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The Aesthetic and Technical Problems in Designing and Mounting the Tingalary Bird: A Production Design Thesis

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THE AESTHETIC AND TECHNICAL PROBLEMS IN DESIGNING
AND MOUNTING THE TINGALARY BIRD:
A PRODUCTION DESIGN THESIS

by

James Beal Lutz

Bachelor of Science, Slippery Rock State College 1964

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

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This thesis submitted by James Beal Lutz in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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Title THE AESTHETIC AND TECHNICAL PROBLEMS IN DESIGNING AND MOUNTING
THE TINGALARY BIRD: A PRODUCTION DESIGN THESIS

Department Theatre Arts

Degree Master of Arts

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Signature James D. Letz

Date July 28, 1971

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the designing and mounting of the children's play, The Tingalary Bird. Designing included the set, properties and furniture, costume, make-up, lighting, and sound. A stylized concept was followed throughout the entire production. A bird cage set, furniture, and properties were built with function, mobility, color, and shape as the primary design elements. Costumes, built from day-glow colored fabric and make-up characterizing doll-like features were coordinated for an overall stylized effect. Lighting, including ultraviolet light, and tape-recorded sound, ranging from pipe organ to acid rock which periodically added a definite mood and emphasis to the plot, accentuated the make-believe and magic of children's theatre.

The play ran for seven performances. The children's audience reacted to the fifty-minute productions by sending the cast and crew letters and drawings. The stylized design concept enabled the children's audience to combine their imagination with the plot of the play. The use of ultraviolet light proved to be a spectacular technical element in the overall stylized design concept. As indicated by their drawings, the footlight shields on the forestage were distracting visual barriers to the children. The designer felt a need for the addition of more stylized trees to the forest setting which would have given the feeling

of greater dimension. Designing for mobility and action, light and sound with aesthetic sensitivity as the foundation for the stylized design concept challenged the writer as designer and technical director for The Tingalary Bird.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an account of the solution of an aesthetic problem. Neither the actual solution nor the problem is found in this paper. Before an audience of children and adults, the problem was met and the solution found in the actual presentation of The Tingalary Bird.

The designer's intent was, through the technical aspects of theatre, to create and execute a design acceptable to the director and to fulfill the following: (1) the joy of make-believe and magic; (2) an aesthetic experience; (3) an understanding of the "message" as written by the playwright; (4) a technically competent production to aid the development of a discriminating taste for theatre.

This thesis is an attempt to report on how the problem was conceived, developed and executed for the production of The Tingalary Bird. Chapter I discusses the play as interpreted by the director and the designer. It also establishes a mutual philosophy and design concept. Chapter II examines the problems of production involved in set, properties and furniture, costume, make-up, light and sound. Chapter III discusses mounting the production, materials which were used to execute the design, and the function of the completed design. Conclusions illustrating the success of the design concept, the problem analysis and the final results are discussed in Chapter IV. Appendices include renderings, floor plan, lighting plot, costume sketches and photograph plates.

CHAPTER I

A DESIGN CONCEPT AND PHILOSOPHY IN PRODUCTION OF

THE TINGALARY BIRD

First produced by the Unicorn Theatre for Young People at the Arts Theatre in London, England, in the 1964-1965 season, The Tingalary Bird by Mary Melwood was billed as a theatre piece for children in three acts. Melwood classified the play as theatre of the absurd for children.

The concept of "theatre of the absurd" has been applied to various playwrights exemplifying divergent existential philosophies. Many designers are motivated by Martin Esslin's reference to theatre of the absurd as a prime example of "pure theatre." Esslin stated:

They [absurd plays] are living proof that the magic of the stage can persist even outside, and divorced from, any framework of conceptual rationality. They prove that exits and entrances, light and shadow, contrast in costume, voice, gait and behavior, pratfalls and embraces, all the manifold mechanical interactions of human puppets in groupings that suggest tension, can arouse laughter or gloom and conjure up an atmosphere of poetry even if devoid of logical motivation and unrelated recognizable human characters, emotions, and obligations.¹

In absurd theatre dramatists present that which sounds and appears to be unrelated. The final results, however, fulfill the

¹Martin Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd," The Tulane Drama Review, May, 1960, p. 4.

audience's quest for a magic which only the stage has to offer. The Tingalary Bird, when applied to Esslin's definition, released the writer of this thesis as a designer and the director from traditional forms of style which bind period plays. In a "pure theatre" sense, reality of environment increases the absurdity of the dialogue. What an adult considers absurd, however, a child may not think absurd at all. No architectural or design reference point is necessary. Absurdity, in its "pure theatre" definition, can exist outside the realm of reality, and for children the magic is limited only by their imagination.

In analyzing the plot and action in the play, certain problems in the script appeared. The scene calls for an isolated cottage deep in the forest. The cottage at one time was an inn but had closed its doors to travelers with a glaring sign which read, "The Stop-Out-and-Go-Away Inn." As the designer of a single unit, interior set, I was immediately concerned with variety of movement to keep the action flowing within the stationary setting. At curtain rise, a sailor appeared strolling through the forest hesitating long enough to sing a short ballad to the audience.

I'm a wandering sailor
With a story to tell
And if you believe it
P'raps I've told it too well.

This poor little dwelling
Is cold and unkind,
And over its threshold
No welcome I'll find.

So out in the forest
I'll go on my way
And see you no more till
The end of the play.²

The ballad completed, he disappeared into the trees. The sailor's line, "And if you believe it / P'raps I've told it too well," encouraged me to pursue make-believe in conceiving a design concept.

The old man appeared next, scurrying about the cottage, poking at an open grate and complaining of the cold weather. Because he was a pathetic character shivering in the cold, cool greens and blues seemed appropriate colors for him. When interrupted, his wife whirled into the cottage as if caught in a windstorm. She carried a large laundry basket overflowing with clothes and other washing paraphernalia. In contrast to the old man, she spoke loudly and demandingly and her actions were brisk and direct. Immediately, I visualized red, orange and pink as characteristic of the old woman's colors. The play continued with the old man taking much verbal abuse from his wife over the fact that he could not successfully (financially) run the inn and, therefore, forced her to take in laundry to pay the bills. She completely dominated her husband. She questioned him thoroughly as to whether or not any travelers had stopped by thinking the cottage was still an inn. He assured her no humans had been there, but confessed that his little bird, which his wife had previously allowed to escape, had returned.

²Mary Mellwood, The Tingalary Bird (London: Caryl Jenner Productions, Limited, n.d.), I.i.2.

Interrupted by sequences of thunder, lightning and the sound of rain, the old woman insisted that someone was trying to gain entrance to their cottage. The sound did not disturb the old man, but on the contrary, generated a feeling of confidence in him. At her insistence, he locked the windows and doors tightly to insure their safety from the storm.

Distinctive knocking could be heard as the old lady screamed, "Go away." The old man hesitated and then decided to open the door as the stage darkened to a blackout. As the stage brightened, a giant bird cage appeared, while the old couple looked on in terror.

After a series of playful gestures with the old man, the bird, having been aroused inside the cage, squawked at the old woman, glaring its green eyes at her while rustling its feathers. The bird remained affectionate toward the old man, as shown by the glow of its golden eyes. A word game over the black color of the bird taught the old lady (and the audience) the word "bituminous coal." The need for a dictionary in every home was also made clear. The bird ate a scrap of bread and this gave the old woman the idea of cooking the enormous "thing" for supper. "It may stew quite tender if I put a lump of soda with it," she said. The old man and woman engaged in a fencing match over the bird's fate. The old woman succeeded in knocking the old man down and lunged for the bird. After a blackout in which the thunder and lightning increased, the lights came up, and the bird strutted about showing off its colorful plumage. Needless to say, the old man called for music and with a "bird cage harp" accompanied the bird as it strutted about. The old man encouraged the old woman to play the harp so that he could

dance with the bird. After accomplishing this, the woman gave up in disgust and hurled the cage-harp at the dancing pair. The bird, aggravated, flew to attack the old woman who, with her broom in hand, soared skyward. During their assaults on one another, the bird bumped the chimney, releasing a horde of coins which cascaded to the floor. The old man now realized that his wife had been freezing and starving him by hiding her money in the chimney. The bird had brought forth the truth.

Immediately he built a warm fire, but discovered in the midst of all of the excitement that the bird had disappeared. The old woman insisted that there was no magic involved in the discovery of the money she was saving for a "rainy day." This created a melancholy mood in the old woman, who, holding a cradle containing a doll, sang a "Rock-a-bye-Baby" lament over not having any children. The old man also affectionately held onto the cradle. The old woman, complaining that children just grow up and go away, pulled the cradle away from the old man as the doll fell to the floor.

As the room filled up with sunlight, the couple was reminded that they had been up all night. Going off to bed, she reminded the old man to safeguard their money. Slowly he did so and then turned the sign around so that it now read, "The Come Inn and Welcome," and then he exited. The sailor reappeared, singing:

I'm a wandering sailor
My story is told
Old Man and Old Woman
I'll leave with their gold.

This dear little dwelling
 Has doors open wide
 The weary and hungry
 May rest there inside.

Let Friendship and Laughter
 Create from to-day
 A new way of living,
 Both righteous and gay.³

After completing the ballad, the sailor bowed and exited. There was a small wicker bird cage on his back in which there was a miniature of the Tingalary Bird.

After reading the play, I was somewhat puzzled as to what the playwright was trying to do with absurdity. There appeared to be many possibilities for an unrealistic combination of setting, costume, and properties; however, absurdity was present in scene segments only.

This designer and the director experienced many exhilarating scheduled and spontaneous sessions. These sessions proved to be the key not only to production staff compatibility, but the source for design inspiration--"brain storming," perhaps.

The initial conference established no restrictions for the designer. His only limitations were the physical plant facilities and budget. The play was discussed in terms of anticipated technical problems, children's audiences and the joy of make-believe and magic. Shapes, colors, textures and sounds began to take shape in my mind as a means to make-believe and magic. With the exception of elements dictated by the script, the designer and director decided that the avoidance of

³Mary Mellwood, The Tingalary Bird (London: Caryl Jenner Productions, Limited, n.d.), III.i.47.

Saturday morning "H. R. Pufnstuf" television shows and Brothers Grimm bedtime stories was essential. The director encouraged the designer's suggestion to move toward stylization involving deliberate deviation from realism.⁴

Stylizing the design meant presenting it in a noticeable artful manner rather than presenting it realistically.⁵ A stylized concept would set the children apart from what they had seen on television, or in motion pictures, or what they had learned to regard as real.⁶

Subsequently conferences delved more deeply into technical problems and cuts to be made in the script. Further discussion established the need for variety in movement beyond that which was motivated by dialogue. Action backed by light and sound took priority over a functional cottage interior setting. Thus, the present trend toward light shows and multi-media productions stimulated further discussion concerning the use of lights and sound in The Tingalary Bird.

The final decision resulted in a design concept which would reflect aesthetic sensitivity through the use of color, line, mass, sound, space, and movement. Generally, it is accepted that set, costume and properties, color, line and mass determine the degree of stylization. Color was used so that it would be seen and would produce some kind of

⁴George R. Kernodle, "Style, Stylization and Styles in Acting," The Educational Theatre Journal, XII (December, 1960), 253.

⁵Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, and William Burto, Aspects of Drama (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 261.

⁶Kernodle, "Style, Stylization and Styles in Acting," 253.

effect.⁷ Line was the restricting boundary which the designer used to control mass. Theatrical elements such as sound involved the non-visible elements of a design concept to which the audience reacted either consciously or unconsciously, while movement within space attracted attention and insured variety. Coordinating these elements with the use of materials including plastic, mylar and styrofoam, established the foundation for the designer's second objective which required the adaptability of a stylized design concept to theatre of the absurd for children.

A continuous one-hour performance, to avoid intermission confusion, was decided upon. The director accomplished this by cutting sequences which provided little action and no plot development. A flying sequence, for the short scene between the old woman and the bird, was eliminated because of the extensive rigging for such a short scene. Another cut pertained to eliminating the sailor's appearance at the very beginning and at the very end of the play.

Through careful examination of the script and numerous conferences with the director, a stylized design concept which would reflect aesthetic sensitivity to a theatre of the absurd play for children was conceived.

⁷Ralph M. Evans, "The Expressiveness of Color," The Educational Theatre Journal, VI (December, 1954), 327.

CHAPTER II

TECHNICAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN DESIGN

In any production the design of costume and setting must be undertaken first. The designer's visualization, represented by sketches, models, and working drawings are guides for design realization. However, the basic problem for this designer was that children's theatre has had no aesthetic prophets such as Adolph Appia or Gordon Craig to examine and recast existing forms, no recognized artists of the first rank such as Robert Edmond Jones and Jo Mielziner to show by example the expert's approach to design problems.⁸ No definite rules or guidelines exist in designing for children's theatre. Lee Simonson cautioned that "an ironclad set of rules would hamper the creative process."⁹ Donald Oenslager agreed by saying that "scenery is never designed twice the same way. Every play must be its own designer."¹⁰ The inspiration from which a design germinates is a curious process. Willard F. Bellman, writing on aesthetics and stage design claimed that:

⁸Jed Horace Davis, Jr., "The Art of Scenic Design for Children's Theatre" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1958), p. 13.

⁹Lee Simonson, The Art of Scenic Design (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950), p. 49.

¹⁰Donald Oenslager, Scenery Then and Now (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1936), p. xiii.

. . . like all other artists, [who] feels the necessity to be retrieved of the logic of the physical world. The logic is a function of the conscious mind which must operate in the physical world in order to survive. Hence, the conscious mind is limited as a symbol-making device for the artist. It is in the subconscious--the home of dreams--that the artist's symbol-making seems to take place.¹¹

Since John Anderson, in "Psychological Aspects of Child Audiences," suggested that a designer should visualize a play from a child's viewpoint and experience, the set was visualized not as a realistic cottage tucked away deep in the forest, but as an environment for the action of the play.¹² The first problem was to design an acting environment which would suggest or arouse in the minds of the audience, images, ideas, and emotions pertinent to the inner drama to be expressed.¹³

The designer made frequent use of Gorelik's scenic metaphor design technique. The scene was not only like something which would be a simile, but the scene was something, which made it a metaphor. Gorelik said that he had "never had a conference with a director who didn't say, 'The setting should have this or that quality.' And when you ask what the quality should be, more exactly, he will get down to a simile or a metaphor."¹⁴ Applied to The Tingalary Bird, the set was

¹¹Willard F. Bellman, "Aesthetics and Stage Design," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLII (October, 1956), 257.

¹²John Anderson, "Psychological Aspects of Child Audiences," The Educational Theatre Journal, II (December, 1950), 289.

¹³Willard F. Bellman, "Aesthetics for the Designer," The Educational Theatre Journal, V (May, 1936), 122.

¹⁴Mordecai Gorelik, "The Factor of Design," The Tulane Drama Review, March, 1961, p. 85.

to become a bird cage. A stylized bird cage which, upon swinging open to form an acting environment and at the same time arouse the imagination of the audience, would solve the major design problem.

A thorough search of available plastic materials was paramount. Upon discovering mylar (a mirrored plastic sheet), Plexiglas (in a variety of thicknesses and colors), and large white rectangular blocks of styrofoam, the designer experimented with shapes which would create an acting environment capable of withstanding a great amount of physical contact. These shapes were sketched (or rather doodled) in margins of class notebooks, backs of envelopes and on church bulletins until a form resembling a giant bird cage began to predominate. The shape grew out of a five-sided pentagonal base. At each angle, an upright arch soared to a center point at which, if it were an ordinary cage, it would be affixed to swing freely. Knowing the play took place in a single setting, the designer desired a movable effect within the acting space. The pentagonal shape resembled five pie slices merging at a center point. The movement stemmed from the pivoting of the pie shapes which opened to reveal a large acting area (Figure 1).

With the elimination of the center section of the pentagon, space for properties and furniture was made available while the "cage" was closed and provided a generous acting area when opened (Figure 2). The angle of the arches controlled the shape of the cage and by attaching an arch to each base angle, the "cage" took shape (Figure 3). Because the director suggested a white set (a white cage), it seemed essential to design vivid color outlines on the set, properties, and furniture pieces to contrast the stark whiteness.

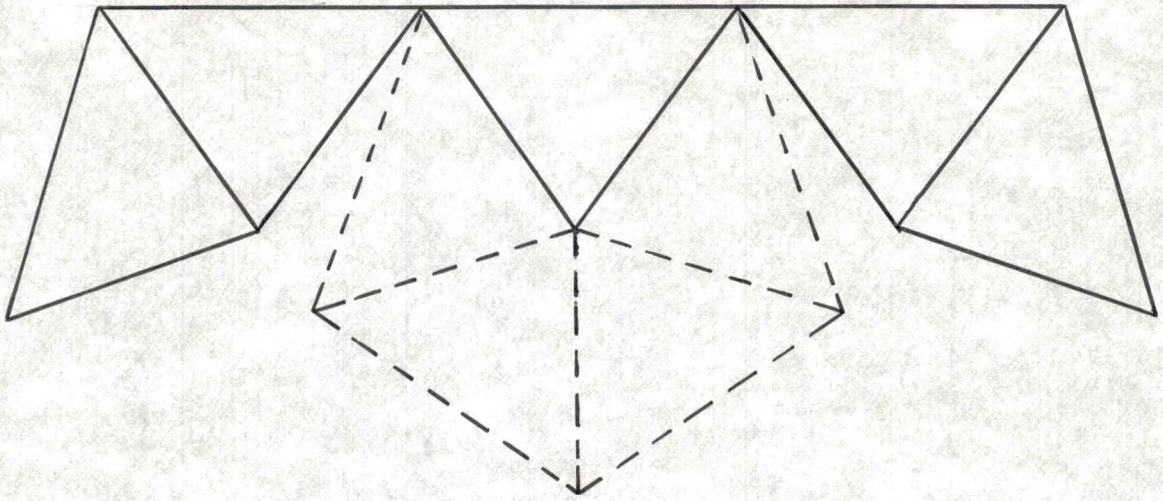


Fig. 1.--Pentagon open and closed.

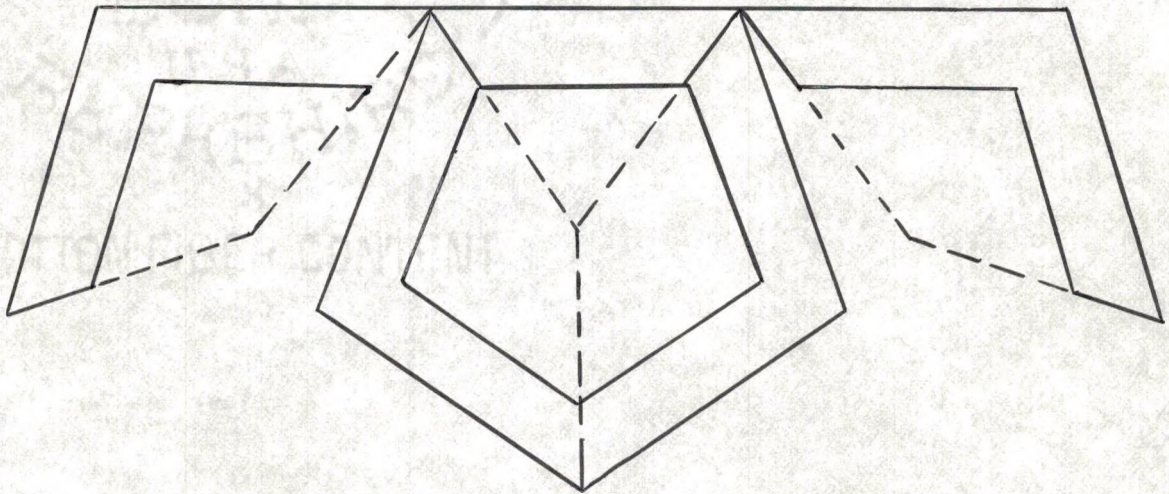


Fig. 2.--Center section removed to form the cage base.

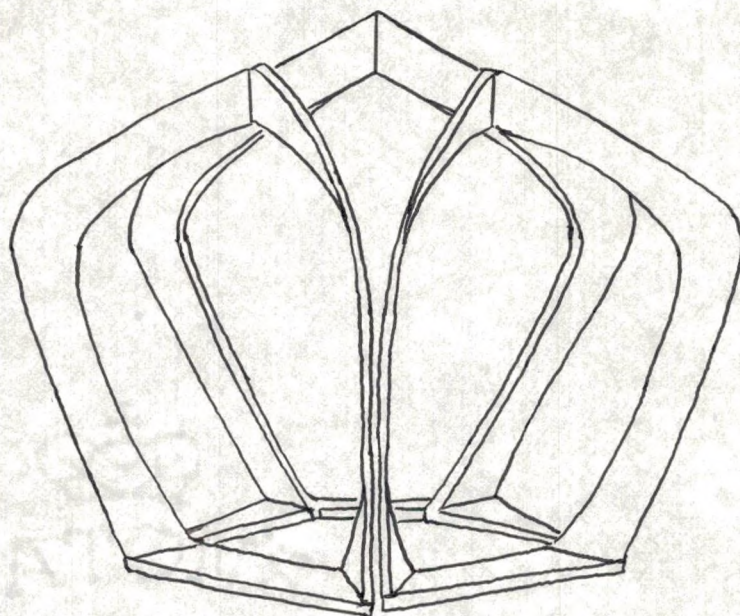


Fig. 3.--Arches attached to base to form complete "cage" set.

So that the environment was consistent with the focal point of the set, trees and leaves followed a stylized pattern. Tree trunks from the floor, disappearing into the flies, consisted of stacked free-form shapes. Leaves, also free-form were designed as suspended mobiles (Figure 4).

After approving the basic design, the director requested a variety of acting levels which would increase or decrease emphasis. This request influenced the design of properties and furniture.

Arches and tree trunks were to be constructed of styrofoam primarily because of its lightweight and sculptural qualities; translucent plexiglass would create a see-through wall for the cage; mylar would be utilized for leaves, making use of its reflective qualities; and leaves would be made of plastic resin. The base of the cage was to

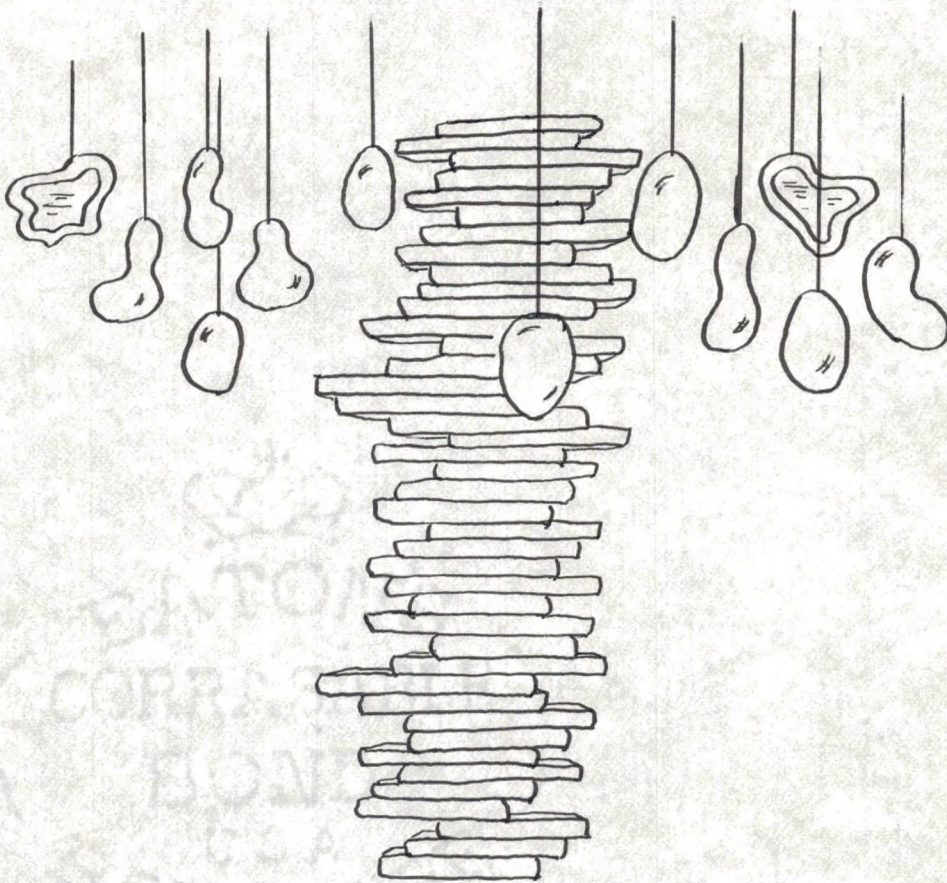


Fig. 4.--Tree and Leaves.

be supported by plywood mounted on casters and concealed by a reflective skirt of mylar. To enhance the mobility of the set, the cage could be constructed to move down-center from an up-left position and open for the action to begin, creating added movement, completing a beginning and ending "cycle" in place of using the act curtain.

After creating this stylized bird cage of lightweight materials to increase mobility, the designer looked to properties and furniture as the next design problem. The property and furniture list consisted of interior furniture such as table and chairs, a stool and rocking

chair. The script called for a variety of curious hand properties including: laundry equipment, a shelf containing nonsense items such as a tin of buns which burst on cue, a "rusty dusty" watering can, a fire place which belched soot, and oversized glasses. In addition, there were objects to be carried in the old woman's apron. To add an element of the absurd, the bone and bottle were exaggerated in size, but became a part of the apron paraphernalia. To furnish the director with furniture and props for initial rehearsals, a priority list of items was made. The old man's stool, the old woman's rocking chair, and the table and chairs were given first consideration. The director had requested a variety of acting levels and, considering the old woman's dominant character throughout the play, the vertical space which she occupied seemed most important. A conference with the director revealed that the entire stage should be conceived as a playground in which children could move freely in their activity with playthings.

Further meditation on the designer's part recalled Gorelik's scenic metaphor technique. The set was not to be like a playground, it was a playground. With a playground in mind, I began creating shapes in which and on which the actors could "play." The old man sat on his stool when dissatisfied and moody. He retreated to it for comfort and pacification from the old woman's harassment. A rocking motion would pacify and a curved inward shape would comfort--the stool became a rocking half donut (Figure 5).

The old woman's rocking chair was never used by the old man. It remained her territory. It provided security for her and a place for escape when upset with the old man. The rocker developed into a



Fig. 5.--Old Man's Stool.

stylized pear shape or "egg," having several utilitarian functions. When open, it could be climbed upon; when on its side, the egg provided a fortress or retreat area (Figures 6 and 7).

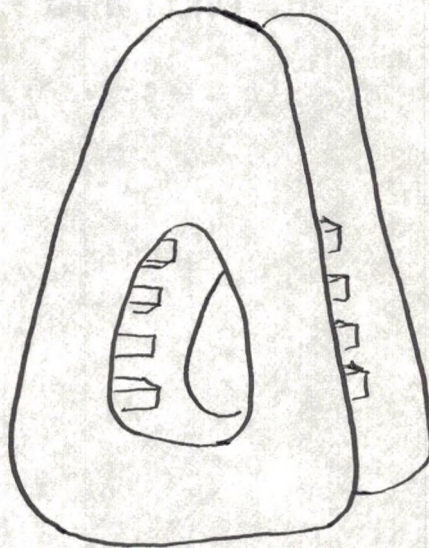


Fig. 6.--Old Woman's rocking chair, upright view.

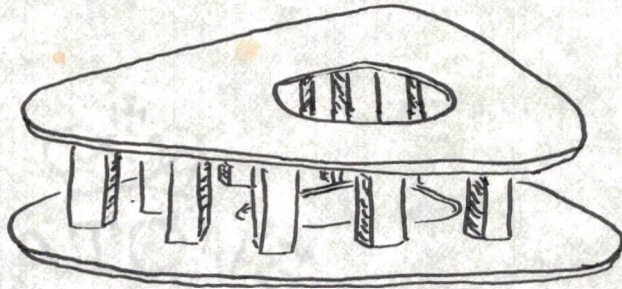


Fig. 7.--Old Woman's rocking chair, on its side.

Traditional table and chairs proved too cumbersome and rigid in a stylized setting. The script indicated that the old woman escaped from the bird by standing on the table top which was set for supper. The movability of the old man's stool and the old woman's rocker gave the designer the motif for creating "a table in motion concept" to correspond to the total design concept. But, to see the top of the table from the audience meant additional adaptation. So, the table design was conceived from the shape of a spool on wheels with a slanted top (Figure 8).

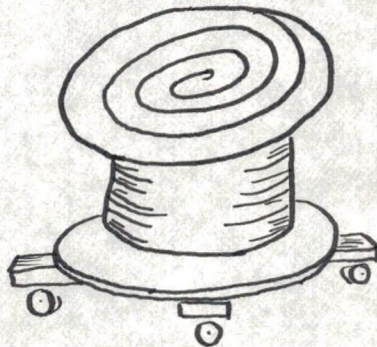


Fig. 8.--Table.

Additional chairs were eliminated by the director. Blocking involved only the old man's stool, the old woman's chair and the cast-tered table. The "playground" metaphor also guided the design of the properties. They emerged as stylized objects in abstract form. A property sampling follows (Figures 9-18):

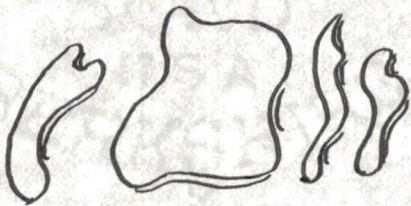


Fig. 9.--Table setting.



Fig. 10.--Birdhouse clothes iron.

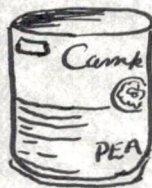


Fig. 11.--Laundry basket.

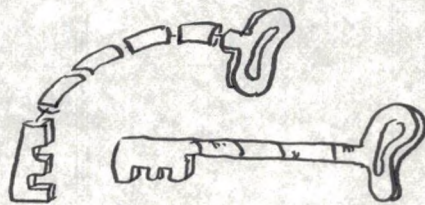


Fig. 12.--Collapsible cupboard key.

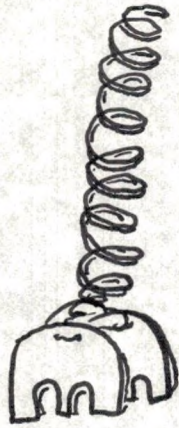


Fig. 13.--Hearth broom.

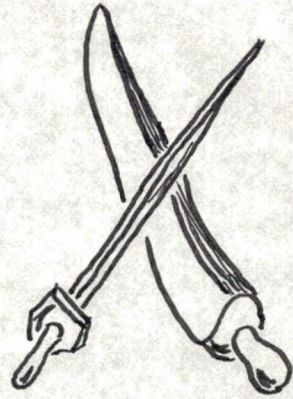


Fig. 14.--Knife and sharpener.

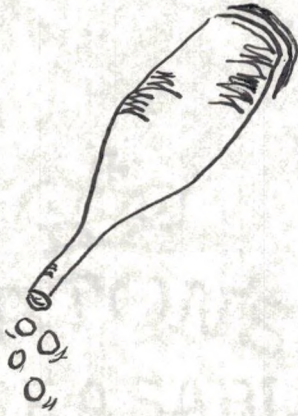


Fig. 15.--Bottle and pills.



Fig. 16.--Rhubarb.

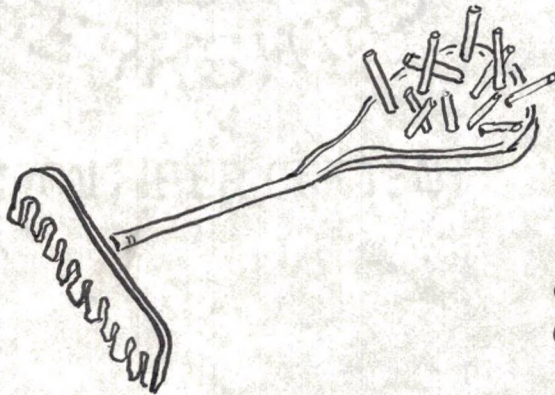


Fig. 17.--Brush and comb.

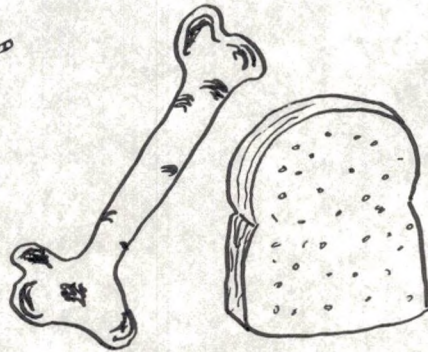


Fig. 18.--Bone and bread.

Projected materials used in the construction of the furniture and properties needed to be highly durable to withstand the intense movement which had been planned by the director. Wooden furniture painted in the same manner as the set materials, styrofoam, wood, and theatremold (a papier-mâché-like substance, only stronger) were possibilities. Experimentation was necessary to insure stability and endurance of every piece of furniture and each individual property.

After stylizing the set, furniture, and properties, the stylized concept was continued through costuming. The old woman's line, "It's just a Tingalary Bird. . . . It doesn't exist," was the only clue to the meaning of the word "tingalary" except for the delightful sound value of the word itself. The designer's imagination was the only restriction! No feathers, no beak, no scrawny legs seemed in keeping with a stylized creature; however, the bird must make a noise, talk, and have eyes that would glow green and amber on cue. During an early discussion, the director suggested a puppet-like creature or a smooth free-form shape. I considered a modified flying movement, which would require a costumed actress. I had visualized much movement and developed the costumed actress into a costumed dancer to increase the movement concept even more. In the script, the word game with "bituminous coal" dictated the color as predominantly black, although the old man calls the bird "beautiful with all the colors of the rainbow." The most exhilarating of all discussions with the director transpired over an idea which would combine the cage and the bird costume. Since the cage was brought in during the blackout, the designer began working on a concept which would enable the actress to show movement from within, but still not reveal

physical shape. The cage would then become part of the costume until the bird revealed itself. Further discussion with the director encouraged additional pursuit of a cage-costume combination. The design developed into a stretch fabric cylinder in which the actress would respond to dialogue by stretching the fabric sides with her arms within the restriction of the cylinder. The actress would wear a circular headpiece to which the stretch fabric was attached. At the bottom, the fabric would be attached to a donut shape on which the actress would stand to keep the fabric stretched tightly. When the actress emerged from the cage, she would slip out of the headpiece and the cage would collapse insignificantly into a pile on the floor in full view of the audience (Appendix B, Plate IX). The design for the bird's costume evolved as a sleek black creature with human form, highlighted with random "scales" of color and red bat-like wings. Color, cascading down its back from a featureless head, completed the bird's costume design (Appendix A, Figure 25).

The old woman's costume followed a European peasant silhouette. I envisioned her as a hard working woman who kept her favorite belongings in the huge pockets of her apron. The fullness of the apron was balanced by a long-sleeved bodice with a gathered peasant neckline. The old man's coveralls and plaid shirt characterized a more American farmer appearance. The designer's stylized-design concept was coordinated with the costume design through color. The colors of the fabric for the old woman's costume were conceived as vivid pink, red, and orange and the old man's colors were bright yellow, green, and blue (Appendix A, Figures 26 and 27).

The designer observed a reversal in character behavior pattern in the old man and old woman. The old man began as a pathetic "hen-pecked" husband, and rose to the level of self-pride and respectability at the play's end. The old woman, who entered triumphantly at the beginning of the play, became humble and passive toward the end of the play. It was the designer's intent to stylize this by deterioration of the old woman's costume and rejuvenation of the old man's costume. Details to capture the designer's intent are explained in Chapter III.

Sketches in art shops or the pictures displayed in department stores depicting sad, enormously large-eyed children inspired the make-up design. Age, as suggested by the director, was to be of no particular significance. A complete but light covering of clown-white grease paint, large eyes, rosy lips and cheeks, and quantities of wig-like hair, beard, and moustache completed the doll-like stylized effect.

In lighting, traditional key and fill frontal illumination was designed by using "no color" pink for key and special lavender for fill. Side and overhead illumination was designed to add greater visual dimension to the set, properties, and characters. Specials were designed for the amber and green moods of the bird. Green scoops and borders illuminating the white backdrop were designed to contrast the white set. While observing a blocking rehearsal, there was a sense of necessity for a technical effect which would create climactic impact. The emergence of the bird from its cage, the confrontation dance which replaced the flying sequence, and the climactic discovery of the coins in the fireplace, needed technical impact and theatricality. The designer

suggested to the director that a special effect utilizing ultraviolet light might be used.

Plastic materials, spectacular lighting, the movable furniture could heighten the stylized concept of make-believe and magic. The designer must use his competence to coordinate these elements which support the concepts of aesthetic sensitivity and to develop a discriminating taste for theatre among the young audience. The culmination would be in the mounting of the production.

CHAPTER III

MOUNTING THE PRODUCTION

In addition to the designer's concern for the aesthetic sensitivity of a design concept, he is responsible for every detail, for the construction of the set, and for the mounting of the play. The preceding chapter dealt with the creation of the set and the meeting of specific problems of design. This chapter will deal with the problems met in transforming those designs into a workable stage setting.

Facing the realization of whether a design concept would function or not was of extreme importance to the designer. By this phase of planning, rehearsals were under way and the designer could see the action for which his set would become the environment. Close contact with the director and other production staff was imperative. Variations of blocking, dialogue, and stage business had to be related to the designer who had become responsible for the total technical production.

As indicated at the beginning of Chapter II, the designer desired to use as much plastic as possible. The original design prescribed the arches for the cage to be made from styrofoam. The styrofoam blocks which measured three feet wide and eight feet long were to be glued together on their four-inch thick side to form the basic arch

shape (Figure 19). Time permitted experimentation with a variety of adhesives in an attempt to establish a firm enough bond between the styrofoam blocks. Each time the bond proved to be unsuccessful when tested for strength. Cutting the blocks in half lengthwise lessened the weight but also reduced the bonding surface and, therefore, was also unsatisfactory.

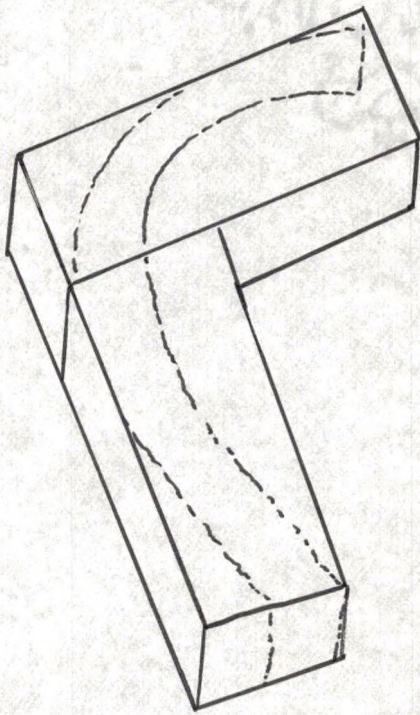


Fig. 19.--Arch sketched on two styrofoam blocks.

By employing an alternate design which consisted of a wooden skeleton over which thin sheets of styrofoam formed the arch shape, the construction progressed making the wooden skeleton from scrap one by three inch pine. This method of construction proved satisfactory (Figure 20). Even though cutting styrofoam would utilize a new approach,

the cutting of the styrofoam into thin sheets was too time-consuming when compared with the final visual results. By using the more traditional method of muslin strips covering Upson board, the same visual effect was created more efficiently and in less time.

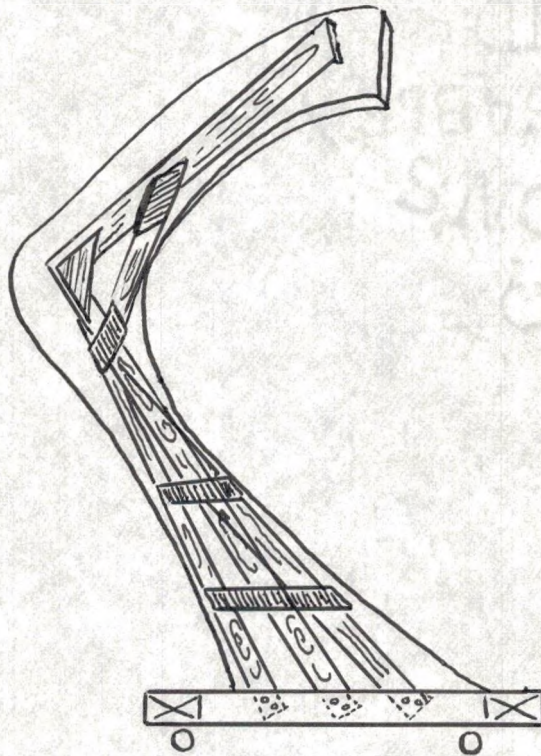


Fig. 20.-- Arch Construction.

The cage, silhouetted against the backdrop, produced the desired effect. Completion of the arches provided a spectacular sight. The uninterrupted, graceful arches towered imposingly over the acting area. Weights were added to the base to provide stability for the cage when it was open. At this point in the mounting process, the director agreed that the visual effect of the cage silhouetted against the

backdrop was important. It opened the cage to the forest and allowed light and shadow to increase depth perception of the setting. The designer's original design of filling in the walls with a translucent plastic material was eliminated. Due to the towering weight of the arches, it was decided to eliminate the original plan to move the closed cage forward into a downstage position before it opened. The center section of the cage, in an off-center position, was secured to the stage floor to allow the sections right and left, hinged to the center, to open freely.

The tree trunks were constructed by jamming styrofoam rectangles onto a piano wire which had been strung from the stage floor and secured with a turnbuckle in the flies. The irregular, staggered trunk gave dimension to the leaves which were suspended by monofilament fishing line from screening which was placed in the flies. The leaves were constructed from three types of material: resin, when poured into oval molds and sprinkled with gel scraps hardened into thin rigid, translucent shapes; mylar, which was mounted in a free-form Upson board frame to reflect light; and free-form shapes made of Upson board and painted with day-glow colors to respond under ultraviolet light.

Three-quarter-inch plywood and two by four inch pine provided the strength required for durable furniture. Styrofoam originally planned for furniture tested unsatisfactorily under the physical abuse of the actors. To provide the needed durability for repeated use, properties were constructed from plywood and styrofoam and covered with theatre mold. At a certain point in the play the fireplace became an important focal point. Because of the old woman's frugality, a roaring

fire to keep the chimney clean was out of context. The slow-burning fire caused soot to settle in the chimney. The chimney provided a security place for the coins. The blue, sculptured, styrofoam fireplace was placed in the center section of the cage to belch "abstract soot" powered by a fan which blew mylar streamers from the open hearth. To provide a device for spilling the coins, a bucket, attached in the flies over the fireplace, was filled with day-glow red and orange styrofoam "coins." A monofilament line, attached to the bucket, ran to a spot on the fireplace which was convenient for the bird to pull on cue. Pulling the line tipped the bucket overhead and sent the coins cascading over the fireplace onto the floor.

Once the set was mounted and the properties were tested for durability and function, attention was turned to the building of costumes to carry out the stylized concept. Costumes were built from day-glow colored sateen and taffeta fabric which was highly susceptible to dirt and wear. Ordinary shoes were painted with white latex and sprayed with day-glow paint. Velcro was applied to the seams of the old man's costume to increase the tattered effect at the beginning of the play. During blackouts, the old man pressed the seams together in order to alter his appearance. The old woman's stockings, affixed with snaps, were banded with day-glow fabric. She "unsnapped" to increase her tattered appearance during the production. This was in keeping with the interpretation of characters as pointed out in Chapter II. When the tidily dressed woman's appearance became tattered, her pride was replaced by humble realization of the truth. The altered appearance of the man transposed him into dynamic self-pride and respectability.

The costume designed for the Tingalary Bird proved highly satisfactory. A minor adjustment eliminating double fabric lightened the wings to allow more freedom of movement during the lifts in the dance sequences. Shiny black, day-glow, metallic fabrics and mylar were cut into approximately two by three inch shapes to resemble scales and were then hand-sewn onto a body stocking. The headdress of scales which was separate from the body stocking was sewn to stretch Banlon and entirely covered the actress' head. Its cascade of color, constructed from day-glow fabric cut in ribbon lengths, and the vulture feathers sprayed with day-glow paint, fluttered to the floor as the actress danced about the stage. While the bird was hidden within the stretch fabric cylinder, it responded dramatically to the actress' dialogue. Its emergence from the cylinder cage triggered the black-light dance sequence (Appendix B, Plate IV).

In the early planning stage the sailor character was deleted from the show by the director, but by the final technical rehearsals, the director requested that the sailor be used and could be portrayed by the actress who was cast as the bird. A sailor costume designed by the costume mistress resembled the traditional bell-bottom uniform; however, it was created out of white satin and metallic blue fabric.

Clown-white grease paint characterized the doll-like actors. The concept of large sad eyes was accomplished by exaggeration of the eyes and ample hair styles. The old man wore glasses which aided characterization and insured vital corrective vision on the part of the actor. Because grease paint does not respond in the presence of ultraviolet light, faces and hands were dark during the black-light sequences.

Ultraviolet make-up was not used, eliminating any monster appearance which it creates because of the inability to accent the eye as the most predominant feature of the face.

Even though to this point the set was mounted, props tested, and costumes designed, lighting would determine the final effects. So, lighting was designed to increase the aesthetic sensitivity of the production and create general illumination. Front lighting, using the key and fill method, was employed with "no color" pink and special lavender as the color media. Side lighting surrounded the actors from above to produce a feeling of much greater dimensionality. The combination of front, side, and back lighting created the ultimate in costume, make-up, and actor flattery. Lights directed onto three sides of the acting area increased the dimension and plasticity of the production. Actors had the appearance of being suspended in space rather than being flattened against the setting. Specials were rigged for the green and amber glow of the bird's eyes. This was accomplished by pooling the contrasting light around the bird on cue. The backdrop was illuminated green with overhead borders and floods positioned on the stage floor. The floods were masked from the audience's view by a black ground-row.

As if a giant neon sign had been charged with super wattage, the cage, forest, properties, and actors glowed in a dazzling color spectacle. Sixteen ultraviolet fluorescent tubes in eight units (four units in the traditional footlight position, one off-right and one off-left, and two overhead, upstage of the grand teaser) achieved the "magic" effect. Fluorescent tubes, impossible to fade up from an off position, flickered on with minimal distraction. Ultraviolet light, commonly

known as black light, responded to anything treated with ultraviolet pigment including the commercial fluorescent day-glow paints and fabrics. Ultraviolet light also reacted with anything white, including teeth, creating a blue-violet glow.¹⁵ Varying the intensity of the stage lights in a random dim to bright pattern to characterize the storm sequence provided inclement weather effects which added to the mood and suspense of the plot. Except during the black-light sequences, green light flooded the white backdrop throughout the play, contrasting the predominant yellow-orange highlights of the white cage (Appendix B, Plate I).

And finally, the music was selected by the director to suggest the extremes within the plot as well as to enhance the mood created by the set. Selections ranging from acid rock to pipe organ were tape recorded. All sound effects except the slide whistle used to indicate the bird's response was taped. For a more realistic location of bird's response, a person blew the slide whistle from stage-right. However, when the bird responded with words, a taped human voice in an echo chamber was used. Not only did music create mood before and after the production itself, music was used periodically to highlight specific action throughout the performance.

¹⁵Black-light is often confused with illuminous or phosphorescent light commonly known for "glow in the dark" effects.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND EVALUATION OF THE PRODUCTION

The Tingalary Bird ran for seven performances. In cooperation with the local school systems, the University of North Dakota theatre sponsored performances to enrich the cultural experiences of children. Four of the seven performances were presented for children who were "bussed in" as part of their fine arts curriculum. The director selected the upper elementary children ages ten through twelve for the "bussed-in" performances. The other three performances were open to the public. Children seemed to be intrigued with the production the minute they entered the auditorium and viewed the open curtain framing a giant arched structure containing a chair, stool, and table closely piled together. The green glow of the lighted backdrop silhouetted the white cage which was highlighted by overhead amber light (Appendix B, Plate I).

As the house lights dimmed and the stage grew dark, the sailor, illuminated by a spotlight, danced slowly down the left aisle of the audience in time to a taped musical ballad. Stepping onto the stage, the spotlighted-sailor circled the cage and disappeared into the darkened wings (Appendix B, Plate II). The words of the ballad gave the necessary exposition to the beginning of the play so that the children

knew the story was make-believe. It told them that the dwelling appeared cold and unkind with no welcome signs and, at the play's end, that the sailor would return.

With an increase in lighting and a transition of electronic music, the old man appeared from behind the cage and began opening it by pulling the movable sides of the arches into the open position. He occupied himself by carefully separating and dusting the furniture, arranging it within the open cage, pausing now and then to poke at the fire, and warm his chilly hands. As the music flourished the old woman came swirling onto the set from the wings, exclaiming how windy the weather had become and, with her entrance, the play was underway.

The fifty-minute production with no intermissions was drawn to a close when the Tingalary Bird reappeared and closed the cage while the old man and old woman, holding hands, rocked quietly to sleep (Appendix B, Plate V).

Every director and designer is hopeful that their preconceived design, when executed, will produce the desired aesthetic response. To evaluate the results of production, the young audience's response will be interpreted.

First, the open cage succeeded in serving as a functional dramatic acting area by allowing adequate space for the actors and furniture. The trees balanced the cage setting and appeared as one child called them, like "slices of bread." The designer felt the need of an additional tree farther upstage which would have increased the depth perception of the set. The ultraviolet effect on the trees and free-form leaves increased the stylization (Appendix B, Plate IV). The set's

mobility, color, and design fulfilled the stylized concept and worked with ease so that the cage could be opened and closed with minimum handling. The mobility prevented any delays or distractions which might have made the children impatient and the continuous action helped to hold their attention.

Absurd furniture, in a bizarre sense, increased movement, elevations, and the stylized concept. The rocking chair (egg) served as an elevated area to increase mobility and positions of dominance. The absence of angles with an emphasis on variation of a circle captured the stylized motif echoed by the free-form leaves overhead. The furniture and properties, and especially the egg, looked like "fun."¹⁶

Before the performance teachers were asked to have their students respond in some way to the production when they returned to their classrooms. Many students responded by letters or drawings. Properties, illustrated by the children in their drawings, proved to be highly impressionable. A favorite prop was the bottle which contained ping pong ball pills. The giant wrist watch which decorated the stage-left arch frequently appeared in their drawings (Appendix B, Plate III). Possibly because of its snowman shape and ease in drawing, the fireplace with the knife sharpener jabbed into it also appeared frequently. However, during the performance the greatest response from the children came from the spilling of the gold coins. The desire for money and what it buys may have had some bearing on the success of that particular

¹⁶Visitors in the scenery shop climbed over and through the egg before it was painted, without being invited by the designer to do so! Upon the request of a local day school, the furniture found a permanent home surrounded by children.

scene. It was at this point that the children sensed a "happy ever after" ending.

In addition to the responses from the children, Tim Marvin, a student Fine Arts Editor for the University newspaper, stated, "The wife's dress seemed particularly appropriate to the genre."¹⁷ The design of peasant costumes was what Marvin referred to as "appropriate genre." The bold day-glow colors added to the stylized concept (Appendix B, Plate VI). It seems somewhat curious that children's response to the characters included drawings and references to the old woman as a witch. Nothing in the costume resembled a witch; however, her vindictive tone and dominant behavior may have reminded the children of stereotyped witch-characters. In so far as characters and their costumes were concerned, the children's greatest concentration was on the bird costume. In their drawings, details including color, shape, and texture were used in designing and constructing the bird images.

The technique used in designing the costumes for rejuvenation of the old man was developed too subtly for the young audience. The design was not obvious enough for the children. The character-change concept through specially-designed costumes may have been too subtle and sophisticated for response from a young audience. Adults seemed to somewhat react to the visual change although the personality factors concerning costuming included the awareness of the vulnerability of the day-glow fabric. Adding colored patches to the knees of the old man's costume extended the life of his coveralls as blending with other

¹⁷Tim Marvin, "This Week in the Arts," The Dakota Student, April 16, 1971, p. 12.

brilliant and contrasting color schemes (Appendix B, Plate VII). A general dullness during the seventh production was noted as the fabric began to lose its fresh glow. The amount of soil and dullness may have been decreased by spraying the costumes with Scotchguard after each performance following careful sponging and brushing. The stretch Banlon "bag" as a child called it, provided a mystery to the very young in the audience. The whistle response and flapping of arms gave a bat-like appearance so that actual fear was expressed by four- and five-year-olds as they crawled onto the laps of the nearest adults for protection.

Curiosity response of the children was somewhat surprising because, upon greeting the cast after each performance, they insisted upon touching the old woman's "wig" which, ironically, was her own long hair. It might be supposed that again they had a stereotyped curiosity about long witches' hair.

Ultraviolet light, a common psychedelic effect, electrified the bird's magic powers adding a spectacular contrast to traditional stage lighting. The children's illustrated attempts were extremely interesting. Their attempt to obtain an ultraviolet effect with a crayon on construction paper ranged from jagged lines surrounding the "lighted" object to a small sign with an arrow saying "magic light." During the performance, verbal "oohs" and "ahs" were heard above the level of the music as the ultraviolet light flickered on to reveal the bird stepping out of its "cage" (Appendix B, Plate IX). The children were obviously disturbed by the shields on the audience side of the ultraviolet units because it blocked their vision and feeling of closeness to the stage

activity.¹⁸ Each drawing of the set which contained any detail at all included the four black shields at the base of their sketches.

The feeling of need for music in the lives of children encouraged the variety of music the director selected. As a catalysis to the entire production, the music crescendoed and diminished supporting action and dialogue. Silence, in the absence of the music, created an equally effective sensation. Thus, the absence of music tended to silence the children.

Quite by accident, the programs printed on bright red, green, yellow, and orange paper responded to ultraviolet light. This was exciting to the children and as one responded, "my program lites up and my friend's teeth glowed."

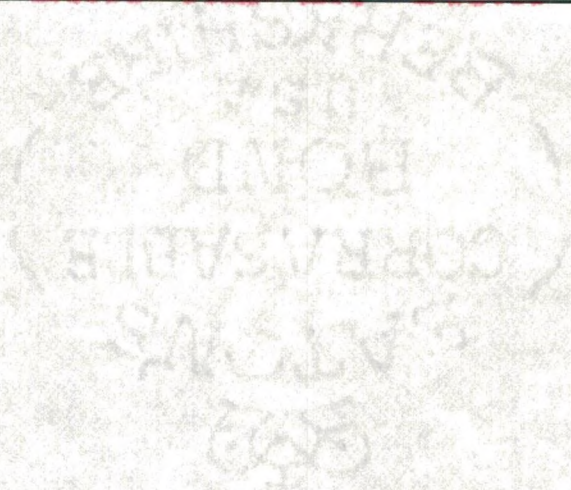
That the children were not able to comprehend the change in character of the man and woman, might be an indication that children do not have the experience or background to understand the subtlety involved. It was this anticipated problem that seemed to disturb the designer throughout the planning for the production. If the production were presented in the true spirit of absurdity, as defined by Esslin, the children may have lost interest and become restless, thus defeating the purpose of their aesthetic experience. Out of this confusion over absurdity, the philosophy of stylization grew and developed. Marvin wrote that, "The audience seemed most attracted to the technical aspects

¹⁸Ultraviolet units, located on the forestage in the traditional footlight position, were covered on the audience side with shields which directed the light onto the stage so as not to distract the audience.

and the comic bits."¹⁹ By designing curious and interesting shapes, the child's attention was gained and focused and his imagination was captured. This, coupled with vital and constant action and startling visual effects, kept the young from being bored and unattentive.

The letters and drawings from the children told the tale of The Tingalary Bird. The sailor need not have worried about telling the story too well. The children accepted, responded, and with their own critical eyes praised the production. The designer knew for sure his concept had "worked."

¹⁹Marvin, "This Week in the Arts," p. 12.



APPENDIX A



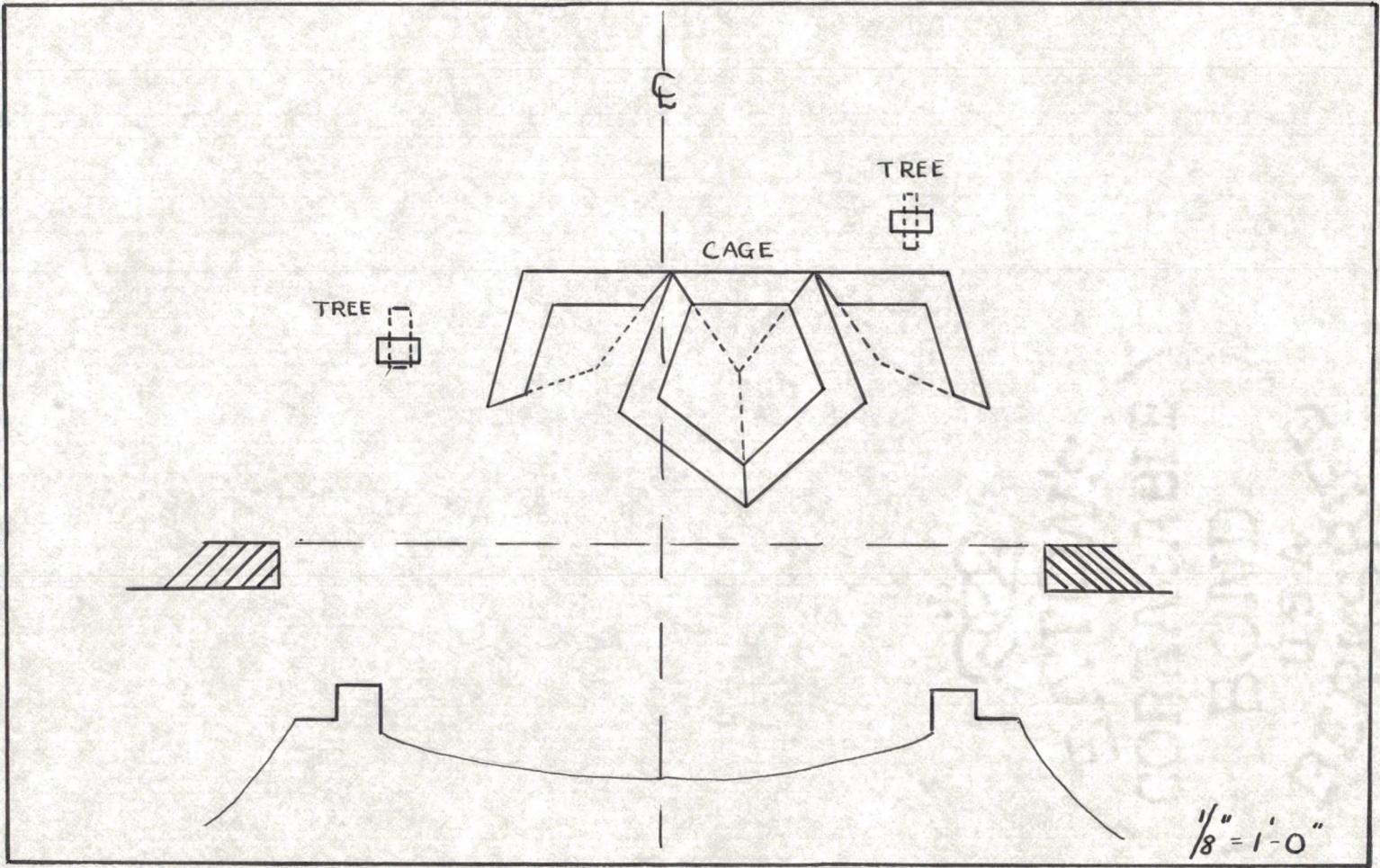


Fig. 21.--Floor Plan.

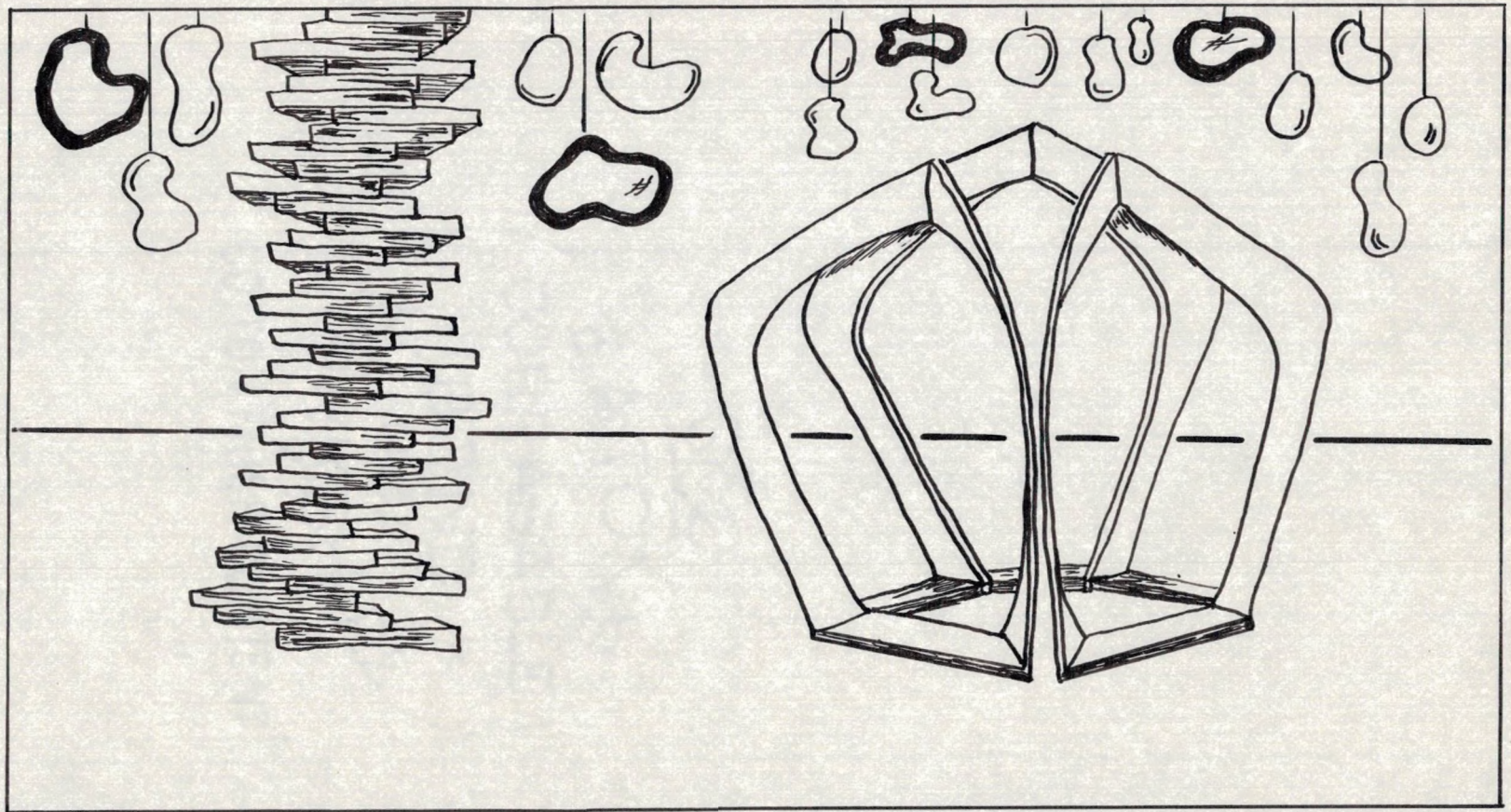


Fig. 22.--Cage Closed.

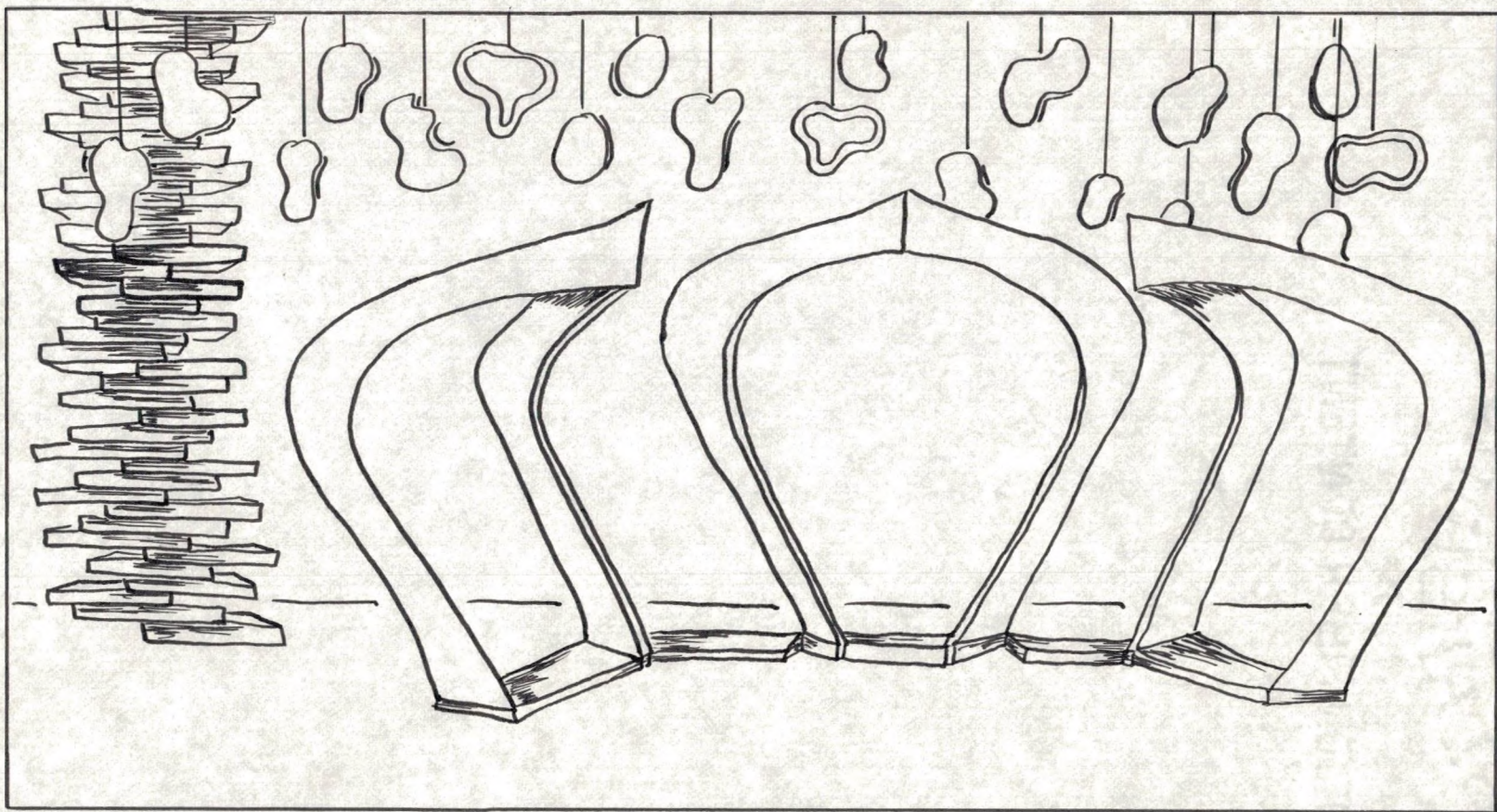


Fig. 23.--Cage Open.

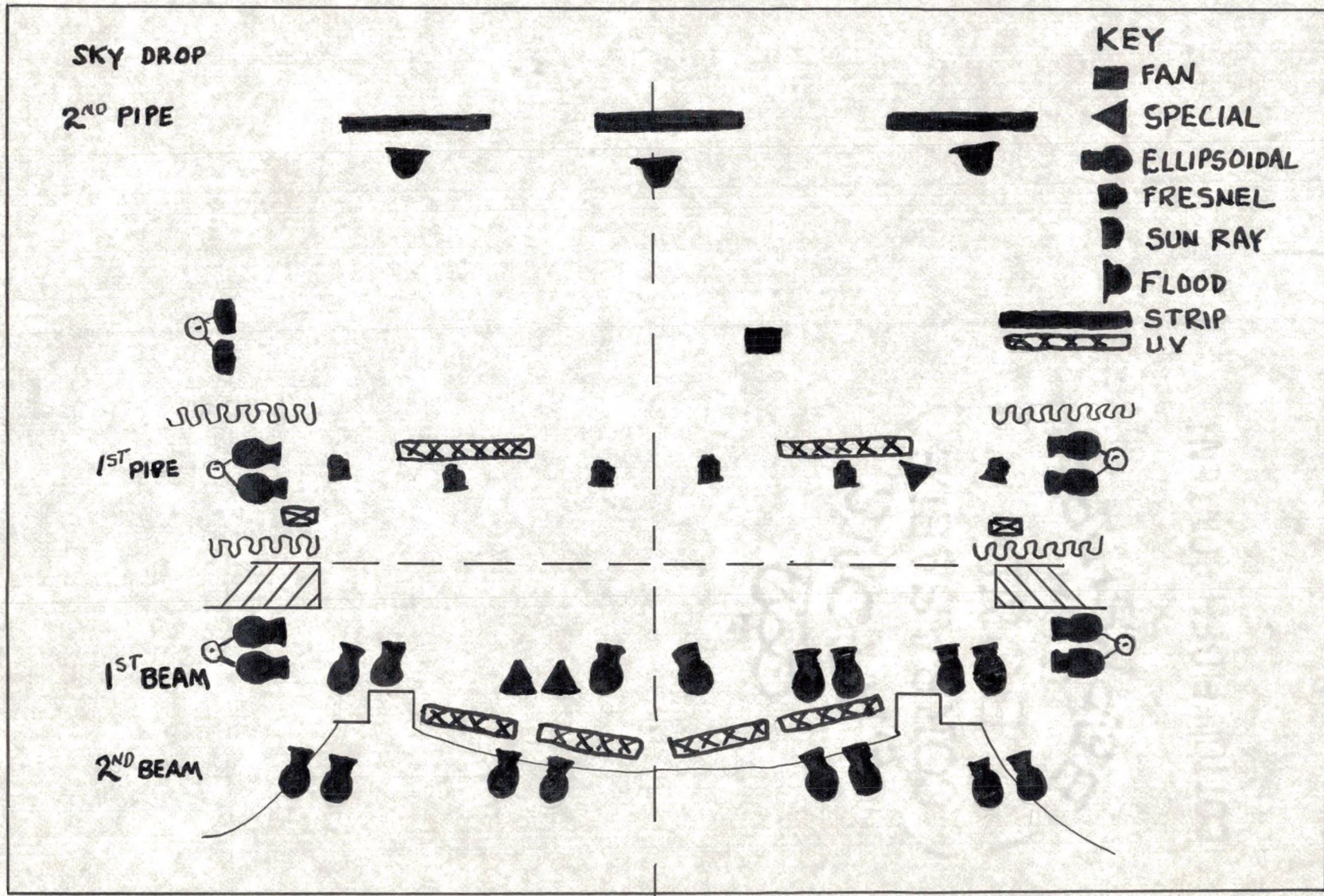


Fig. 24.--Lighting Instrument Layout.



Fig. 25.--The Old Woman.

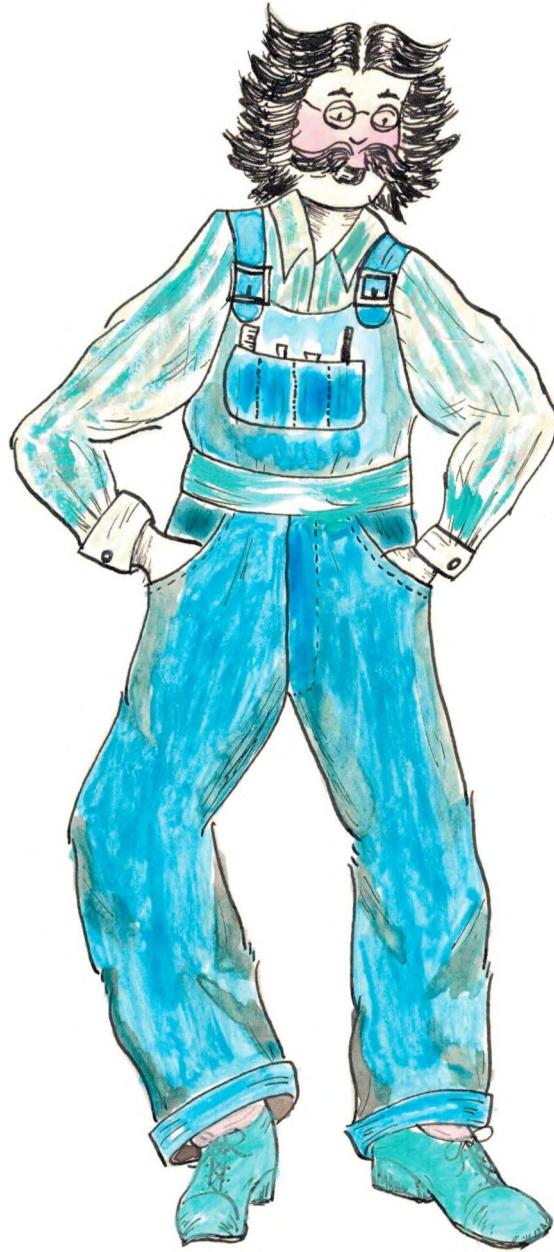
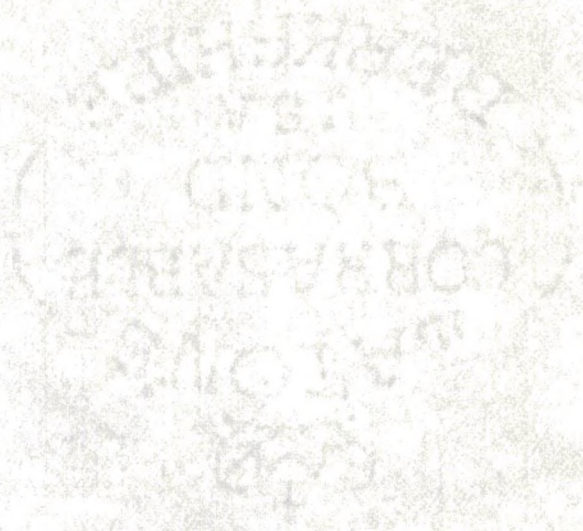


Fig. 26.--The Old Man.



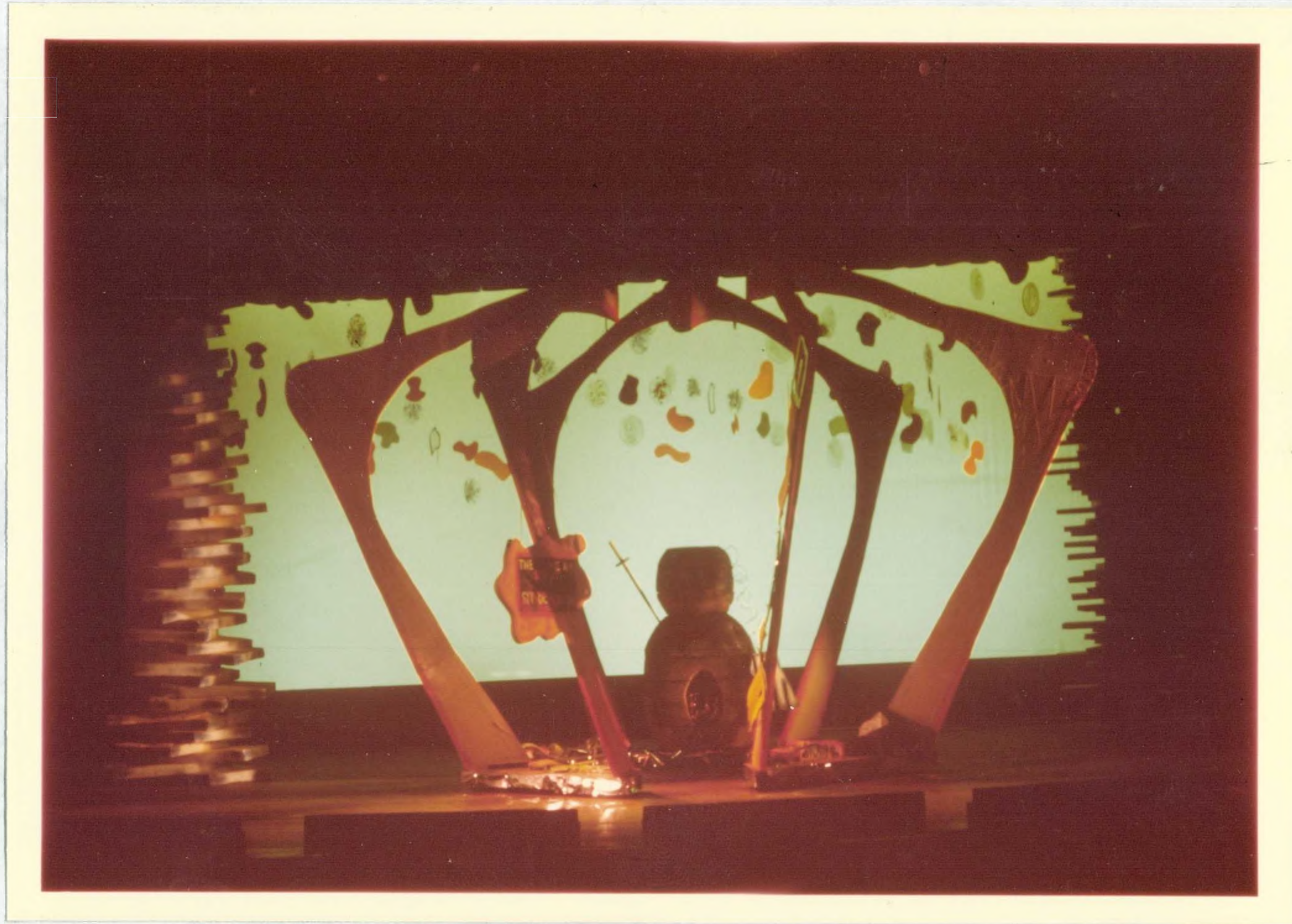
Fig. 27.--The Tingalary Bird.

WILLIAMS BROTHERS



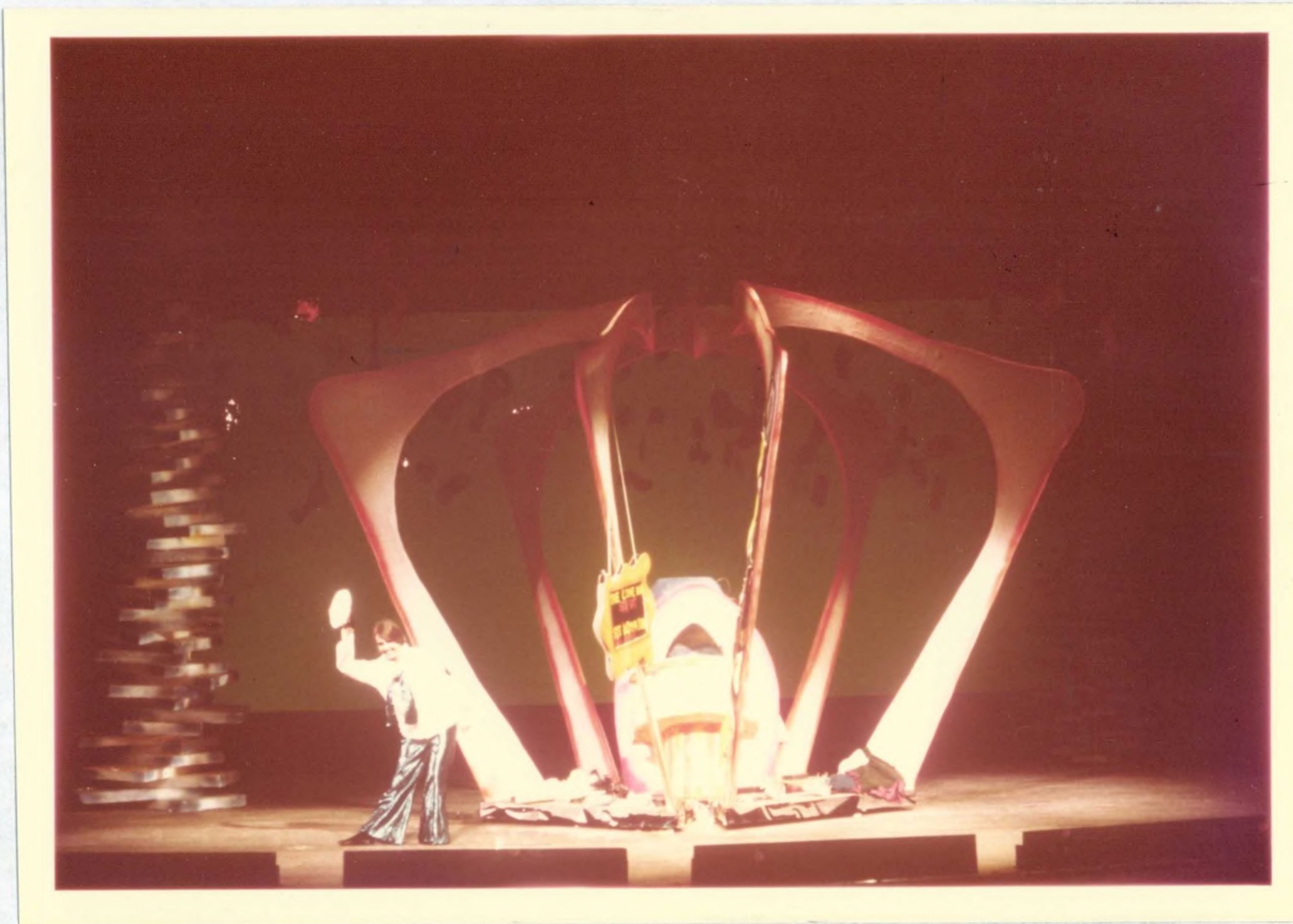
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PLATE I



PRE-SHOW SETTING

PLATE II



FIRST SCENE

PLATE III



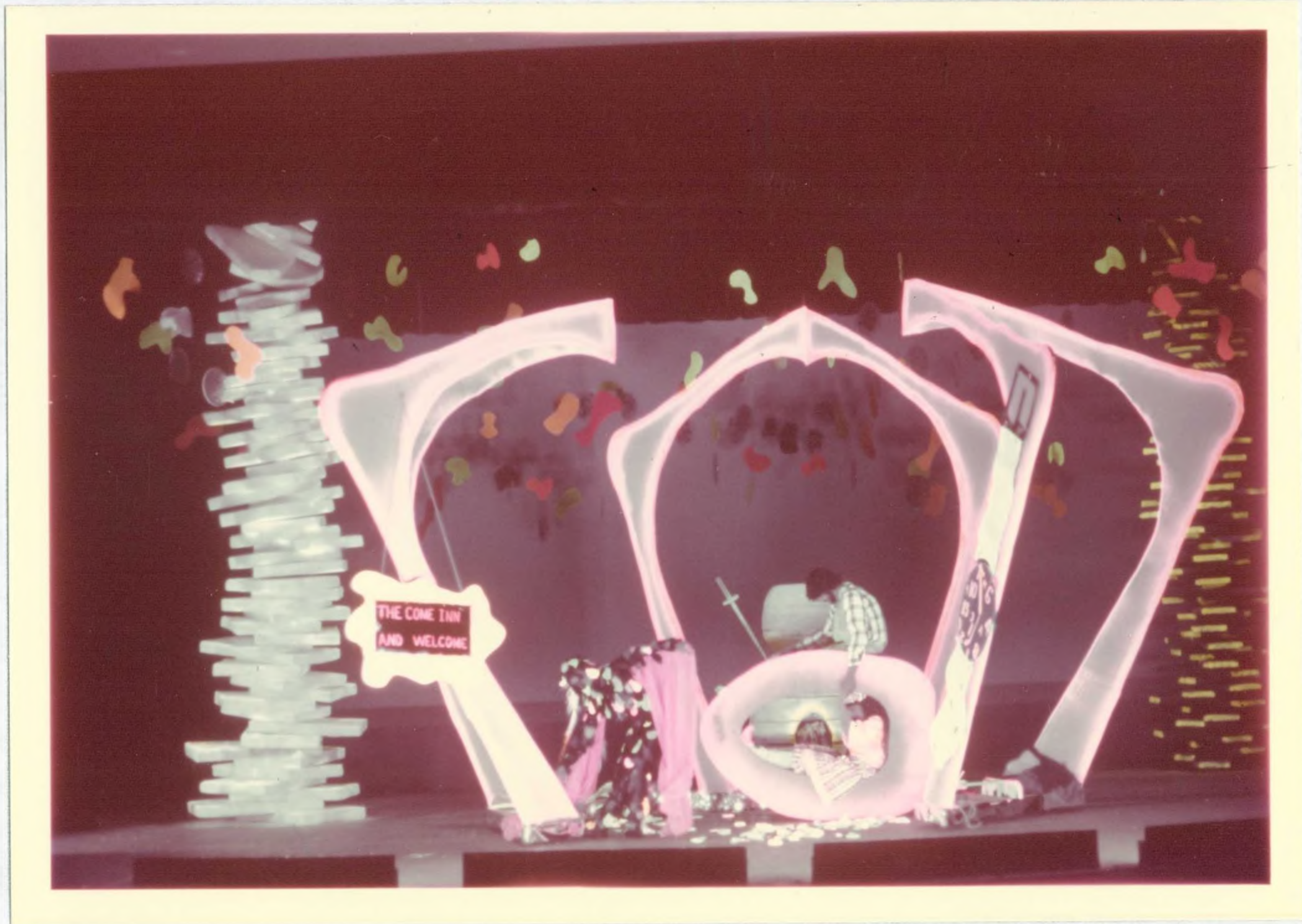
STAGE LIGHTING

PLATE IV



ULTRAVIOLET LIGHTING

PLATE V



FINAL SCENE

PLATE VI



THE OLD WOMAN

PLATE VII



THE OLD MAN

PLATE VIII



THE TINGALARY BIRD

PLATE IX



THE TINGALARY BIRD'S STRETCH-FABRIC CAGE

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