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Inside Front and Back Covers: Scene Design for Godspell and Noises Off

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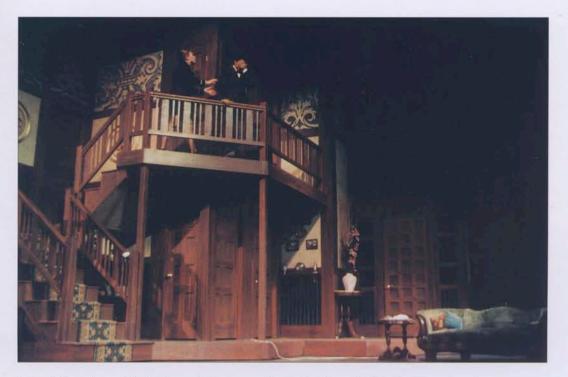Laura MacPherson

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Professor Stephen Levine of the Communication Studies and Theatre Arts Department has directed scores of plays at Bridgewater. An integral part of producing a play is the scene design. In the inside front and back covers of the issue of the *Review* Professor Levine provides a summary of thirty hours of conversations that he had with Laura MacPherson, scene designer, for the jazz-rock musical, *Godspell*, and the hilarious, play-within-a-play, *Noises Off*. (Photos by Mark Johnson)

This 1997 Godspell *needs to get away from the medieval view of the world, away from the 500-1000 year old icons of life. Take the "good news" of* Godspell's *parables and ultra-contemporary music and create a cold environment where the characters shine. What is in their hearts is the only true warmth in the cold, hard-edged high-tech world of today's visual images. The humorous appeal of the action is improvised around the most recent, up-to-the-minute icons from pop culture and advertising. The result is that material things (masks, gag props like money, hats, clothing accessories) form a wall that we can see through but not get through, separating the characters (and the audience) from what is beyond, "out there." As the things are used, they are discarded into the "pit" leaving the world empty. The play ends with the resurrection which unites the world of performers and the audience in joy.*

Noises Off requires a setting that is a revelation, in several ways. First, it must look like the two-story interior design of a fabulous English manor house with no less than seven functional doors, a staircase with a banister and mid-level landing, and a banistered balcony. Second, the audience discovers in Act I that this impressive English manor house is actually a set in a "play" that is being lovingly rehearsed one night before opening. Then, in Act II, the entire set must revolve to reveal a performance of the same "play" from the dark "backstage" world (where the "actors" already despise each other, get drunk, threaten mayhem, and try with varying degrees of success to negotiate the doors, stairs, and ruined love affairs. For Act III, the entire set must revolve again to reveal a final performance of the same "play" where "sardine" messes accumulate, a door handle comes off with the door jammed shut, and "injuries" occur including a "fall" down the entire staircase. All of the doors (front and back) and the staircases (front and back) must be in distance relationships that allow the action (front and back) to fit in perfect timing with the dialogue.