideas of what to expect with a musical because of their familiarity with the Rodgers and Hammerstein successes. Common complaints were that a musical should be happy or entertaining, not thought provoking or depressing.

Probably the comment that meant the most to me came from an usher who attended almost every performance. This young man came to me outside of performance one day to tell me how much the production meant to him. He explained that he was an adopted child from a Mexican border town and that the stories being told were his stories. He identified so closely with many of the characters that he found himself drawn into each performance. He never elaborated on exactly which things moved him, but he expressed

the fact that we had captured the truth and were presenting it in the best possible way.

I asked several cast members to give me an honest assessment of their experience on Runaways. All of the cast members I interviewed enjoyed the process. Several mentioned specifically how they enjoyed the freedom to create their own staging and to participate in important dramatic decisions. It gave the cast members a real sense of investment into the production. Many cast members enjoyed the research they conducted, and the subsequent character history that was developed through the research and the rehearsal improvisations. All of the actors expressed a real sense of pride in both their own work and in the show. No one had anything negative to say about the experience at all.

A formal evaluation came from a respondent for the American College Theatre Festival. Paul Steger, a professor from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, gave an informal critique following the performance he attended. He then sent a three page formal critique that was very insightful. He remarked how the setting and the pre-show music immediately established a "mood of despair and isolation with an undertow of passion." Even before the play had begun he had perceived the runaways' village to be a colorless, harsh, industrial wasteland of the streets. He commented on the high energy level of the actors. Professor Steger felt that the text had been interpreted well, especially noting several areas which happened to be my favorite moments as well: the hands which groped the youngest runaway in the blue spotlight of "MINNESOTA STRIP;" the fighting and flying heroes in the funny "FIND ME A HERO" song; the contrast of the real and unreal worlds depicted in "NO LULLABYES FOR LUIS;" and the image of the spider crawling along the back fence before the rape of Gretchen.

He commended the actors for taking risks and making bold, even volatile choices. He also perceived the method of rehearsals through the performance and stated: "The director must have established a very good relationship in the rehearsal process to allow the ensemble to experiment with the bold choices and risks that they seemed to feel so comfortable with in the performance."

Professor Steger complimented the director for making the production seem so fresh and chaotic, but expressed concern about the staging being so unstructured as to make it unsafe. In fact, the evening that he attended, one of the actresses slipped on the ladder and fell onto another actress directly in front of him. This incident caused him to caution us about being too "free-form" and suggested that the production could have been more polished in its staging to prevent such actions. This was actually a compliment, because the "free-form" feel was an objective I was working towards. The truth of the matter is that the movements which appeared so chaotic, were completely staged and repeated at every performance. In fact, on the brush-up rehearsal we ran the show at break neck speed. The resulting movement, fifteen actors climbing, jumping, running, and falling at twice the normal rate of speed, showed clearly how exact the blocking was. I only regret that no one else was there to see this rehearsal as it showed without a doubt that the chaos of Runaways was truly not chaos at all, but meticulously planned out and consistently executed.

Professor Steger was incredibly intuitive as to each character's history and motivations. He was able to perceive more about some of the lesser ensemble members than I supposed any audience member would ever be able to do. However, he felt that there was a lack of empathy for the ensemble. I found this curious, because it was the same criticism I had

levelled at the original company. He pointed out that the humanity began to emerge about two-thirds of the way through the production. This made him focus more on the individual rather than society as a whole.

He concluded his critique saying: "In general the production involved me intellectually, I admired the ensemble's risk-taking and bold choices, and I applaud the willingness to undertake the production of unconventional musicals."

I was recently asked in a job interview to name some recent work of which I was proud. Instantly I responded by naming my production of Runaways. I cannot say it is the best production I have been involved with, nor would I say that all of my choices as a director, choreographer and musical director were the best choices. However, I feel a great sense of pride in this production for several reasons. I do believe it was a valuable, entertaining theatrical production. I also think that it was educational--not only for the cast members and me, but also for audience members. Most of all, I am proud of the fact that I set my sights on certain goals, especially the goal of letting the process be the main focus, and I stuck to those objectives throughout the rehearsal period. I sat through every rehearsal and every performance and can honestly say that I was amazed and entertained at each sitting. I saw growth in each actor, depth in each character, and pride in the ensemble as a whole. It was truly an exciting finale, when as the last week approached, and the set was finished and the lights focused, we were able to see the process culminate into a powerful evening of theatre.

In my original proposal, I outlined several objectives which I hoped to reach through my work on Runaways. The first objective was to create an entertaining and understandable production using a script that is vague and confusing. This was accomplished successfully in most instances; but I

would have to admit that some of the methods of presentation used in the UNO production did not necessarily enhance understanding. The techniques used to incorporate the simultaneity of time element at times clouded the episodes for the spectator rather than clarifying them.

Another objective was to create an ensemble whose acting had a sense of inner truth, but could also exhibit the influences of Brecht, Artaud, and Meyerhold. This was accomplished to my complete satisfaction. We were able to blend the method of Stanislavski, the power to portray real emotions, with the techniques of alienation, theatre of images, theatre of cruelty and the grotesque. The individual members of the ensemble were constantly challenged to look at the text in a new way, and yet the honesty of the stories was never compromised.

The time element was an objective that was successful in process and in the shaping of the performance, but did not make it across the boards to the audience. I feel strongly that this was the best decision I made in approaching the script. No one outside of the production will ever know how much influence the characters' diverse time frames affected the final performance. It is an idea that has not been fully realized, and will serve me again in future productions I am sure.

The research I did before, during and after production fulfilled my next objective. I wanted to learn about other nontraditional approaches to texts. I feel that I got a minute sample of the brilliant and innovative ideas from directors of nontraditional theatre. As has been the case throughout my graduate program, the more I find out about any subject, the more I know there is to discover.

I wanted to present this compilation of real life horrors in a manner that would deliver a message about the timelessness of human suffering and yet

maintain an entertaining, if thought provoking, method of doing so. This was difficult to achieve. There were various opinions as to the successfulness or failure to accomplish both objectives. Throughout the process one of the primary thoughts was to soften the guilt and the blame that I believe was written into the script, without removing any of the effectiveness. I believe that this was, for the most part, accomplished.

Keeping the innovativeness of the original production was an objective that I felt I not only achieved, but exceeded. From all of the research and reading I did beforehand, I honestly believe that Elizabeth Swados would have approved of the methods I used to present her material. I constantly strived for more creative ways to present the text and I let the process help to shape what we conjured up. Although the two productions were completely different in so many ways, the most common link between them was the use of nontraditional approaches to staging and text.

The last objective was to take risks in my directing methods and challenge the actors to explore new territories in their acting. This is the area where I succeeded most grandly. I feel that my ideas of what a director can accomplish have been expanded a hundredfold after this experience. The cast members were inhibited and a bit reluctant at the outset of the rehearsal process, but by the time of performance, all had grown immensely through the risks they had undertaken. Many of the actors, especially the musical theatre actors, had never experienced anything like this before. We all emerged with a suitcase full of new experiences that will further our growth as artists.

There were many small successes and failures that have not yet been noted. It was a daunting challenge to be the director, choreographer, and musical director on this particular project. This was not new to me because I

have often performed all of these tasks on a project, or participated in other such comparable multiple duties. However, this project was all the more difficult because I never had a stage manager/production assistant that I could count on. The original assistant could not make a commitment to the rehearsal schedule, and eventually dropped out of the project. Her replacement was not much better, and the hours spent in trying to corral my assistant ended up being more than if I had undertaken the job myself. I also had problems with the band: my pianist left after a couple of weeks and found a substitute that did not reach his standards; other band members were often late, or didn't show up at all at rehearsals; I had three different drummers before we finally arrived at the one who would play the show; and I had a bass player that couldn't do all of the performances due to another University commitment. Even with all of these problems, I felt that I was successful in all of my duties.

I also successfully demonstrated my abilities to communicate with the technical staff to achieve what I wanted and yet to leave the door open enough to allow them to be creative. This was a challenge because the design staff did not agree with my decision about the time setting. I also had to assert myself more than other directors might have needed to do because I was in the position of being a student and working with a design staff composed of my faculty members. They were all extremely hard working, interested in the project, and quite professional in their dealings with me. I regret that the costuming did not achieve the results that I wanted, but find consolation in the fact that the costume choices were incorporated into the acting process.

More than any other success, I felt I was given an extremely rare opportunity to study various theories of theatre aesthetics and then to put

them into actual practice. By studying the theories of Brecht and then applying them to the actors in our rehearsal process I was able to better understand these methods which I had often read about but had never experienced. I was able to find practical methods of application for all of the various theories we had studied in my graduate classes. It was a tremendous experience to gather the information from my various theoretical classes and apply them directly to the real workings of theatre.

Runaways was an important project in my journey to becoming a director. The research, the methods, the experimentation that I did preparing for this production will be tools which I will call upon freely in future endeavors. The fact that the process led to a successful performance has altered my perception of how to make a theatre production reach its potential. I felt the creativity was stimulated so much more in this process than in any other production I had previously worked on that I will strive to keep the process an important function in all future projects.

NOTES

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APPENDIX A
A Character Breakdown of the UNO Production

- Joy -** 16 year old Caucasian female. Born in Boston, ran away to NYC. Current time is 1970. Works for a pimp named Mico. Survives by fantasizing, has imaginary bird friends.
- Ace -** Real name is Casey Simpson. 19 year old from Minneapolis. Ran away to Chicago in 1991. Hustler, card shark. Has been on streets for 1.5 years. Came from dysfunctional family.
- Alexander -** 20 year old Caucasian male from St. Louis. Ran away to Chicago. Current time is 1958. Has never resolved mother's death. Loner.
- Bailey -** 16 year old Caucasian female. Only on streets for two months. Very confused. Current time is 1982.
- Gabriela -** 17 year old Hispanic female from Matamoros, Mexico. Current time is 1975 and current place is Dallas. Has survived on the streets for a year by hooking and by her relationship with Luis.
- Spanky -** Real name is Jack Wilson. Abused and neglected as young child. Has been on the streets virtually his whole life. Lives in New Jersey in 1983. Angry, volatile.
- Gretchen -** 18 year old Caucasian female from New Mexico. Ran away in 1981 to Memphis. Been on the streets for four years. Often stoned. Ran away because "conflict is cool." Befriends Avalon, who later rapes and kills her.
- Carolyn -** 16 year old Caucasian female from Minnesota. Current time is 1968. Rich girl who came from abusive family. Cannot handle the street life very well. Needs protection.
- Rhonda -** 20 year old female who ran away in 1956. A "motorcycle mama." Very tough exterior, very vulnerable interior.
- Miriah -** 15 year old Hispanic female from Peoria, IL. Long history of sexual abuse. Still carries doll, acts immaturity. Luis uses her to carry his drugs.
- Ernie -** Gordon Ernest Jr. 19 year old Caucasian male from CA. Ran away in 1969. Sane, level-headed, strong and understanding. Ran

away because of father's disapproval after Ernie protested the Vietnam war (Ernie's brother was killed in Nam).

Luis - 18 year old half-Puerto Rican, half-Caucasian male. Birth place is unknown, but assumed to be NYC. Been on the streets for eight years. Current time period is 1978. Grew up in an orphanage, unaccepted by both Hispanic and Caucasian cultures. Drug pusher, abusive in relationship with Gabriela.

The Pope - Real name is Gerry Burroughs. White male, 25 years old. Born in Queens, ran away to Manhattan. Current time is 1964. Hearing impaired. Heroin addict.

Lily - 16 year old Caucasian female from Peoria, IL. Ran away in 1992 to the inner city of Chicago. Only on the streets for nine months. Victim of sexual abuse.

Avalon - Real name is Garret Robinson. Caucasian male from Long Beach California. Ran away to Hollywood to make it in the movies. Does not consider himself to be a runaway. Has a troubled past that finally pushes him to rape and murder his friend, Gretchen.

APPENDIX B
The First Biographical Questionnaire

Name:

Character Name:

Year:

Headlines:

Movies, Sports figures, Politics, Plays, Albums, Dances, etc.:

APPENDIX C
The Second Biographical Questionnaire

Name:

Nickname (if any):

Age:

Birth Date:

Where were you born:

Where does the play take place (city):

Month:

Year:

Time of day:

Economic Resources:

How much money do you have:

How do you eat:

How do you bathe:

Where do you sleep:

How do you pass the time:

What would you buy if you had any money:

Survival Resources:

How long have you been on the street:

Date you ran away from 'home':

Do you hook:

Do you do drugs:

What kind:

Are you a thief:

What do you steal:

What keeps you sane:

What is your emotional state:

APPENDIX D
The Third Biographical Questionnaire

Name of character:

Name of actor:

Age you were when you ran away:

Date you ran away (last time):

The most treasured item you own/have is:

The single item of clothing or an accessory that you would buy if you had \$5.00 is a:

The image that you want to present to the world is modelled after:

Your state of mind/spirit (75% of the time) can best be described as:

New information/discovery about your character:

APPENDIX E
UNO Program for Runaways

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
College of Fine Arts
Department of Dramatic Arts
presents

RUNAWAYS

**A NEW MUSICAL BY
Elizabeth Swados**

Director/Musical Director.....Dan P. Hays

Set/Lighting Designer.....Robert W. Welk

Costume Designer.....Kathleen Gossman

**Experimental Theatre
Fine Arts Education Building
December 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1992
Eight O'clock P.M.**

Runaways is presented by special arrangement
with Samuel French, Inc.

RUNAWAYS

THE CAST

JOY.....LISA BEACOM
ACE.....ROD CARLSON
ALEXANDER.....THOM DAVIS
BAILEY.....HEIDI HAZUKA
GABRIELA.....ANNA HERNANDEZ
SPANKY.....KENNETH JACOBS JR.
GRETCHEN.....SHAWNA MEFFERD
CAROLYN.....KARI NELSON
ANDY.....GINA MARIE SACCO
MIRIAM.....SARA TEMPLETON
ERNIE.....CHRIS THACKRAY
LUIS.....MATTHEW THIES
THE POPE.....JONATHAN WARMAN
LILY.....APRIL WIETING
AVALON.....AARON ZAVITZ

THE BAND

Kay K. Clark
Mark Harr
Mark Irvin
John Myre
Brian Nelson

ACT I

Prologue / You Don't Understand.....Ensemble / Pope, Carolyn
 I Had to Go.....Ace, Ernie, Gretchen, Avalon
 Appendectomy.....Miriah
 Where Do People Go?.....Ensemble
 Footsteps.....Lily, Ensemble
 Once Upon A Time.....Ace, Gretchen, Ensemble
 Current Events.....Alexander, Ensemble
 Every Now and Then.....Ernie, Ensemble
 Out on the Street.....Pope, Bailey
 Minnesota Strip.....Miriah, Ensemble
 Song of a Prostitute.....Joy, Miriah, Carolyn
 Christmas Puppies.....Rhonda
 Cesi Que Quieres Sera una Puta.....Gabriela
 Heroes.....Avalon
 Find Me A Hero.....Ensemble
 Scrynatchkiealooaw.....Gretchen
 I am the Undiscovered Son.....Avalon, Ensemble
 I Went Back Home.....Spanky, Gabriela, Luis
 This is What I Do When I'm Angry.....Joy, Ensemble
 Basketball Song.....Ernie, Spanky, Ensemble
 Spoons.....Luis
 No Lullabies for Luis.....Carolyn, Luis, Ensemble
 We Are Not Strangers.....Ensemble

15 MINUTE INTERMISSION

ACT II

Sleeping Line.....Ensemble
 Lullaby from Baby to Baby.....Rhonda, Lily, Ensemble
 Tra Gog.....Avalon, Pope
 Revenge.....Rhonda, Alexander, Ensemble
 Enterprise.....Ensemble
 Sometimes.....Bailey, Ensemble
 Clothes.....Alexander
 We Are Not Strangers.....Ensemble
 Untrue Pigeon Speech.....Joy
 Untrue Pigeon Song.....Joy, Lily
 We Have To Die?.....Lily
 Duermete Nino.....Gabriela
 Appendectomy II.....Miriah
 Let Me Be A Kid.....Ensemble
 To The Dead of Family Wars.....Ensemble
 Problem After Problem.....Ensemble
 Lonesome of the Road.....Carolyn, Joy, Ensemble
 Kid Reprise.....Ensemble

RUNAWAYS

PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

Stage Manager.....John P. Hatcher
 Assistant Stage Manager....Marguerite Boehme
 Technical Director.....Barron
 Costumer.....Kathleen Gossman
 Assistant Lighting Designer.....Tobey Wood
 Property Design.....Kevin Hill
 Stage Carpenter.....John P. Hatcher
 Master Electrician.....Steeve Miller
 Light Board Operator.....Kathleen Burke
 Follow Spot Operator.....Edwin Murdock
 Lighting Crew.....Barron,
 Julie Cvetas, Aaron Fili,
 Christine Johnston, Emma Lara,
 Brian Laughlin, Kathy Lewis,
 Chris Nielsen, Tom Pacer, Tobey Wood
 Wardrobe.....Emma Lara
 Properties Crew.....Kevin Hill, Seth Perlman
 Scene Construction Crew.....Stagecraft Class
 Scene Painting.....Barrett Ryker
 Publicity.....Emily Kecey
 House Manager.....Tom Mitchell
 Ushers.....Julie Cvetas,
 Christine Johnston, Richard L. Jones,
 Kathy Lewis, Brian Mortensen
 Grad. Asst., Box Office.....Dan P. Hays
 Grad. Asst., Costuming.....Stephanie Stewart
 Grad. Asst., Publicity.....David Zinck

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

This summer I had the opportunity to direct Oliver, a musical based on Dickens' novel Oliver Twist, for the Ralston Community Theatre. It occurred to me then that the reasons young people run away were the same in 1850 as they are today. Some of the problems they encounter have changed names - the drugs of choice have progressed from alcohol, opium, heroin, marijuana, LSD, cocaine to crack - but the situations are frighteningly similar through the years. This led me to locate the action of the play in a timeless, faceless place. The runaways of this particular village come from the last five decades in America, 1950-1992. They have not only run away from their homes and families, but also from their own time period. They are from poor families and rich; single parent families, orphanages, step-parent situations, as well as "normal" family settings. These stories were taken from interviews with actual runaway children. Their horrors were real. Unfortunately, there are literally millions of other stories just like these.

- Dan P. Hays

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