

Summer 7-2009

Direction of the Play: You Can't Take It With You

Lisa Dawn Nelson

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Direction of the Play: You Can't Take It With You

A Project Report
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Theatre Production

by
Lisa Dawn Nelson
July 13, 2009

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

We hereby approve the project report of

Lisa Dawn Nelson

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts:

Theatre Production

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

7/15/09

Date of Signature

Scott Robinson, Committee Chair

7/15/09

Date of Signature

Terri Brown

7/15/09

Date of Signature

Elise Forier

Please note: Signatures in this project have been redacted due to security concerns.

ABSTRACT

PROJECT REPORT

You Can't Take It With You

BRIDGEMONT HIGH SCHOOL

Directed by

Lisa Dawn Nelson

May 2009

This project entailed the selection, background research and documentation, script analysis, casting, direction, vocal coaching, and post-production analysis of Bridgemont High School's production of You Can't Take It With You. Documentation includes research and analysis of the play itself, as well as an evaluation of the play as a production vehicle, for the Theatre Arts department at Bridgemont High School.

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

Final Examination of

Lisa Dawn Nelson

B.S. Oklahoma Baptist University, 1988

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Theatre Production

Committee in Charge

Scott Robinson

Terri Brown

Elise Forier

McConnell Hall

Room 117

July 14, 2009

7:30 PM

Lisa Dawn Nelson

Courses presented for the Master's Degree

<u>Course Number/Title</u>	<u>Credits</u>	<u>Instructor</u>	<u>Quarter Completed</u>
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Student

SUBSTITUTION FORM
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
(Submit in Quadruplicate)

Student Name Lisa Nelson Birth Date [Redacted]
Mailing Address [Redacted] Student ID [Redacted]
City, State, Zipcode [Redacted] Date 7/8/08

The following substitutions will be accepted, if approved, on the Course of Study for the Master of Arts Degree
I agree in Theatre Production Specialization

SUBSTITUTE (New Course) _____ 3
Dept. Course Number Course Title Qtr. Credits

FOR (Old Course) _____ 3
Dept. Course Number Course Title Qtr. Credits

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Dept. Course Number Course Title Qtr. Credits

[Signature] 7/14/08 Course of Study Advisor or Committee Chair Date
[Signature] 7/14/08 Department Chair or Designee Date

More than three substitutions will be processed on a Course of Study by the Graduate Studies and Research Office without the student filing a revised Course of Study for approval.

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AND RESEARCH

[Signature] 7.24.08
Associate VP of Graduate Studies Date
Dean

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Lisa Dawn Nelson

Undergraduate Study:

Oklahoma Baptist University, 1984-1988

Graduate Study:

Central Washington University, 2006-2009

Professional Experience:

Performing Arts Teacher, Bridgemont High School and Junior High
San Francisco, CA, 2002-present
drama, musical theatre, playwriting, directing, dance, music, speech, debate
grades 6-12

Fine Arts Specialist, International Christian School
San Francisco, CA, 2001-2002
drama, musical theatre, dance, music, poetry, visual arts
grades P-8

English/Performing Arts Teacher, Contra Costa Christian H.S.
Walnut Creek, CA, 1996-2001
English, speech, drama, dance
grades 9-12

English/Drama Teacher, Hawaii Baptist Academy
Honolulu, HI, 1989-1995
English, speech, drama
grades 7-12

English Teacher, Broken Arrow South Intermediate High School
Broken Arrow, OK, 1988-1999
English, Honors English
grade 10

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Section One: Preliminary Information

MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT PLAYSCRIPT APPROVAL FORM

(PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE READ THE PLAY SELECTION CRITERIA SECTION IN YOUR GRADUATE HANDBOOK)

SCRIPT TITLE _____ You Can't Take It with You

PLAYWRIGHT(S) [If musical, list lyricist/composer] _____ Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman

NUMBER OF ACTS _____ 3 _____ APPROXIMATE TOTAL PLAYING TIME _____ 2 HOURS _____ 0 _____ MIN.

CAST (fill in with the appropriate numbers)

MEN _____ 9 (+ 3 extras) _____ WOMEN _____ 7 _____ CHILDREN _____ 0 _____ OVER 40 _____ 9 _____

ROLES REQUIRING PEOPLE OF COLOR _____ 2 _____ ROLES COULD DOUBLE _____ 2 _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF CAST _____ 17-19 _____

OTHER CASTING CONCERNS: This cast size will be a stretch for my program, since my entire high school has only around 50 students in grades 9-12. Last year I cast 12 in Little Shop of Horrors and 20 in the Original One-Act Festival, so my hope is that a comedy like this one will be able to attract at least 17 students to be in the play. The biggest challenge will be finding enough boys. I expect I will have a lot of cast members who are completely new to theatre, so a big part of my job will be training, some of which I can do in my Drama 1-2 class.

ARTISTIC STAFF (check those needed for this play or production idea)

MUSICAL DIRECTOR _____ no _____ DANCE CHOREOGRAPHER _____ no _____
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER _____ no _____ DIALECT COACH _____ no _____ SPECIALTY HIRE _____ yes: set and costume design
ORCHESTRA/BAND (specify what size) _____ no _____. Will you be fulfilling any of the above? no

Will a guest artist be fulfilling any of the above? Yes. If so, which? I would like to hire someone to design, build, and paint the sets, and perhaps someone to design costumes and lighting, if I can work it into the budget. If not, I will have students help in these areas.

SCENERY/PROPS (check those needed for this play or your concept of the play)

UNIT SET? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE) NUMBER OF SETTINGS _____ 1: the living room of Martin Vanderhof
HISTORICAL PERIOD _____ 1930's _____ GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION _____ New York, "just around the corner from Columbia University"

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SET CONCERNS OR SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

I'd like to direct the show in the thrust (most likely in our school cafeteria), but it is a fairly small space, creating a challenge to the set designer, who will have to consider how to feature a cast of 17-19 people (15 of which are on stage in one scene) with maximum visibility. The thrust stage will probably need a fairly wide upstage area to alleviate some of the potential sight line problems that would occur if the downstage area were too crowded.

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PROPS _____ over 200 props listed, though I plan to minimize this to 75 or so
PERIOD _____ 1930's _____ DIFFICULT OR UNUSUAL PROPS? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE) DESCRIBE: skull ashtray, solarium with snakes, xylophone, hand press, type case, unusual art pieces, stuffed crocodile, painting of Mr. de Pinna as a discus thrower

WEAPONS OR FIREARMS? HOW MANY _____ 0 _____ DESCRIBE:

COSTUMES (CHECK THOSE NEEDED FOR THIS PLAY OR YOUR CONCEPT OF THE PLAY)

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF COSTUMES PER CHARACTER _____ 3 _____
HISTORICAL PERIOD _____ 1930's _____ SEASON _____ summer (2 weeks before the 4th of July)

Scene/Season Breakdown:

Act I: Wed., June 22nd, 1938 (24 years after government taxes began in 1914)

Act II: Wed., June 29th, 1938

Act III: Thurs., June 30th, 1938

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS: none

JUSTIFICATION FOR CHOICE OF SCRIPT

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS SCRIPT PRODUCED? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE)

HAVE YOU DONE THIS PLAY BEFORE? BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRODUCTION:

I have never done or seen this play, but I have read it, read reviews of it, and talked to people who have seen it or directed it. Everyone I know who has done this play loves what it has to offer: colorful characters for many actors to play, a tightly written comedic script, and great audience appeal.

WHY SHOULD YOUR ORGANIZATION PRODUCE THIS SCRIPT?

This play features strong, interesting characters, providing my actors with a worthwhile challenge. The themes are relevant to our city, dealing with society's craze for materialism and working just to make money or get ahead, rather than for the love of work. In addition, I need to attract more boys into the drama program, and a survey I conducted this year showed me that while many of our boys will not consider being in a drama or a musical, a great number of them are willing to be in a non-musical comedy. I am hoping that this show will attract guys into my program, and that, once they like theatre in general, they will stay next year for my Musical Theatre class.

WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS (IF ANY) TO DOING THIS PRODUCTION AT YOUR SCHOOL?

The biggest drawback is that so many of the characters over 40 years old. This will be a real acting challenge, especially for my beginners. Still, I believe that the advantages of the show outweigh the disadvantages, and that my students will definitely grow by doing this production. Another huge drawback for me is the exorbitant number of props listed in the script. I will try to minimize this list as much as possible, as I have no theatre, no storage space, and no safe place to keep the props during rehearsals or shows other than in the school cafeteria or my tiny classroom.

PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE SCRIPT ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER AND ATTACH.

PLEASE INCLUDE A COPY OF THE SCRIPT FOR THE THESIS COMMITTEE TO REVIEW.

SUBMITTED BY: (Printed Name) _____ Lisa Nelson _____ Date Submitted: July 19, 2008 _____

(Signature)

Thesis Chair Approval: _____

Date Approved: 7/28/08

Thesis Committee Members Approval: _____

Date Approved: 07/28/08

Graduate Coordinator Approval: _____

Date Approved: 9/22/08

Plot Synopsis

You Can't Take it With You is a 1930's era Romeo and Juliet on laughing gas. The "Montagues"—or, in this case, the Kirbys—are of the Wall Street elite. They are wealthy, well-connected, well-dressed, and well-mannered. In truth, they are a bit uptight, yet in the most socially acceptable ways. The "Capulets"—here known as the Sycamore family—are a family of free-spirited artists who have refused to follow the beat of the capitalistic drum. Instead, each of them devotes him/herself wholly to various creative endeavors in the home. Penny writes plays and paints, Paul creates fireworks in the basement, Essie makes chocolates and studies ballet, Ed plays the xylophone and prints flyers on his printing press, and Grandpa attends graduation ceremonies for entertainment.

Their close friends are equally loyal to such Romantic notions, stopping by the house to help teach ballet, read for a play, or model for a painting, and then staying for dinner and, eventually, becoming a part of this extended family. Their "work" rebels against the capitalistic society outside of their home in that it is like play to them, almost like a favorite hobby rather than a money-making labor. Yet, in spite of their lack of capitalistic fervor, they all seem very happy, healthy, and functional, at least within their own contained space. They are seemingly oblivious to the dominant force in society outside of their home, that is, at least until outsiders enter their home and disrupt the utopia they have created.

This happens when their "normal" daughter, Alice, falls in love with her boss, Tony, a young stockbroker on Wall Street who happens to be Mr. Kirby's son. When the two families meet, their values clash, havoc ensues, and Alice decides she must leave Tony because their differences are too great. Finally, Grandpa Vanderhof intervenes, encouraging Mr. Kirby to consider what really matters in life and to let his son be happy. Eventually, Mr. Kirby is won over, the young lovers are reunited, and all is made right.



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July 20, 2008

To Whom it May Concern:

Lisa Nelson has administrative approval to continue with her planned production of You Can't Take it With You on May 15-16, 2009. I am aware that this production is a part of her Master's Thesis Project for Central Washington University, and she has permission to use the facilities at Bridgemont to complete this endeavor. Furthermore, Ms. Nelson has permission to include activities for this project in the curriculum of her theatre classes at Bridgemont High School.

Respectfully,

Derrick Leonard
Principal
Bridgemont High School

Project Parameters and Production Schedule

After our school's calendar planning meeting, the suggested dates for Bridgemont High School's production of You Can't Take It With You are May 15-16, 2009. Our school does not have money budgeted for the drama productions, so the school administration encourages us to spend as little as possible and to break even on every production through ticket sales or other fundraising events. I typically spend up to fifteen hundred dollars on straight plays, and between three and five thousand dollars on musicals, recouping all expenses at the box office or through candy sales.

Until recently, I have not had a "production staff," although I do typically have a few parents or fellow teachers who volunteer to find some props, sew some costumes, or help build the sets. Last year, however, I did more fundraising so that I could hire a scenic painter and a choreographer. My goal for this year's production is to hire Jackie Scott to design, build, and paint the unit set. Ideally, I would also like to find someone to design and find or make costumes and someone to design lighting, but if I cannot afford it or find people to do it, I could recruit students to help in those areas, as I have done in the past.

Casting for the spring play is typically limited to the students in my drama class, which, for 2008-09, will be "Drama 1 and 2," a two-semester beginning level drama course that teaches acting, theatre history, and theatre production. My hope, then, is to encourage a few more students to sign up for Drama 1 and 2, as my current class size is smaller than the cast size for You Can't Take It With You. If I cannot get enough students to be in the class, I will have to add students and/or adults from outside of the class and plan more after-school rehearsal time to incorporate them.

Though my venue is a school cafeteria with very low ceilings (not the most "theatrical" venue for any play), we regularly transform it into a makeshift theatre of sorts. Because of the

constraints of this space and our complete lack of available storage, plays with minimal sets are ideal for us. In You Can't Take It With You, the entire play takes place in Martin Vanderhof's living room and dining room. This unit set will not require additional wing space for set pieces, which is perfect for us, as we have none.

Without having a theatre, we also have no theatrical lighting. Typically, I rent a few lighting instruments and trees. Although they are in full view of the audience, they allow for at least some measure of ambiance. Another issue with the lighting is the limited power available in this space. To avoid overloading the circuit, we run power cords to four different circuits within reach of the cafeteria. Even with this precaution, we still cannot have more than 12-15 instruments, which limits our ability to create detailed lighting effects.

Sound is also an issue to reckon with in this space, as the tile of the cafeteria bounces the sound around a great deal, making it sound muddy. In the past, I have used PZM floor microphones to bump the sound and increase the clarity. My hope this year is to spend more time teaching my students to project their voices in the space. Only if they cannot project sufficiently will I resort to using microphones for this play.

Of course, renting a theatre is still an option, which would solve many of the issues mentioned above, such as wing space, lighting, and sound. I plan to look into this possibility, to see if this is financially feasible for us. Apart from the rental fees, one of my biggest concerns is finding a space that is near enough our school and one with ample parking, so that I will not lose my audience base by changing to a less convenient venue.

Fortunately, the rehearsal schedule can be whatever I decide we need, as my administration does not put limitations on my scheduling. I hope to do the bulk of the rehearsal during class time or on weekends, and as little as possible after school, so that my students can still be in sports or other after-school activities. This is especially important if I hope to recruit

more boys into the program, as our school is so small that many student athletes are also in theatre, and sports practice happens every day after school. At the time of our rehearsals, baseball season will be in full swing, so I will have to work closely with the baseball coaches to make sure that any actors who also play baseball will be able to manage both within our rehearsal schedule.

In spite of these various parameters and limitations a successful show is possible. As always, my students and I will rely on our own imaginations and resourcefulness to create something out of nothing, and our audiences will bridge the gap with their imaginations and willing suspension of disbelief. That is the magic of theatre.

February 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 Groundhog Day	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12 Lincoln's Birthday	13	14 St. Valentine's Day
15	16 Presidents' Day	17	18	19	20	21
22 Washington's Birthday	23 Class: auditions	24 3 ⁰⁰ -4 ³⁰ auditions	25 Mystery Day Class: auditions Ash Wednesday	26 3-4: worship team 4-5: call-backs * parent forms due	27 cast list posted	28

March 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 class: table work Act I	3 4-5 ³⁰ table work Act II	4 class: table work Act III	5 3-4 faculty meeting	6 class: block pp. 5-11 3-4 ³⁰ : block pp. 11-22	7 9-noon costume pull @ Riordan
8 Daylight Savings begins	9 class: block 22-35	10 4-5 block 36-47 Purim	11 class: block 64-76 3 ³⁰ -5: block 47-60	12 3-4 worship team 6 ³⁰ -8 field studies mtg. 8-9 drama parents mtg.	13 end Q3 class: block 76-80 3-4: block 60-63	14
15	16 class: work pp. 5-27	17 4-5 work 27-35 St. Patrick's Day	18 class work 36-47 3 ³⁰ -5: work 47-60	19 no worship team 3-4: work 60-63	20 class: work 64-72 Spring begins	21
22	23 class: work 72-80	24 4-5 ³⁰ : Run Act II	25 class: Run Act I	26 3-4 worship team	27 1/2 day: 3, 4, 5, chapel class: Run Act III	28
29	30 class: pp. 5-15 o/b book	31 4-5 ³⁰ : pp. 15-21 o/b book				

April 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 class: pp. 27-35 off-book April Fool's Day	2 3-4 faculty meeting 4-5 worship team	3 class: run Act I off-book	4
5 Palm Sunday	6 Spring Break	7	8	9 Passover begins	10 Good Friday	11
12 Easter Sunday	13	14 4-5 ³⁰ : pp. 47-60 off-book	15 class: pp. 36-47 off-book	16 6, 7, 1, 2, field studies 3-4 worship team	17 3, 4, 5, chapel, field studies class: TBA 3-4: 60-63 off-book	18
19	20 Field	21 Studies	22 Earth Day	23	24 Arbor Day	25
26	27	28 4-5 ³⁰ pp. 64-72 off-book	29 class: pp. 72-80 off-book 3 ³⁰ -5: Act II off-book	30 3-4 worship team		

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May 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 class: Act III 076 - book May Day	2 7-4 Set painting (required)
3	4 class: Run Act I	5 4 - 5 ³⁰ : Run Act II Cinco de Mayo	6 class Run Act III	7 no worship team 3-4 faculty meeting	8 class: Spot work 2 ⁴⁵ -5: full run	9 pm - JSB
10  Mother's Day	11 class: load in lighting 5-9 Tech Rehearsal	12 5-9 Full Run w/ Tech	13 5-9 Dress Rehearsal	14 no worship team 5-9 Final Dress Rehearsal	15 7-Show	16 7-Show Armed Forces Day
17	18 Victoria Day (Canada)	19	20	21	22	23
24	31 Memorial Day (observed)	26	27	28	29	30

Evaluation of the Play as a Production Vehicle

When You Can't Take It with You opened on Broadway in December of 1936, New York Times' critic Brooks Atkinson praised the play for being a "spontaneous piece of hilarity" and noted that "Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman are fantastic humorists with a knack for extravagances of word and episode and an eye for hilarious incongruities." Though seventy years have passed, the comedy is still appealing, particularly to those who, like Atkinson, "have a fondness for amiability in the theatre," and prefer an innocent comedy to the more modern trend toward sardonic, sexual, or otherwise edgy comedies.

Since I teach in a Christian school, many of my audience members (comprised of students, parents, friends, staff, administration, and donors), are somewhat conservative, and those whom I answer to expect morally appropriate material from the Drama Department. This rules out plays that are flippant about or derogatory toward Biblical values or worldviews. In essence, this rules out a large percentage of modern plays. To avoid alienating my audience, I try to choose material that reflects the world in which we live, but doesn't contradict a Biblical worldview. A play from the 1930's is a good fit for my audience, as society of that era held fairly conservative values, compared with society today.

Thematically, You Can't Take It with You still has a great deal of relevance today, as it focuses on society's ongoing obsession with making money. Just as people of the 1930's were driven by the American Dream and the desire to overcome the poverty of the Great Depression, so today's society still values working, making money, and "getting ahead," often at the expense of personal happiness, relationships, or health. This is definitely true in cities such as San Francisco, where income level dictates fashion, cars, homes, and other marks of social status. At the same time, San Francisco also embraces individualism, so the Sycamore family's alternative lifestyle of being true to themselves and their artistic leanings is one that will resonate with San

San Francisco audiences, particularly with teenagers.

Though my venue is a school cafeteria with very low ceilings (not the most “theatrical” venue for any play), we regularly transform it into a makeshift theatre of sorts. Because of the constraints of this space and our complete lack of available storage, plays with minimal sets are ideal for us. In You Can’t Take It with You, the entire play takes place in Martin Vanderhof’s living room and dining room. This unit set will not require additional wing space for set pieces, which is perfect for us, as we have none.

Not only is this play appropriate for both my audience and my venue, but as far as curriculum planning, the play also matches my goals for my Drama 1 and 2 class this year, providing my students the opportunity to apply their learning from the fall semester (drama basics such as acting, script analysis, and design) to a full-length production in the spring semester. You Can’t Take It with You features strong, quirky, colorful characters and a large number of roles for actors of all levels, which is ideal for my students, as some of the younger students will have never been in a play before, and other more advanced actors will have been in several.

In the larger picture of curriculum scope and sequence, the play also seems fitting for this year. Since I teach only one high school drama class per year, I rotate from year to year between Drama 1 and 2, Musical Theatre, and Playwriting/Directing. Accordingly, my goal is to have this year’s spring production be a straight play, next year’s to be a musical, and the following year’s to be an original one-act play festival. You Can’t Take It with You would fit perfectly into both this year’s curriculum goals and my long-term scope and sequence.

In addition, if my drama program is to survive beyond next year, I need to recruit more boys as actors. A survey I conducted this year revealed that while many of our boys will not consider being on stage in a drama or a musical, a great number of them are willing to perform in

a non-musical comedy. I am hoping that this show will draw several new boys into the drama program, and that, once they find they enjoy theatre in general, they will stay next year for my Musical Theatre class.

The biggest drawback of You Can't Take It with You is that so many of the characters are over 40 years old. This will be a definite acting challenge, especially for my beginners. Still, I believe that in this graduate program I have been given several tools to help young actors physicalize older characters, and that the practice of playing different ages will be good for my students. Also, if I do not have enough student actors to play all of the roles, I will recruit adult actors to fill in the gaps, which might, in the end, add more believability.

Another obstacle for me in this play is the exorbitant number of props listed in the script. If we dress the stage as thoroughly as the script calls for, we will have well over two hundred props. I plan to minimize this list as much as possible, as I have no theatre, no storage space, and no safe place to keep the props during rehearsals or shows other than in my tiny classroom, which is approximately fifteen by twenty feet, more like an office than a classroom, really. Once I get the props down to the bare minimum, I may treat my classroom like a prop storage room and find an alternate space for my classes to meet during the rehearsal period for this show. This would not be too difficult, as I often move my drama classes to larger rehearsal spaces, using my own classroom mostly for lecture, discussion, and media presentations.

All in all, I believe that the advantages of You Can't Take It with You outweigh the disadvantages, that the show meets many of my goals for the drama program at our school, and that my students will definitely grow by doing this production.

Concept Statement: You Can't Take It with You

When New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson first saw You Can't Take It with You in 1936, he noted that, "To people from the punctilious world outside, the Vanderhof and Sycamore

tribes appear to be lunatics.” Indeed, their snake collecting, dart throwing, xylophone playing, ballet dancing, firework inventing ways are unconventional, to say the least. A visitor stopping by unawares might view this household as a three-ring circus, with Grandpa Vanderhof as the affable, laissez-faire ringmaster. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines a three-ring circus as “something wild, confusing, engrossing, or entertaining,” which seems to capture the essence of this family perfectly (“Three-ring”). In directing You Can’t Take It with You with this concept in mind, I hope to incorporate circus-inspired elements into the design. The most important part of this will be the ring shape, which symbolizes the unity of the family and their adopted friends.

Ideally, a round or oval dining room table will be at the heart of the set design, and will represent the gathering place where the extended family comes together to share meals in between their individual artistic pursuits. Other possible rounded lines in the set design could be an archway entrance into the room, a round-backed chaise lounge, and round or oval area rugs. This pleasant shape will reflect not only the rings of a circus, but also the easy, carefree way that the Sycamores and Vanderhofs lead their lives.

The set should also reflect the clutter of a circus, with multiple areas of interest and entertainment. Just as a circus hosts various areas for popcorn, cotton candy, lemonade, games, gifts, and viewing the show, so Martin Vanderhof’s home has an area for everyone. There is a music area with Ed’s xylophone, a writing area with Penny’s typewriter, a dancing area for Essie (though she may spread out and make the entire room her dancing area), a snake feeding area, a dart-throwing area, an eating area for the entire family, and a few resting areas scattered about. In general, the stage should be filled with the signs of life in a large family—not neat, tidy, or sparse. The furnishings should not look terribly expensive, to emphasize the family philosophy that money does not buy happiness. It is the people you love and who love you that make life fulfilling.

Though the 1930's color palette may be more muted tones than, those of, say, The Ringling Brothers circus, there should still be color. The neutral tones of the Depression Era—browns, creams, and tans—will be interspersed with splashes of burgundy, coral, robin's egg blue, and olive to add a sense of life and hopefulness that is clearly evident in this home. These earthy, natural colors will be reflected in both the costumes and the sets. All members of the extended family will be costumed in this color palette to signify their unity and the sense that they belong to one another. Hostile or uptight characters, such as Henderson, the Kirbys or the G-men, will be costumed in harsher, starker colors that do not blend with this palette, such as black, navy, or white. The more flamboyant the character, the brighter his or her colors should be. Gay, for instance, as the drunken diva, might wear bright red rather than burgundy or turquoise blue rather than the more muted robin's egg blue. Tony and Alice, as the most "normal" characters in the play, should be dressed within the color palette, but fairly conservatively, compared to most characters. Their costumes should show both sophistication and gentleness, allowing them to belong visually to both the stylish outside world and the artistic world inside this home.

The lighting should be very warm, with amber gel colors to warm up the actors' skin tones and create a glowing picture of the coziness of this sanctuary. When hostile visitors from the outside come in, the lighting could become colder to reflect the intrusion. After such visitors leave and peace is restored to the home, the warm lighting should always return, most particularly in the closing scene when Mr. Kirby finally agrees to the join the family for dinner so he can get to know them. The play should end with the entire family gathered around the table to share a meal, and the lights should reflect the almost holy warmth that comes with communion of the heart.

Music played between acts should be fitting to the era of the 1930's and to the themes

and moods of each act. Singers like Ella Fitzgerald, Ethel Waters, and Louis Armstrong were all recording in this era, so I would start with jazz and swing as the basis for my intermission music. As Act One ends with Alice floating about feeling hopelessly in love, the songs in between Acts One and Two could mirror her emotions. Songs such as “When You’re Smiling,” “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” and “It’s De-Lovely” would fit nicely in this transition. Act Two ends with the G-men arresting everyone and taking them to jail, so the music between Acts Two and Three would need to match this mood. Perhaps songs such as “Down in My Soul” or “Stormy Weather” could lend a bluesy mood to this transition. As the show ends, the music during bows should be upbeat and swingy, perhaps just an instrumental piece from the era.

Finally, the casting for this play will by necessity be untraditional, with students playing the bulk of the characters, regardless of age or race. Almost half of the characters are over the age of forty, and, unfortunately, my non-existent budget does not permit me to hire nine adult actors to be in the show. If I do not have enough students in my drama class to fill all of the roles, I will try to recruit adult actors (teachers, parents, or other community members) who are willing to volunteer for the parts. Still, as this is educational and not professional theatre, I am happy to let my own students gain acting experience, using outsiders only if I have no other student options.

Racially, I hope to stay true to having both Rheba and Donald be played by black actors, as they have lines in the play that make it clear that they are intended to be such. Donald says, “Ever notice how white folks always getting themselves in trouble?” and Rheba responds, “Yassuh, I’m glad I’m colored.” Donald then echoes her sentiment, saying, “Me, too” (Hart 64). Though I will endeavor to find black actors for these roles, if I cannot, I plan to request permission to change these lines and cast these roles untraditionally. The rest of the actors, particularly the Vanderhofs (Dutch), Kolenkhov (Russian), and Olga (Russian), who would

traditionally be played by white actors, will most likely be played by actors of various ethnicities, as the bulk of my students are Latino and very few are Caucasian. Ultimately, the casting will by necessity be “color blind,” simply due to the racial make-up of our student body.

Section Two: Pre-Production Analysis

Given Circumstances

Given Circumstances: Environmental Facts

Geographical Location

Martin Vanderhof owns a home in New York, “just around the corner from Columbia University, but don’t go looking for it” (Hart 5). This would place his home near 535 West 114th Street on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, specifically in a neighborhood known as “Morningside Heights,” just west of Harlem.

In the 1930’s, the Upper West Side was home to some of the city’s most affluent people, many of them Jews who had emigrated from Europe. In fact, by 1929, this neighborhood “housed ten synagogues, a number of them large and ornate, and supported scores of kosher butchers, bakeries, and restaurants” (Wenger 94). This affluent neighborhood had such stable wealth that in spite of the Depression of the 1930’s, the Upper West Side continued to prosper and grow. Indeed, “even at the height of the Depression, Jews on the West Side had the resources to take extended summer vacations and send their children to expensive summer camps. On Manhattan’s Upper West Side, the Great Depression was a dramatically different event than it was only a subway ride away in the less fortunate Jewish districts of New York City” (Wenger 95). This could help explain the general cheerfulness and optimism of Martin Vanderhof and his family, who seem completely oblivious to and untouched by the economic crisis of the day.

Date, Year, Season, Time of Day

Though the play was written and produced in 1936, it was set two years in the future, in 1938. When Act One begins, it is Wednesday, June 22, two weeks before the Fourth of July. We know the season because Paul and Mr. DePinna are busy inventing fireworks for the

upcoming holiday, and DePinna mentions that they have two weeks yet to get their stock ready to sell (Hart 8). The year is revealed in the discussion between Grandpa and the IRS man.

Henderson states that “. . . the Government is only concerned from 1914 on. That’s when the income tax started . . . Well—it seems, Mr. Vanderhof, that you owe the Government twenty-four years’ back income tax” (Hart 20). Doing the math reveals that the year must be 1938. Act One spans several hours, from the afternoon visit from the IRS to the late night, when Tony and Alice return from seeing the Monte Carlo Ballet.

According to the scene outline in the beginning of the script, Act Two occurs one week later, which is Wednesday, June 29 (Hart 3), and Act Three takes place the following day, which would be Thursday, June 30 (Hart 64). The play, then, covers a total of eight days in the lives of Martin Vanderhof’s family.

As for weather, Act One opens with Essie complaining about the heat in the kitchen, to which Penny says, “Do you have to make candy today, Essie? It’s such a hot day” (Hart 6). At the beginning of Act Two, Gay mentions, “My! Hot night, ain’t it?” to which Donald responds, “You want me to open the window, Miss Wellington?” (Hart 36). Later in the same scene, Alice remarks, “It *is* awfully hot” (Hart 51). This heat magnifies the tension and discomfort of the unexpected dinner party in Act Two.

Economic Environment

Within the decade of the 1930’s, the average American salary was \$1,368, and a family would spend about fourteen cents for a quart for milk, nine cents for a loaf of bread, and forty-two cents for a pound of round steak. By the year 1938, the nation was at the tail end of the Great Depression, which lasted from 1929-1941. Unemployment had risen to 25% (Sutton), making this era “the most severe economic crisis of modern times. Millions of people lost their jobs, and many farmers and businesses were bankrupted” (Nelson).

“Popular songs of the day mirrored the transition from optimism to despair. In 1930, people sang ‘Happy Days Are Here Again’ and the national income dropped from \$87 billion to \$75 billion. In 1931, somewhat more dejectedly, people sang ‘I’ve Got Five Dollars’ and the nation’s income dropped to \$59 billion. The song of 1932 was ‘Brother, Can You Spare a Dime,’ when the domestic economy fell to \$42 billion. Eventually, the American economy bottomed out at \$40 billion in 1933” (Schultz).

When Franklin D. Roosevelt got elected in November of 1932, his New Deal helped the country to recover through such acts as the Emergency Banking Act, the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the Social Security Act, as well as through agencies like the Works Progress Administration. The New Deal helped to alleviate the suffering of many Americans. In fact, “perhaps 10 million to 12 million Americans worked at some time on public works or in relief jobs (through the Public Works Administration, the Works Project Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps)” (Smiley).

Considering the economic crisis of their era, it is perhaps understandable that Kaufman and Hart would choose to depict Mr. Kirby as a driven stockbroker, fighting to maintain his wealth and status rather than to become a statistic among the other impoverished Americans of the 1930’s. Surely Wall Street was full of such men. On the other extreme, it is particularly ironic that Martin Vanderhof, in the decade of the New Deal, with a movement toward finding jobs for every American, seems to have no qualms leaving behind the economic “rat race” and not working at all, nor even encouraging work among the younger members of his household. His complete disconnection from the economic environment of his day is what makes him so unusual.

The average American citizen of the 1930’s was grateful for a job and, as a result, worked hard, earned money, married, had children, and pursued the American Dream. In stark contrast, Martin Vanderhof and his eclectic, multigenerational household of family and friends

defies the norm. Like the biblical “lilies of the field,” they neither labor nor spin, but live each day as they wish and let tomorrow take care of itself (Matt. 6.26-34). In living so freely, they are a threat to those more regimented citizens who have bought into the American work ethic, such as Kirby. In discussing the importance of work, Kirby retaliates, “What do you expect me to do? Live the way *you* do? Do nothing?” To this outburst, Grandpa responds, “Well, I have a lot of fun. Time enough for everything—read, talk, visit the zoo now and then, practice my darts, even have time to notice when spring comes around. . . . What’s the matter with that?” (Hart 75).

Political Environment

The 1930’s, an era sandwiched between the first and the second World Wars, was a volatile decade politically. There was an “explosion of political ideas and movements” sweeping the country (Wenger 103). Alfred Kazin painted a picture of the era, explaining that “the way anywhere . . . led through the rival meetings on Pitkin Avenue. . . . From blocks away you could hear the Communist voice on the bank corner shouting into the great dark crowd, and some wistful socialist voice on the opposite corner crying in rebuttal” (qtd. in Wenger 103). In the midst of the political turmoil, many Americans reacted to the Communist voice with fear and suspicion. The Red Scare of the 1920’s continued into the 1930’s, as the Federal Government became very fearful and self-protective.

In *You Can’t Take It with You*, this fear becomes evident when Martin Vanderhof and his entire clan gets arrested due to Ed Carmichael’s hobby of printing anti-government quotes on flyers and distributing them around town in Essie’s chocolates. Though to Ed it is simply an entertaining hobby, to the F.B.I., such anti-American behavior is highly suspect and potentially dangerous. Why should an American citizen be circulating messages such as, “Dynamite the Capitol!” “Dynamite the White House!” “Dynamite the Supreme Court!” and Trotsky’s famous quote, “God is the State; the State is God!”? When the F.B.I. investigates the home, they find, of

course, the gunpowder that Paul and Mr. DePinna use to make their fireworks, and deduce, “We were right, Chief. They’ve got enough gunpowder down there to blow up the whole city” (Hart 61-2). With that conclusion, the entire dinner party is taken to jail.

This whole arrest was possibly set into motion the day that the I.R.S. man, Henderson, stopped by the house to discuss Grandpa’s unpaid taxes. Grandpa very sensibly asks what his money, if he were to pay taxes, would buy. “Why,” says Henderson, “the Government gives you everything. It protects you . . . How do you think the Government keeps up the Army and Navy? All those battleships . . .” (Hart 20). Grandpa is unimpressed, claiming, “Last time we used battleships was in the Spanish-American War, and what did we get out of it? Cuba—and we gave that back. I wouldn’t mind paying if it were something sensible” (Hart 20). The discussion then starts to sour, with Henderson raising his voice, threatening Grandpa with jail time, and storming out of the house. Clearly, his loyalty to the Government is the only logic that he needs. This version of patriotism was common, even in the turbulent 1930’s, as many people owed their financial security, and thus their lives, to the Government. It is not surprising that a government worker such as Henderson would defend the Government’s ways. Nor is it too shocking that he would get so emotional at anyone questioning the Government. Perhaps he has walked past one too many rival meetings on the street corners, or he has just never stopped to question the status quo as Grandpa has. Regardless, five days after his visit, Ed began to notice a man following him when he went out to deliver candy.

Social Environment

The Great Depression created a wide variety of social problems, including the breakdown of the family, as men who could no longer provide for their families often just abandoned them in shame. During this decade, high school dropout rates soared from two to four million, organized protests became commonplace, homelessness was rampant, and those without shelter

gathered cardboard and scraps to create their own shantytowns, which came to be known as “Hooverilles” (Schultz). Society seemed to be breaking apart at the seams, and the root of the problems was money.

Religious Environment

Though many scholars believed that the twentieth century would bring about the demise of religion, it actually remained very central to urban life, “particularly immigrant and minority communities in New York City, where religion prospered despite the city's reputation as the capital of American secularism” (“Religion”). In the Upper West Side, religion thrived, even in the worst of times. “Although most of the Christian churches there were built before 1910, most synagogues went up after 1920, and in the 1930’s the West Side became home to thousands of Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi persecution” (Gray).

In Martin Vanderhof’s home, religion is rarely discussed. The only discussion about religion is when Mrs. Kirby mentions that her hobby and solace is spiritualism. To this, Penny responds, “Spiritualism? Now, Mrs. Kirby, everybody knows that’s a fake” (Hart 53). Going even further in her offense, Penny defends her own hobbies claiming that at least they are not “silly ones.” To smooth over the moment, Grandpa points out, “I don’t think it matters what the hobby is—the important thing is to have one” (Hart 54). Clearly, Grandpa values open-mindedness and tolerance in his home. As for himself, he leads two dinner prayers, addressing God as “sir”, and praying very comfortably and casually, like having an ordinary conversation.

Previous Action

- (Page 6) Essie has been studying dance and Penny has been writing plays for the past eight years, the first two years of which Penny was learning to type.
- (Page 8) Last year, for the Fourth of July, Paul and Mr. De Pinna had a booth and sold the fireworks they invented.

- (Page 8) Alice has only been home for dinner one night this week.
- (Pages 9,11) Penny has previously started writing—but never completed—a war play, a labor play, a religious lay, and a sex play.
- (Page 11) Ed has previously printed a thousand calling cards for Mr. De Pinna.
- (Page 12) Grandpa has gone annually to Columbia's Commencement.
- (Page 12) Last summer, Paul paid Donald to help sell fireworks. Since then, however, he has gone on government relief and is not allowed to work for pay.
- (Page 15) Grandpa has received several letters from the United States Government, but someone in the family misplaced them before he got to read them.
- (Page 16) Alice bought a new dress earlier this week.
- (Page 18) Paul only called for Penny once before they married.
- (Page 18) Ed came to dinner with Essie once and just stayed on with the Sycamore family.
- (Page 19) Martin Vanderhof has never paid an income tax.
- (Pages 19-20) Grandpa has owned a rental property, which has earned an income of three to four thousand dollars annually since 1901.
- (Page 20) The United States income tax started in 1914.
- (Page 23) Anthony Kirby, Sr., recently testified before the Securities Commission and was written about in the newspaper.
- (Page 23) When Tony Kirby graduated from college, he spent some time traveling, went to Cambridge for a year, and then began working for his father.
- (Page 25) In 1932, in an effort to speed the industrialization of Russia, Stalin created the second of several Five Year Plans (Cambridge). One of Kolenkhov's friends who still lives in the USSR has kept him abreast of the failure of such plans through letters.

- (Page 28) Tony typically vacations in Maine in the summer time.
- (Page 31) Eight years ago a typewriter was mistakenly delivered to the Vanderhof house. Penny interpreted this as a sign that she was to become a writer.
- (Page 31) Thirty-five years ago, Grandpa went up the elevator to work, came right back down again, and just stopped working. Since then, “he’s just collected snakes, and gone to circuses and commencements.” In other words, he has enjoyed his life on his own terms.
- (Page 37) Penny recently met Gay on the top of a bus, found out she was an actress, and invited her home to read for one of her plays.
- (Page 38) Last week, Paul built the Empire State Building with his Meccano set.
- (Page 38) For the last two days, when Ed has been out delivering candy, he has seen a man following him.
- (Page 40-41) Eight years ago, Penny started a painting of Mr. De Pinna as The Discus Thrower.
- (Page 41) Eight years ago, Mr. De Pinna came to deliver ice, and just stayed.
- (Page 41) Five years before Mr. De Pinna, the milkman came and stayed. He died just before Mr. De Pinna’s arrival. Since they never knew his name, they gave him Grandpa’s name—Martin Vanderhof—for the death certificate.
- (Page 41) Eight years ago, after getting the death certificate in his name, Martin Vanderhof stopped receiving mail and telephone calls.
- (Page 42) Kolenkhov’s friend from Moscow was sent by Stalin’s regime to Siberia, but he escaped and returned to Moscow.
- (Page 44) The Russian Revolution of 1917 created food shortages and bread lines that Kolenkhov still remembers.
- (Page 45) Kolenkhov was followed when he fled Russia.

- (Page 50) Mr. Kirby has suffered from indigestion and can only eat certain foods.
- (Page 51) America has been in the midst of the Great Depression for the past several years.
- (Page 61-62) When Ed delivered candy, he included interesting quotes he had printed in each box of candy. Unbeknownst to him, many were politically subversive.
- (Page 69) The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina has suffered greatly from the Russian Revolution, leaving her place of privilege to come to New York, only to wait tables at a pancake house in Times Square.
- (Page 75) Mr. Kirby has “spent [his] entire life building up [his] business.”
- (Page 76) When he was younger, Mr. Kirby wanted to be a trapeze artist, and later a saxophone player. At twenty-one, he ran away from home because he didn’t want to be forced into his father’s business. Eventually, he gave in.

Polar Attitudes of the Principal Characters

- Penelope Sycamore: Creating plays consumes my imagination. (Beginning)
Helping Alice have a happy ending to her story is even more exciting than writing the ending of a play. (End)
- Essie: I love to dance, especially for my family. (Beginning)
Now that Mr. Kirby is joining our family, I want to dance for him! (End)
- Rheba: This family is where I belong. (Beginning)
When the “white folks always getting themselves in trouble” (64), I’m glad to have Donald. He is even more like family to me than they are.
(End)
- Paul Sycamore: I love the thrill and creative possibilities of inventing fireworks.
(Beginning)
Now that Alice and Tony are back together, I can stop worrying that I

should have been an architect, and “start thinking about next year’s fireworks” (80). (End)

Mr. De Pinna: I enjoy being a part of such an interesting family. There is never a dull moment here. (Beginning)

I am fascinated by new members of our circle, especially Russian royalty, and want to get to know them better. (End)

Ed: I like living with my wife’s family, because they let us play the xylophone, use the big printing press, and just have fun. (Beginning)

I see that some people take life a lot more seriously than my family does, but I’d rather stay the way I am. (End)

Donald: I like the slow-paced, peaceful life of being on relief. (Beginning)

When these “white folks” are causing commotion and making all of us go to jail, I’m glad I’m black (64). (Ending)

Martin Vanderhof: I enjoy my life and do what I want to do. (Beginning)

I want to help Tony’s father relax a little, so that he can free Tony up to follow his heart and marry Alice. (End)

Alice Sycamore: I am hopelessly in love with Tony Kirby, but can’t imagine how his family would ever understand mine. (Beginning)

Despite our vastly different families, I see now that we can all get along, and marriage is finally possible. (End)

Tony Kirby: I am deeply in love with Alice Sycamore and charmed by her free-spirited family. (Beginning)

I choose to live like Alice’s family, following my heart, rather than continuing in my father’s steps, living just to work. (End)

Boris Kolenkhov: I miss my homeland and hate those who have destroyed it. (Beginning)
 If I cannot go home again, at least I can bring a part of Russia into my new family, in the person of the Grand Duchess herself. (End)

Mr. Kirby: A man's duty is to work hard, even if he hates his job. (Beginning)
 Perhaps doing what you love is possible, after all. (End)

Significance of the facts in the total meaning of the play

Dialogue

Dialogue: Choice of Words

The words chosen in You Can't Take It with You reveal the 1930's to be a more innocent era than our current one. Characters speak sweetly, using exclamations like "my" to mean "my goodness," as when Penny says, "My, if it keeps on I suppose you'll be opening up a store" (Hart 6). Penny also uses sweet terms of endearment like "dear" when speaking to her husband, as in, "Paul, dear, were you ever in a monastery?" (Hart 7).

The members of the Vanderhof clan are also sometimes playful with their words, teasing each other, as when, after Alice's foiled plan to run away to the Adirondacks, Tony teasingly asks, "Well, Miss Sycamore, how was your trip to the Adirondacks?" to which she responds, "Shut your face, Mr. Kirby" (Hart 79). This playful banter is part of Tony's fascination with Alice's family, as his own family has no such freedom and playfulness in the way they speak to each other.

Noticeably absent are swear words. Written in 1936, the language of the play fit the social expectations of the time. The lack of swearing also reflects the happiness and camaraderie of the family, along with their gentleness, "nobility" (Hart 31) and lack of stress.

Dialogue: Choice of Phrases and Sentence Structures

Characters in Martin Vanderhof's home speak comfortably and casually, in a very

relaxed manner. Even the older characters are not above slang, as when Paul says, “we sell ‘em for fifty,” or De Pinna says, “what day you going to take the stuff up to Mount Vernon? (Hart 8). Paul often shortens his words and uses incorrect grammar, as in “I gotta wash,” which could indicate that he came from a working class upbringing. His children follow his example, with Essie saying, “You can take ‘em around tonight” (Hart 10). Such relaxed speech makes the characters seem youthful, carefree, and child-like.

Even Alice, the most “traditional” member of the family, who usually speaks with proper grammar and syntax, has some moments of rambling confusion. When she tries to explain to Tony why she shouldn’t marry him, her choppy sentence structure mirrors her emotional turmoil: “No it isn’t . . . it’s never quite that. I love them, Tony . . . I love them deeply. Some people could break away, but I couldn’t. I know they do rather strange things . . . But they’re gay and they’re fun and . . . I don’t know . . . there’s a kind of nobility about them (Hart 31).

The Kirby parents, on the other hand, speak with a terse, clipped formality, using haughty and accusatory phrases, such as when they arrive for dinner a night early and turn on their son, saying, “Tony, how could you possibly—” and “Really, Tony! This is most embarrassing” (Hart 47). They emphasize their feelings by repeating their accusations, such as when Mr. Kirby says to Tony, “It was very careless of you. *Very!*” (Hart 49).

When the tension of the moment has passed and Grandpa has steered the conversation to Mr. Kirby’s work, Mr. Kirby’s short sentences suddenly expand. Speaking of coming out of the Depression, Kirby says, “As a matter of fact, industry is now operating at sixty-four per cent of full capacity, as against eighty-two per cent in 1925” (Hart 51). This sentence of twenty-three words nearly quadruples the size of his previous sentences, which averaged four or five words each, the longest being eleven words. The initially clipped manner of Mr. Kirby’s sentence structure reveals both his formality and his discomfort with the chaotic situation into which he

and his wife have stumbled. His sentence expansion reveals his comfortableness in speaking about his work. Work is a safe, acceptable topic for him, one in which he feels an expert, because he has thrown himself into his career for so many years.

Dialogue: Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

A few of the characters have specific regional dialects. Donald, for example, speaks in a more Southern style characteristic of black men in his day, using phrases like, “Caught a big mess of them today” and “the years certainly do roll ‘round. M-m-m” (Hart 12). Rheba, too, has a stereotypically “black” dialect of the 1930’s. For example, When Donald asks if Rheba thinks Tony and Alice will get married after the big arrest, Rheba says, “No, suh.” Later, Donald asks, “Ever notice how white folks always getting themselves in trouble?” To this, Rheba responds, “Yassuh, I’m glad I’m colored” (Hart 64). Though this dialect may not have offended audiences in the 1930’s, three decades before the Civil Rights movement, it could be seen in our era as “politically incorrect,” making the black characters look less educated or sophisticated than the white ones. When Penny Metropulos directed this play in Denver in 2007, she opted to alter the dialect and play Donald and Rheba as Irish to avoid negative black racial stereotypes.

Two other characters with dialects are the Russians, Kolenkhov and The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina. Their speech has a hint of formality often found in second language speakers. For example, where Grandpa’s family might make contractions like “won’t” or “he’s”, the Russians would keep the words separate, as when The Grand Duchess says, “He will not speak to the rest of us . . . He is in ladies’ underwear” (Hart 71).

Mr. Kolenkhov speaks with great power and flair, many of his sentences including Russian words and ending in exclamation marks. Upon his first entrance, he greets Rheba with a booming, “Ah, my little Rhebishka!” His pet name for Alice is the name of a famous Russian ballerina (“Pavlova”), “My Pavlowa! . . . My little Alice! Never have I seen you look so

magnificent” (Hart 25). He adds more Russian flavor to his language when, annoyed that Alice would go to the Monte Carlo Ballet, he cries out the names of Russian ballet masters (“Bakst,” “Diaghileff”) “Bakst! Diaghileff! *Then you had the ballet!* (Hart 26). Clearly, Kolenkhov is a proud Russian who carries his dialect with him like a badge of honor.

Dialogue: Sound and Music

The sound of the dialogue is incredibly varied, like the sounds of a day in the park. The Vanderhof clan, including family and closest friends, has ten different voices that all speak freely and often. Listening to the music of their speech, the audience would hear women and men, Yankees and Southerners, Americans and Russians, young and old. These different voices would vary in pitch, in volume, and in tempo. And yet most of the sounds would be relaxed and comfortable, with a smooth flow back and forth between voices. The exception to this would be Kolenkhov, whose loud, booming Russian voice might sound more aggressive than most of the characters, and sometimes disgusted or disdainful in tone. The musicality also changes when people enter this sanctuary from the outside world, such as Henderson, the Kirbys, or the G-men. In each case of outsiders who don’t understand the ways of this peculiar family, conflict ensues, which creates sharper, tenser, less fluid moments in the music of the dialogue.

Dialogue: Structure of Lines and Speeches

Lines in *You Can’t Take It with You* tend to be fairly short, with a great deal of dialogue and very little monologue. Glancing at any page in the text, the reader of the play would see that on most pages, the speaker changes at almost every line or two. On page fifty-five, for example, with forty-one possible lines to a page, the speaker changes twenty-three times. The Russians often speak in longer paragraphs than the other characters, but even so, on page seventy-one, when the Grand Duchess is meeting the family, the speaker still changes eighteen times. This structure of lines makes it clear that this family operates as a democracy, with everyone having

an equal voice and value. No one character dominates through the bulk of the play.

Near the end, however, when Grandpa is trying to resolve the conflict of the young lovers, he does have several longer speeches, trying to convince Mr. Kirby to consider a new perspective. On page seventy five, Grandpa's speeches start at two lines long, then grow to six, six, five, and eight, leading up to a remarkably long ten-line monologue on page seventy-seven. This unusually weighted section of the script allows Grandpa to share his wisdom and persuade on "outsider" to come into the fold of the family.

Dramatic Action

The following pages are the units of action broken down in the script. Each unit is divided with a horizontal line and titled. Each action/intention is indicated in the margin next to each spoken line.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
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Characters

Martin Vanderhof

Desire—To enjoy the simple pleasures of life, and to encourage this in his loved ones.

Will—Strong, unyielding to social or even legal pressures.

Moral stance—Live and let live. He is morally upright, honoring his own inner sense of morality above the law of the land, particularly when that law seems foolish or petty.

Decorum—Casual, comfortable, open. Not interested in formalities. Tries to include everyone, but is patient with outsiders' reluctance to understand his family's ways.

Summary Adjectives—Comfortable, kind, warm, generous, diplomatic.

Penelope Sycamore

Desire—To create. Whether she is painting or writing plays, her passion is creating.

Will—She is intent, focused on writing, but never at the cost of her relationships.

Moral stance—Morally upright, though not uptight. She will freely discuss sexuality, in plays or in casual conversation with guests, but her intent is not to be shocking, provocative, or licentious.

Decorum—More interested in getting to know others than in being polite or formal.

Summary Adjectives—Sweet, kind, caring, gentle, homey, motherly, artistic, passionate.

Paul Sycamore

Desire—Like his wife, his passion is creating. In his case, he loves inventing fireworks, and can hardly wait to share them with others. To him, his “work” is play.

Will—His will is strong. Even when bullied by the G-men, he does what he must do to try to save his fireworks.

Moral stance—Paul is a moral man, choosing his family and his “work,” with no real indication of any other temptation or distraction.

Decorum—Childlike enthusiasm with his family and close friends; more reserved with strangers.

Summary Adjectives—Creative, excited, focused, polite, kind.

Essie Sycamore

Desire—To do what she loves, which is mostly dancing and making candy.

Will—Very strong. She has studied ballet faithfully for eight years.

Moral stance—Pure, sweet, with a childlike innocence.

Decorum—Naïve, childlike. Though twenty-nine, she wears tutus around the house and dances everywhere she goes. She is too young at heart to obey standards of decorum.

Summary Adjectives—Sweet, kind, pixie-like, a bit empty-headed.

Ed

Desire—To create. He loves printing cards and creating music for Essie to dance.

Will—Easily influenced. When Penny suggests they have a baby, he is willing, but doesn't seem to make decisions on his own.

Moral stance—Moral, but naïve. He prints cards with catchy sayings, not understanding the meaning or power of the sometimes politically subversive words he prints on them.

Decorum—Boyish. He and his wife Essie are both very childlike and innocent.

Summary Adjectives—Youthful, naïve, a bit empty-headed.

Alice Sycamore

Desire—To marry Tony.

Will—Torn between following her heart (for Tony) and her head (knowing that her family and his will never mesh). She waffles back and forth between the two.

Moral stance—Very strong, not wanting to lead Tony on if she cannot marry him.

Decorum—Dreamily in love. She floats through the room with a smile on her face. When entertaining the Kirbys, she strives for order and decorum, but finds it impossible to achieve with her unpredictable, free-spirited family.

Summary Adjectives—Sweet, adoring, beautiful, practical, smart, spunky.

Rheba

Desire—To care for others, especially those she considers her family.

Will—Flexible; tethered to that of those she serves. She does not assert her will above theirs.

Moral stance—Open-minded, non-judgmental.

Decorum—Servile. She is a maid and behaves as one who knows her role.

Summary Adjectives—Warm, maternal, servant-hearted, unselfish, friendly.

Donald

Desire—To relax. He is on government relief and doesn't exert himself much, other than catching flies for the snakes.

Will—Easy-going. If asked to lend a hand with something, he will agree amiably.

Moral stance—Honest. He refuses to take money for helping with the fireworks, since he is on government relief.

Decorum—Polite, adding “ma’am” and “sir” to many of his sentences.

Summary Adjectives—Relaxed, amiable, even-keeled.

Mr. De Pinna

Desire—To belong. He stumbled into this family eight years ago, delivering ice, and just stayed.

Will—Quiet, but strong. He has made himself a part of this family, helping make fireworks, posing for paintings, and stepping forward eagerly to be introduced to their guests.

Moral stance—Neutral. He seems to be a moral man, but possibly less of his own accord than because he is surrounded by morally grounded friends.

Decorum—Informal. He rarely prefaces his words with niceties, but says what is on his mind.

Summary Adjectives—Shy, nerdy, eager to please.

Boris Kolenkhov

Desire—To live life fully, with dignity and strength that would honor his proud Russian heritage.

Will—Strong, unhindered by the Russian Revolution, language barriers, or his terrible ballet students. “Life is chasing around inside of (him), like a squirrel” (42).

Moral stance—Strongly on the side of justice, particularly concerning his beloved Russia.

Decorum—Commanding, strong and majestic.

Summary Adjectives—Enormous, hairy, loud, boisterous, opinionated.

Tony Kirby, Jr.

Desire—To be true to himself and follow his heart. Initially, that means to marry Alice, and later, it enlarges to include his career goals, as well.

Will—Very strong. He arranges for his family to arrive on the wrong night, so they will be forced to face the truth, and later, he tries desperately to convince Alice to stay.

Moral stance—Upright. He is the stereotypical “boy next door”: sincere, honest, and good.

Decorum—Polite, well-mannered, articulate; a product of both Yale and Cambridge.

Summary Adjectives—Sweet, romantic, handsome, idealistic, smart, playful, kind.

Anthony Kirby, Sr.

Desire—To live up to his own father’s vision for his life, i.e., making a lot of money.

Will—Like a mountain made of loose dirt. When it is challenged, it begins to erode.

Moral stance—Uptight. He is almost prudish, and his morality is an accidental by-product of his dedication to a job he hates.

Decorum—Formal, proper, not comfortable in his own skin.

Summary Adjectives—Repressed, driven, unhappy, unhealthy.

Miriam Kirby

Desire—To feel alive. She is trapped in a dull, lifeless marriage and hungry to feel.

Will—Weak. Though bored with her life, her only move toward change has been exploring

spirituality. She cannot even articulate why she does it.

Moral stance—Dutifully obedient.

Decorum—Formal, proper, a bit haughty.

Summary Adjectives—Repressed, bored, love-starved, but dignified and self-controlled.

Gay Wellington

Desire—To be a star.

Will—Weak. She drowns her failures in alcohol and spirals downward in her career.

Moral stance—Irresponsible. She is a drunk who flirts with other people's men, swears, and passes out on the couch when she should be reading through Penny's play.

Decorum—Undignified and poorly mannered.

Summary Adjectives—Vain, self-centered, flirtatious, boastful, drunk.

The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina

Desire—To make the best of whatever situation she is given.

Will—Strong. She is a survivor, and holds her head high despite her now lowly position.

Moral stance—Firm and righteous. She does not depend on others, beg, cheat, or steal, but works hard to make an honest way for herself.

Decorum—Dignified, regal, commanding, yet always willing to lend a hand.

Summary Adjectives—Majestic, powerful, dignified, undaunted.

Mr. Henderson

Desire—To pursue justice and uphold the law.

Will—Very strong. When confronted with obstacles to his desire, he becomes enraged.

Moral stance—Uptight. He lives by the letter of the law.

Decorum—Professional at first, but then explosive when faced with Grandpa's "logic."

Summary Adjectives—Logical, legalistic, unbending, stubborn, tightly wound.

Idea of the Play

Idea of the Play: Meaning of the Title

The title of You Can't Take It with You is inspired by a conversation between Martin Vanderhof and Mr. Kirby in the closing scene. Mr. Kirby is explaining that he keeps working on Wall Street because that's his business. "A man can't give up his business." Grandpa argues, "Why not? You've got all the money you need. You can't take it with you" (Hart 75). In contrast with the American Dream, which is based on hard work, independence, and material prosperity, Grandpa Vanderhof embraces a more utopian ideal, choosing to relax, live communally and enjoy the simple life. He is not ruled by corporate America, but does what he feels like doing when he feels like doing it, however whimsical it may be.

In the context of the Great Depression, it may seem odd that such a light-hearted comedy as You Can't Take It with You should win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1937. Some may denounce it as pure escapism. Still, the simple innocence of the theme must have struck a chord deep in the hearts of its audience: money does not buy happiness. Wealth does not shape our destiny. We, like Martin Vanderhof, are free to follow our passions and refuse to march to the relentless beat of the American Dream, especially when it is crumbling all around us. This play, though a modern audience may view it as merely charming, must have seemed somewhat rebellious, even revolutionary, in its day. At the very least, it was refreshing, offering hope and laughter in the midst of a dark decade. In 2009, with the American economy so fragile and depressed, it seems an especially fitting time to be producing this play.

Idea of the Play: Philosophical Statements in the Play

Grandpa Vanderhof often speaks philosophically, as the wise old sage of his family, and possibly as the voice of the playwright, as well. When he first returns from the Commencement exercises in the opening scene, Penny asks him if "the graduates ever say anything." He wryly

responds, “No, they just sit there in cap and nightgown, get their diplomas, and then along about forty years from now they suddenly say, ‘Where am I?’” (14). This was certainly true of his own younger life, following the dictates and expectations of society, rather than his personal dreams and desires. However, Grandpa has since made a radical change, and his philosophical statements are a continual gentle reminder of the simple life he has chosen for himself.

In saying Grace before dinner, for example, Grandpa prays, “Well, Sir, we’ve been getting along pretty good for quite a while now, and we’re certainly much obliged. Remember, all we ask is to just go along and be happy in our own sort of way” (26). This request reflects his desire for himself and his family to follow their hearts. His prayer also reveals his humility and sense of gratefulness to a higher power. In addressing this higher power, however, we see his untraditional bent. Grandpa does not begin with a lofty title such as “Heavenly Father” or “Lord,” but simply “Sir.” Even in his approach to God, Martin Vanderhof is not bound by the example of society, but simply led by his own understanding.

Most of Grandpa’s philosophy comes spilling out in his final attempt to convince Mr. Kirby to let Tony and Alice marry. Because Mr. Kirby is chasing the American Dream, he is the perfect foil to Grandpa, who believes the pursuit is empty. Grandpa tries to show Kirby the pointlessness of such a life: “Well, what *I* feel is that Tony’s too nice a boy to wake up twenty years from now with nothing in his life but stocks and bonds” (74). When Kirby argues that he has spent his “entire life building up [his] business, Grandpa asks, “And what’s it got you? Same kind of mail every morning . . . same kind of meetings . . . same indigestion. Where does the fun come in? Don’t you think there ought to be something *more*, Mr. Kirby?” (75). Grandpa’s carefree approach to life extends even beyond his work to the way he views politics. “Used to worry about the world, too. Got all worked up about whether Cleveland or Blaine was going to be elected President—seemed awful important at the time, but who cares now? What I’m trying

I'm trying to say, Mr. Kirby, is that I've had thirty-five years that nobody can take away from me, no matter what they do to the world" (Hart 75).

While this philosophical statement might be the writers' attempt to avoid the "escapist entertainment" label and "address the social issues of his times" ("Moss" 172), not every critic agreed that this "sermon" fit the show. Richard Watts, Jr. noted:

A time comes toward the end of the play when the authors apparently thought they should offer some kind of philosophical moral about the advantages of not toiling or spinning over the struggle for practical success, but their hearts were obviously not in it, and it's just as well. They weren't writing a preachment but a carefree comedy on some likeable people whose oddities are amusing and charming without being fantastically excessive, and they managed it delightfully. ("Moss" 172)

Idea of the Play: How the Action Leads to the Idea

Since Alice and Tony want to be married, their opposite worlds must collide. Tony, weary of life with his rigid parents who don't know or understand him, purposely brings them to his fiancée's house for dinner one night earlier than planned, knowing that this will show his parents what "real families" are like. The introduction of the very proper Kirby parents to Martin Vanderhof's messy playground of a household sets up an immediate conflict of values that must be resolved. Either Alice's family must straighten up and become more "responsible", or the Kirbys must loosen up and learn to enjoy life. Although this awkward meeting turns out disastrously, with the entire dinner party spending the night in jail, the crisis forces change to happen. Alice reacts to the disaster by wanting to run away, Tony by pursuing her, Mr. Kirby by chasing Tony, and Martin Vanderhof by speaking frankly with Mr. Kirby about the meaning of life.

Reviews of Past Productions

When You Can't Take It with You opened on Broadway in 1936, it was a commercial success. In fact, not only did the public support the play for an impressive 838 performances in its initial run (all the more notable considering that it was in the midst of the Great Depression), but the Pulitzer Prize board also deemed it worthy of the 1937 award in Drama. Since that time, there have been three more Broadway revivals, in 1965, 1967, and 1983 (Garcia). Now, preparing to direct this show more than seventy years after the original production, it is crucial to find out from the critics what made this show work well, and, on the other hand, what potential or actual weaknesses they found in these productions.

While confessing his own “fondness for amiability in the theatre,” Brooks Atkinson of The New York Times raved about the original production in 1936, calling it the playwrights’ “most thoroughly ingratiating comedy.” By contrast, Atkinson described their previous work, Once in a Lifetime, as one in which the writers “mowed the audience down under a machine-gun barrage of low comedy satire.” In shifting his praise from the writing to the directing, Atkinson noted that “under Mr. Kaufman's direction, which can be admirably relaxed as well as guffawingly taut, every one gives a jovial performance.” To this critic, the warmth, affection, comic craftsmanship, and strong acting melded together to create a highly entertaining evening of theatre.

In 1983, more than fifty years later, Frank Rich of The New York Times reviewed the third Broadway revival a bit more critically, pointing out some possible flaws in the show. According to Rich, You Can't Take It With You “has probably been ruined by more high school productions than anyone can count, and, let's face it, its confectionary charms are not foolproof: the writing is far too slipshod in design to be mistaken for classic farce, much too landlocked by its simple, best-things-in-life-are-free Depression escapism to speak to the ages.” Despite his

reservations about the script, however, Rich gives high praise to Ellis Rabb, the director of both this revival and the 1965 version, for bringing together such fine actors. The characters they create are wacky but lovable, and make the audience want to join them in their eccentric ideals. The key is in playing the characters for believability, not just for laughs. Rich noted that “whenever the script gives them room, the actors insist on portraying these zanies as real people whose behavior is not merely a setup for gags but a valiant response to hard times.”

Rich warns against playing mindless stock characters, such as the “young lovers,” in favor of playing genuine emotions. He insists that “even the play's potentially drippiest passages become radiant under this approach. The romantic scenes between Penny's daughter, Alice . . . and the well-bred boss's son, Tony . . . , are sexy and touching because the young lovers are played as adults, not juveniles.” In fact, according to Rich, most of the actors in this revival “succeed in stretching period stereotypes into people,” with the possible exception of “James Coco, as the Russian ballet teacher, . . . (who) falls into shtick that this production otherwise avoids.”

When the 1983 Broadway revival closed, the cast was reassembled and taped before a live audience for television broadcast. John J. O'Connor reviewed this taped rendition of the stage play, and confirmed what Frank Rich had alluded to the year before, commenting that “the production's most outstanding and beguiling asset is its sustained feeling of genuine warmth. These are accomplished actors openly enjoying themselves. They may step outside of the material occasionally, but it is never with a sense of patronization. They love the play, and they love playing with one another.”

In regional theatre, director Penny Metropulos directed *You Can't Take It with You* at the Denver Center Theatre Company in 2007. Critic John Moore warned that “this is an American classic no one performs anymore—partly because it's dated, partly because it requires

a cast of 19 astonishingly carefree actors. If tragedy is easy and comedy is hard, then believably conveying a pure and innocent spirit must be next to impossible.” That said, he gave Metropulos high praise when he added that she had “done the next to impossible.” Like critics of other productions, his praise was aimed mostly at the delightful acting. Moore imagined “Metropulos advising her actors, regardless of age, to simply play their characters as adult children.”

Even more recently, seasoned director Nora Ephron staged a “one night only” reading of the play in 2008 at UCLA. Ephron was thrilled that the actors who played Tony and Alice turned out to be “very, very charming together,” which she deemed fortunate, “because if that relationship doesn’t work, the play doesn’t work” (“One”).

Most of these critics seem to agree that the secret to this show’s success lies more with the actors than with the script. Particularly in this cynical age, when the audience might easily deem the play overly idealistic or dated, You Can’t Take It with You requires actors who are uninhibited, innocent, and believe in their characters one hundred percent, zany though they may be. With that in mind, a director would be wise to build an atmosphere of trust and acceptance among the cast, in order to encourage the actors to take risks and explore their characters without reservation. Not surprisingly, this strategy aligns perfectly with Moss Hart’s own philosophy of directing. Rather than wasting “endless time in discussing motivation and inner orientation,” he believed that the director’s job was “the creation of a climate of security and peace, in which actors can do their best work” (Garrison 303). This, then, will be my own goal.

Research on the Playwrights

George S. Kaufman was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1889, to a working class Jewish family. After a series of odd jobs, his theatrical career began in his early twenties, doing summer stock in Troy, New York. He quit after one week, “sending his father a telegram that said: ‘Last Supper and original cast wouldn’t draw in this house.’” Almost immediately, his

career began to improve. Before the decade was over, he had his first Broadway hit” (Gussow). He also worked as a journalist and drama critic for The New York Herald Tribune and, eventually, as the drama editor for The New York Times. Known for his surly persona and his razor-sharp wit, Kaufman surrounded himself with many well-known fellow artists, such as Dorothy Parker, Edna Ferber, and Marc Connelly, in a literary and theatrical group called the Algonquin Round Table. The group was named after the Algonquin hotel, where they met every week to eat lunch, chat, and refine their “sharp verbal repartee that greatly influenced American popular culture in the 1920’s and 1930’s” (“Kaufman” 256).

Kaufman was “lanky, taciturn, [and] curmudgeonly,” but he had undeniable talent and craftsmanship (Singer). Woody Allen, as a teenager, pored over Kaufman’s plays trying to glean wisdom from this master. He found that Kaufman’s work “not only crackled with sophisticated Broadway wiseguy dialogue, but more important, played. The plots were beautifully structured and were very performable” (Allen). Indeed, Kaufman had a reputation for being a “play doctor,” one that other playwrights could turn to when they had a play that wouldn’t work (Johnston). Kaufman could do the “tedious, glamourless structuring and rewriting and merciless cutting that is crucial to making comedy breathe” (Allen).

In 1931, Kaufman collaborated with Irving Berlin on the satirical musical Of Thee I Sing, which became the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama (Isherwood). Kaufman was well-respected as a successful and capable playwright, even before he met Moss Hart, with whom he would create his longest lasting successes.

Nearly a generation after Kaufman’s birth, Moss Hart was born in the Bronx in 1904, the son of Jewish immigrants from England. He grew up helping to shoulder the burden of poverty by dropping out of school at age twelve in order to work. Despite being poor, his aunt fostered in him a love of theatre at an early age, taking him to see plays at the Alhambra Theatre and the

Bronx Opera House. As a young man, one of his jobs was working as an office boy for Augustus Pitou, a theatrical manager. Their working relationship was terminated, however, shortly after Hart convinced his boss to produce one of his original comedies. It flopped with both the critics and the public, costing Pitou a whopping \$45,000, and costing Hart his job (“Hart” 172).

Regardless of this failure, theatre was in his blood. Hart confessed that the “theatre is not so much a profession as a disease . . . and my first look at Broadway was the beginning of a lifelong infection” (Garrison 303). Hart then held various odd jobs, acting, directing, and working at resort camps in the Catskill Mountains, all the while continuing to write plays and have them rejected. Despite their rejection, theatre managers encouraged his sense of humor, and when he submitted his play Once in a Lifetime to six different managers in 1929, his luck turned. Not only did all six accept his play, but one producer, Sam H. Harris, encouraged Hart to revise it with George S. Kaufman, a more seasoned and established playwright. At age twenty-five, with the golden opportunity to be mentored by an already successful playwright, Hart agreed to the collaboration, and with that, Broadway history was made (“Hart” 172, 176).

Hart admitted that, “at our first meeting, I was wide-eyed with hero worship; [Kaufman] recoiled in horror. Later, however, everything turned out fine; we married and had several beautiful children.” In fact, “together they wrote eight shows in ten years, nearly all of them hits” (Singer). Though Hart was, in some regards, an apprentice, in the case of You Can’t Take It with You, it is he who received top billing, because Kaufman “made it a rule that whoever came up with the original idea would be first billed” (Allen).

Of this working relationship, Hart wrote, “. . . if it is true that no more eager disciple ever sat at the feet of a teacher, it is equally true that no disciple was ever treated with more infinite patience and understanding” (Garrison 304). Of course, both writers brought something to the

table. Kaufman's daughter Anne explained that "the structure of almost any of the plays was clearly my father's. Moss, I believe, did bring more heart to the writing—no pun intended" (Singer).

Together, in their first collaboration of Once in a Lifetime, they introduced to the Broadway stage "the multiplicity of characters and outrageous incidents that became a hallmark of their work" ("Kaufman" 256). The success of this play was expected for Kaufman, but for Hart, it marked a career turning point that brought him from rags to riches. Suddenly, he had made it into the inner circle of the Broadway elite, where he remained for the rest of his career.

As for their writing process, Brooks Atkinson explained that they typically started casually, discussing various ideas and letting them germinate for weeks or months, expanding them until there was enough to begin a daily writing schedule. At that point, they began to write:

Mr. Kaufman usually sitting at the typewriter, Mr. Hart roaming the house and looking for interruptions. An orderly person who [liked] to attack everything on plan, Mr. Kaufman [felt] happy if they [produced] four pages a day. They [were] likely to overwrite the first draft, confident that it [was] easier to improve a play by cutting than by expanding. Working after this general fashion, You Can't Take It with You was finished in five weeks. ("Moss" 176)

For all of their differences in age, personality, and approach to writing, Kaufman and Hart made a dynamic team, complementing one another's abilities and getting along well enough to work together for a very successful decade.

Student Learning Goals

At Bridgemont High School, we have a Graduate Student Profile, highlighting three main areas in which we strive to equip our students by the time they graduate. Our goal is that they will have the necessary tools to be critical thinkers, confident communicators, and community

assets. To that list, I would add that in the Performing Arts department, we want to equip them to be artistically excellent. My intention is to work toward all of these goals through the production of You Can't Take It with You.

Student Learning Goals: Critical Thinking

- Gain greater insight into the connection between art and culture
- Develop problem solving ability through acting and improvisation
- Analyze text in order to gain understanding of the character, intention, and subtext

Student Learning Goals: Communication

- Build upon existing skills in voice, body language, and facial expression
- Grow in confidence and self-awareness through the rehearsal and performance process
- Practice positive interpersonal communication skills with other team members

Student Learning Goals: Community Asset

- Grow as a team player, making a consistent, dedicated, positive contribution to the overall production
- Foster a desire to become a life-long supporter of the arts

Student Learning Goals: Artistic

- Experience and explore performance in a non-musical comedy
- Practice and perfect the art of comic timing
- Build upon existing skills of creating interesting stage pictures and blocking, using Hodge principles
- Create an original, insightful character interpretation and bring that person to life
- Move beyond playing “stock characters” into acting believably, with sincerity and understanding
- Use the entire body as an acting instrument, with physical awareness and energy

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**CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
THEATRE ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM**

THESIS PROJECT/ PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

STUDENT-

Lisa Nelson

ID#-

UNDER CONSIDERATION IS DIRECTION OF:

You Can't Take It with You

EVALUATOR'S NAME:

Scott Robinson

TITLE: Committee cha

PLACE OF PERFORMANCE:

DATE OF VIEWING:

DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE VENUE:

Small low ceilinged multi-purpose room. When the audience was added it gave a very shallow acting area. Limited lighting from portable trees just behind the audience.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTUAL PRODUCTION DIRECTION AND/OR REALIZED DESIGN OF SETS, PROPS, COSTUMES, LIGHTING, SOUND:

The scenic pieces worked very well for the play. Typical to comedy several doors lead to numerous other rooms and locations. The tight ceiling height limited the height of the flats, and also precluded overhead lighting. This was a prop heavy show, complete with xylophone and real snake in a case upstage. Furniture placement did interfere with blocking as did the linier shape of the stage. Often actors would line up behind the table as there was really no where else to go. Moving the small desk and grandpa's chair more into the downstage corners may have helped with movement and crating some angles.

Costume are generally appropriate for the production, setting in time and place as did the hair and makeup. Of note was the bald pate, which was very well done.

Lighting did struggle of the evening of review. One of the few units had been knocked of focus causing some dark spots on stage felt and intimately illuminating the room's wall, drawing some focus from the action.

Sound cue ran smoothly and were generally well recorded. I wondered why the sound was not directed from a more upstage location as most of the cues were associated with the door bell or phone, both upstage. Sound coming from far left was a bit confusing. Music for transitions and preshow was very appropriate.

HOW DID THE PRODUCTION DIRECTION OR DESIGN IMPLEMENT THE IDEAS EXPRESSED IN THE CONCEPT STATEMENT?

APPROPRIATENESS OF CHOICE OF SCRIPT FOR ABILITIES OF PERFORMERS, AUDIENCE, VENUE, AND/OR ACADEMIC SETTING?

This script was very appropriate for the cast with which she had to work, including the colleague playing the Russian.

ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING IF APPLICABLE: CLEAR DELINEATION OF UNITS OF ACTION,

MOTIVATED BLOCKING, VISUALLY INTERESTING COMPOSITION, VISUAL EXPRESSION OF METAPHOR, USE OF PICTURIZATION IN STORYTELLING, CLEAR AND BELIEVABLE CHARACTERIZATION, ADEQUATE USE OF BODY AND VOICE, UNITY OF PRODUCTION ELEMENTS, CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING.

Generally nice pictures were created but were often limited with the shallowness of the playing area. However actors consistently move into creating diagonals and using the available space.

Comic timing was well done, some of the punch-lines did need to be "offered up" in a stronger way to help the audience.

This script has a vast array of characters and the diversity of the student body was very appropriate to this script. Although not a period as might be warranted, contemporary audiences have no trouble accepting this mix of races.

Young actors need to work on motivated actions and diction especially with the mix of dialects clear diction would have helped make the word easier for the audience.

One performance by a student that was of note was the drunk actress. She was exceptional the night of my visit

WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THIS PARTICULAR PERFORMANCE VENUE, WAS THIS PRODUCTION SATISFACTORY OR UNSATISFACTORY?

Satisfactory.

Section Three: Post-Production Materials

Production Journal for You Can't Take It with You

23 Feb. 2009

Today in Drama 1-2 I introduced the new play, You Can't Take It with You. I passed out scripts to the eleven students in my class, described the characters, announced that all major roles would be cast from this class, and commenced with cold readings. By the end of the ninety-minute period, I was pretty sure about who would play two or three of the male roles, but was still very undecided about the bulk of the casting.

24 Feb. 2009

After school we held open auditions for the eight smaller roles, to be cast outside of my Drama class. Six girls showed up to try out, most of them very young: three eighth graders, one freshman, one sophomore, and one junior. The extra parts available for women are all three older women: the Grand Duchess, Mrs. Kirby, and Gay Wellington. Unfortunately, the eighth graders may not be a great fit for any of these roles, so I will have to figure out other ways for them to be involved. Perhaps they can help with props, costumes, or ushering.

Since half of my Drama class (six students) will be absent from class Wednesday for a field trip, I asked those six students to come after school, as well, for their second reading. I had all twelve students do cold readings, and by the end of the audition, I felt I had a solid Mrs. Kirby, Mr. Kirby, Grandpa, Mr. DePinna, and Tony. I was still unsure about the leading female roles and who could handle the bigger-than-life character parts of the Grand Duchess and Gay Wellington.

25 Feb. 2009

In Drama 1-2 class, I had four students who were not on today's field trip: three boys and one girl. I had them do several cold readings of my choosing, as well as allowing them to do cold readings of their own choosing. By the end of the period, I had finalized the casting for all

leading male roles, but will have to call back nearly all of the women to make final decisions about those roles. I will also recruit some students to call-backs who did not try out, in an attempt to fill all of the roles and involve students who will be most fitting for the parts available. If I am desperate, I will recruit teachers to fill these roles, as I had already decided to do for Kolenkhov. We have a teacher with some theatre experience who would be very funny in this part. He is a large man with a big booming voice who will bring a lot of life to this role. Also, it is fun for our students to see a teacher playing a role on stage. Finally, the presence of an adult actor will help set the bar high for acting expectations.

26 Feb. 2009

After school today we had call-backs. I started with the male roles and dismissed each group as we finished. My hardest decision was the three leading women: Essie, Alice, and Penny, but in the end, I felt fairly certain of my casting. One girl was the clear-cut ingenue (Alice), because of her ability to play the love scenes with sincerity. The two character actresses were harder. The one whose voice sounded the youngest (the most like Essie) seemed uncomfortable doing the ballet-like movement necessary to play the character. In the end, I chose the actress who was the most physically uninhibited to play Essie, as I think movement is more essential to her flighty character than voice. By the end of the call-backs, I had cast every role in the show. My only hesitation is that one boy who wanted to try out was sick today, so I've never heard him read. If he is at school Friday, I plan to give him a chance to read for Henderson before I post the final cast list.

2 Mar. 2009

Today I posted the final cast list, including crew members, so that students who were not cast as actors would still feel included. In class, we read through Act One and began to cast a vision for the characters. As we were reading the stage directions, this took much longer than I

anticipated, and, even though class was ninety minutes, we didn't get to finish the last few pages.

3 Mar. 2009

After school today we read through Act Two. We were missing Alice and Tony, as they were both sick. Ironically, they are also dating in real life, which I hope will not present problems down the road, should they break up before our play. We did have Kolenkhov (played by a teacher), and the students were delighted. I think he will be a big crowd-pleaser. I need to find an accent coach for ^{he}him and the Duchess.

4 Mar. 2009

In class today we read through Act Three. We were still missing Alice and Tony, but finished the entire play and the students really seemed to like it. I had them do some character imagination work, coming up with memories and favorite things and a character inspiration from real life. My hope is that this will help them begin to think like their characters and have someone of that age that they can study for movement.

6 Mar. 2009

Today we blocked our first scene during drama class. It went fairly smoothly, although I can tell there will be some difficult blocking moments, with so many students involved. This cast size is about twice the size of my past few shows, and I know it will present a challenge to manage rehearsals well with so many students. The time we had was barely enough to finish the blocking, with no time for warm-ups or training. My hope is that once we have done the initial blocking, I can start incorporating more training into each rehearsal, even if it means making them thirty minutes longer to accommodate it.

9 Mar. 2009

Today in class we had a very chaotic rehearsal. I was not as well-prepared as I would like to have been, and the blocking was tedious, trying to work out the traffic patterns with so

many actors in the scene. My goal for next time is to come more prepared with blocking.

10 Mar. 2009

Today after school we had an excellent rehearsal. It involved smaller scenes, and there were no actors sitting around who were not involved, as there often are during class time. The after-school rehearsals are going to be our most productive. I may need to change the rehearsal schedule so that more class time is spent on training, designing, and building, while more after school is spent on rehearsals.

11 Mar. 2009

Today we had two ninety-minute rehearsals: one in class and one after school. In both instances, I broke the larger scene we were working on into three French scenes, dedicating thirty minutes to each 4-5 page scene. This helped the process a great deal, making the scenes seem more manageable and allowing us to run them two to three times each. I decided to strive for quality blocking rather than quantity, even when it meant that we didn't finish all of the pages we had set out to block. Pages 55-60, therefore, will have to be rescheduled to another rehearsal next week, to make up for not finishing them today. It was completely worth it, though, as the students had much more fun when they could feel a sense of mastery over the parts we did finish.

16 Mar. 2009

Today, I started adding in warm-ups at the beginning of rehearsal. It seemed to help the actors with their focus and characterization. They still need a great deal of work in physicalizing their characters.

18 Mar. 2009

I'm realizing that my days are a series of "to do" lists, and that I am treating rehearsals like that too. I need to have a better start and finish to each rehearsal, a moment at the beginning and at the end where I motivate, set acting goals, and cast vision, not just read the "to do" list and

then announce it as finished.

Overall this week, we solved many blocking problems as we worked through the play for the second time through. The hardest scenes to block are the ones with large groups, particularly when they sit down to dinner, as the inevitable semi-circle seems to appear on stage. My goal next week is to continue fixing these stage pictures, changing the semi-circles into triangles.

23 Mar. 2009

Today I had my stage manager pre-set the stage prior to class, and clear two tables for the cast to sit at when they came in. At each place, she pre-set a revised rehearsal schedule and a character exercise: writing a letter to another character from the point of view of your own character. I used this as a warm-up exercise for the first five minutes of class, and then we began the rehearsal. It seemed to be fairly focused, although physical acting exercises might be even more effective than this mental one.

This evening I watched half of the 1938 movie to try to get ideas for some of my difficult blocking moments. So far, I have gleaned several good ideas: having Donald play the harmonica instead of the accordion, having Ed play Chopin or a Hungarian folk song instead of Beethoven as the script mentions, having Henderson say "holy smokes!" instead of "Jesus," having Grandpa stand at the table when he prays, rather than sitting, and having Donald and Rheba serve the food at meals so that they won't need a chair at the table.

Finally, my goal in this next week is to get hand props into the actor's hands: a list for Alice's party planning, a xylophone for Ed, a stamp album for Grandpa, a typewriter and paper for Penny, a pipe for DePinna, a tpestick for Ed, etc. This should help my actors with their stage business, which needs more attention, and the characters need to take more delight in all that they do.

25 Mar. 2009

Today I assigned each actor the task of finding his own hand props by Monday. I e-mailed a list to the cast, some teachers, and some parents, and many of the difficult props are already starting to be claimed. The cast is to have at least “working” props in hand Monday.

27 Mar. 2009

I showed my students a scene from the movie during class today, and they seemed to enjoy watching their characters fully developed. I want to do more work with them to help them develop their characters much more. So far, many students just look like themselves. We need to “play” more and let these characters breathe on their own. My hope is that when we get off script on Monday, more character work can begin to happen.

30 Mar. 2009

We did some physical character warm-ups today, to try to get actors thinking and moving differently from themselves. We ran a short scene twice during class, and another short scene twice after school. In both rehearsals, the actors were off-book and had eighty percent of their props in hand. This really helped them start to be able to move more naturally. I’m starting to see that character movement is very closely tied to focus. Those who don’t move well are not mentally engaged, either. I want to try the game where actors have to speak aloud their thoughts (“Stop and Think”), so I can get them more mentally engaged and more emotionally connected to one another throughout the scene, particularly when they are not the focus of the scene.

31 Mar. 2009

I started experimenting today with having actors speak aloud their thoughts. They are clearly uncomfortable with this game, which confirms my suspicions that they are not mentally engaged in creating subtext during the scenes. This is a game I will definitely repeat often, until they are in the habit of remaining focused. I want to try another game about emotional connections between characters. Rhett Luedtke taught us both games this summer in Teaching

and Directing Young Actors. I need to review them both a bit more to see how he conducted them, but if I can get my students good at these two skills, I think the play will be much more interesting to watch.

14 Apr. 2009

I am most worried about all of the technical aspects of the play: sets, lighting, and costumes. These are never my strongest suit, and I rarely have adequate help in these areas, so they often fall on me and the cast. I have assigned the cast the job of finding one costume each, and have finally gotten confirmation from a costumer who has agreed to help out with the show. I think her presence on the design team is going to make a world of difference in the overall look and period accuracy of the costumes, as well as in my stress level in that area. She may even agree to help with scenic painting, since my first scenic painter will be unable to help, so that would be a huge relief, as well. My goals this week are to make some contact at SFSU for prop rental, and to watch the video of a friend's production to get ideas for problem areas to avoid.

27 Apr. 2009

One of my ongoing goals is still to get more consistent about beginning each rehearsal with some sort of acting warm up: vocal, physical, or mental exercises to help the actors become more aware of themselves. Today, I began with volume and articulation drills, making it the goal of the day to have actors speaking clearly and projecting their voices. Most of the actors still struggle to be heard, so projection exercises need to become a regular part of our warm-up routine.

We ran through the entire play for the first time. To ensure that the rehearsal would run smoothly, I employed the technique of shadowing. If a student knew his lines were weak in a particular scene, he could assign a "shadow" who stood behind him, speaking his lines in his ear, while the actor continued to say them aloud. Two of the actors were very weak on lines, and two

others knew their lines, but not their cues. The shadows allowed the scenes to flow smoothly, and also allowed me to see visually who was weak on their lines. This technique is in many ways more efficient than having students call for lines, as there are not lulls in the action or dialogue, so we were able to get a rough timing of the show as well.

Though it's tempting to focus the entire week on memorization, I hope to find higher acting goals, really stretching all of the actors, and trusting that those few who are slow to memorize will catch up this week, especially if the rehearsals are fun and challenging on more levels than just rote memorization.

28 Apr. 2009

Rehearsal began with an improvisation centering on the Vanderhof home as a playground. Each actor had to find an area to play in and have fun in that space. The goal of the day was to breathe more life and joy into the house, so that it would be immediately clear to guests and to the audience that this home is full of grown children who love nothing more than to play. Transfer of this warm-up to the scene today (Act One) was somewhat successful, though there still needs to be more joy and playfulness in the house. The characters need to take greater delight in one another. Tomorrow we may try the same exercise, but add more interaction with other characters, switching from character to character in the improvisation. I also want to try the projection exercise using increasing space between partners to help students feel the need to project in large spaces.

One of the boys playing a very small part (G-man #3) dropped out of the play today, due to poor grades. I asked the light board operator to fill his part, which means I need to find a sound board operator now, and ask that person to run lights and sound during the G-man scene.

29 Apr. 2009

Today, the boy playing the head G-man skipped rehearsal for the fourth or fifth time.

Out of perhaps six rehearsals, he has only been to one. I called his father and we agreed he needed to be taken out of the play due to his noncommittal behavior. I went outside and talked to the coach about it, who recruited one of his athletes to do the part. The two new G-men did fairly well in rehearsal today. I think they will be fine, though they will not get nearly the training or rehearsal time I would have liked them to have.

I asked a girl named Alex to be the sound board operator, and she agreed. She should start coming to rehearsals next week. We already have most of the sound effects and music cues compiled in a playlist, so she will be able to run the cues for the actors to start getting used to the sounds. I plan to ask the lighting operator to watch rehearsal next week and start working on a lighting cue sheet.

My students were terrible with their memorization today. It seems I will have to find a way to help them memorize, other than just lowering their grades, which hasn't had much effect so far. The students who need the most work on their lines are the same students who don't care that much if they get a low grade. I called three students who were the weakest links and told them they had to come in at lunch Thursday for a lines test. Also, Friday in class I plan to give them time to study lines in partners.

1 May 2009

Act Three went much more smoothly than Act Two. Lines were more solid and stage pictures and looking very good. I feel my strength is more in the surface of the show, such as good stage pictures, rather than in the inner workings of the characters, such as motivation and intention. In these last two weeks, as all of the technical details fall into place, I hope to do more work with actor intention and subtext.

3 May 2009

Today I had a team of one parent and ten students working on building sets. We got the

audience platforms legged and the backdrop nearly completed. It will definitely add an air of excitement to this week's rehearsals.

I spoke with one student who has been absent for three weeks, due to three deaths in his family, plus a case of strep throat himself. I asked if we should find him an understudy. He hopes to be in school Monday and is willing to keep his part, so that is the current plan. However, I feel it would be wise to have a student start understudying his role, just in case he cannot handle the pressure of all the rehearsals, while trying to catch up on three weeks of class work.

4 May 2009

Today in class I assigned several students work to do on sets and props, while those who needed it most were given a partner to help them study their lines. My hope is that the few students who are not fully memorized will be helped by having class time to work on this, as they are clearly not disciplined enough or skilled enough to do it effectively on their own.

For the last half hour of class, we all did some character improvisation. The students went in pairs, playing their character, but enacting a scene that was not in the play. Some scenes were mentioned in the script, and other scenes were completely out of context. In all scenes, I employed the "stop and think" technique to get students creating continual subtext. Though they are not completely comfortable in this yet, they did seem to improve, and they thoroughly enjoyed doing the improvisation.

After school, I began rehearsal with a character meditation designed to help students create imaginary memories for their characters. Rehearsal flowed smoothly today, as we ran Act One. This act is where it needs to be for a week prior to opening. Tomorrow will be the biggest challenge, as Act Two is currently our weakest link in the show, and quite far from performance level. I may employ shadows again, if certain students still seem to need them.

5 May 2009

The warm-ups today focused on volume and articulation, which are still quite weak, but which I hope to improve before we open. Act two was vastly improved from last week. After having three different class days with some time allotted for studying lines in partners, the lines were much stronger. Volume and articulation seem to be improving as well, which is encouraging, though we still have work to do. We adjusted a few awkward stage pictures, and students are becoming more comfortable handling their props as more props appear daily. Also, the acting evoked several sincere laughs from those watching, which was a first for this act. The comic timing is finally starting to work. Also, with sound and lighting people now watching, we have a fresh audience, and that helps us see what is really funny, despite the fact that we have grown numb to its humor.

6 May 2009

Today I got held up on a phone call to the lighting rental company, so my stage manager, of her own accord, started rehearsal, guiding the cast through several volume and articulation drills until I could get there. I was impressed with and encouraged by the proactive leadership of this fourth year drama student, whose experience and training are evident, along with her own leadership skills and self-motivation.

Act Three is the shortest act in the play, so we had plenty of time to stop and work the trouble spots. For example, when the actress playing Penelope started off with a very insincere sadness at the beginning of the rehearsal, I coached her to help her understand her character more. Though Briana, the actress, is too young to know what it feels like when a daughter moves away from home, we talked through associations that would help her relate to Penelope's plight. When we ran the scene again, her sadness was much more sincere and believable. Briana still has some issues that I don't fully understand about not wanting to touch her husband in the

play, Jose. Whenever I ask them to hold hands or hug, she is very resistant. I need to have a talk with her to see if I can help her press through whatever is going on socially to play the part as it should be played—as a happily married couple, very much in love.

One big blocking issue is that the dining table is just too small, and we need a buffet. I must find a solution for that this weekend so that there are no more furniture issues next week that impede our blocking. As we have no prop room at school, most likely, I will have to bring in my own dining table, chairs, and buffet, and just live without them at home for the week.

10 May 2009

Saturday the students and I did the bulk of the painting, and Sunday a friend and I started dressing the stage. We brought in a larger dining table, which is about two feet longer and solves several blocking issues. We also loaded my sideboard in the car to take to school Monday, at which point all of the furniture will be finished. The scenic painter will come in Monday to do the detail work on the walls, and another friend will stop by to cut the wood for the swinging doors. I found a ginger ale bottle that can explode and be closed again each night, and one of my students is roasting a turkey for the closing scene, since our paper mache efforts fell short.

For me, tomorrow's focus will be threefold: hanging and focusing lights, finishing all doors and hanging them, and working with the chemistry teacher on the pyrotechnics.

11 May 2009

I'm feeling the truth that without a technical director, the majority of a director's focus in the week or two prior to the show, is purely technical. Today I felt completely overwhelmed by the tasks that needed to be done. I had a friend Joseph come in and fix some stairs and a parent named volunteered to hang some doors. Still, there is much to be done in creating masking curtains for the wings and trouble shooting the swinging doors, which won't stay closed.

Without a lighting designer, there is a great deal to be done in that arena, as well. I do have

students with interest and some level of expertise who learn a great deal more by experimenting and mentoring one another than they might if there were a professional designer doing all of the work. I am thrilled with the good fortune of having the assistance and expertise of my costumer and scenic painter, Janice. In addition to helping in these two areas, she has also brought many props and helped with hair and make-up.

For the next show, I would like to recruit and train many more volunteers to be as committed to the project as Janice has been. My volunteer pool is made up of parents who are required to donate twenty volunteer hours per semester to the school community. However, none of them seem to have any theatre experience or any concept of the amount of work it takes to mount a production. I want to have them coming to rehearsals, getting familiar with the show, and committing to help out all along the way, not just by donating food in the last week.

Ideally, I need to recruit and train five teams of parents or other volunteers to do the following jobs: hair/make-up, set construction, scenic painting, props, and costumes. Then I wouldn't be burning out as I am this week, feeling that I no longer want to be a drama director because there is too much stress. Instead, I would have a whole team of people, all of them on board with the vision of the show, and each doing their part to make the vision come together.

12 May 2009

As for the students, their acting is improving with each rehearsal, as expected. They are still shaky on many of their lines, which is very unprofessional, but at this school, it seems to be the culture. I'm not sure how to change the culture to one that prides itself on learning lines thoroughly and on time. However, we began today's rehearsal by spot-working five or six of the sections that had line errors last night. Still, it seemed there were even more line errors in tonight's rehearsal. I may have them study lines in class Wed. in pairs to try to help them as much as possible. The truth is that they are busy with the show from 4:00-9:00 this entire week,

and they still have homework in their classes, so their free time to study lines is quite limited. Any time I can give them would help the show.

We also began the rehearsal with warm-ups that encourages energy and focus, both of which seemed to be better in tonight's rehearsal than in last night's. I stressed the importance of learning to improvise to cover mistakes, and the students practiced it several times, particularly in covering for the several late entrances that happened. This epidemic is due to the fact that we have a tiny backstage and the "green room" is in the next building over, with no monitor to help the students know where we are in the show. This problem has me changing my rule from "Stay out of the backstage when you're not needed" to "Stay backstage at all times until your role is completely finished."

I have been training my cast to respond politely to the stage manager when she makes the pre-show calls, and we all seem to enjoy the culture that such politeness breeds. The students may laugh or exaggerate politeness when they respond, "five minutes, thank you!" but at least they stay in a good mood, rather than getting crabby or ignoring each other.

Going into our final dress rehearsal, I still have a long list of tasks to accomplish today, but I feel that, at least for this school and our limited resources, we are where we need to be at this stage to be ready for opening night. I wish I could breathe experience and focus and energy into some of my younger actors, but there is no substitute for just letting them do it themselves and grow, so I am choosing to be satisfied with their best for now, even if that is not perfection.

One of the greatest rewards of my job is infusing a love of drama in these students. One of the boys, an athlete who is new to drama this year, told me this week that I could count on him for drama next year. He said that none of his friends believed him when he told them he was in a play, and they all were calling him "theatre boy" now. Just the knowledge that he is willing to do something he loves despite the skepticism and teasing of his friends puts a smile on my face.

My goal in choosing a relatively large show like this one was to build my theatre community and draw more students into the drama department. That goal, at least, seems to have been reached.

13 May 2009

The final dress rehearsal went very well, despite the fact that we still had to stop two or three times to work out some of the trouble spots. Still, they now run smoothly, and the students are prepared for an audience. Today we tried eating dinner first, rather than after Act One, and then we ran the show as we will perform it, with two ten-minute intermissions. I think it works nicely and the intermission music helps maintain the mood and ambiance of the 1930's very well.

14 May 2009

Today my task list was still two pages long and I started the day feeling completely overwhelmed. I broke the list into sections: set tasks, lighting tasks, costume tasks, props tasks, and miscellaneous. My first thought was a recurring one for the week: I wish I had a technical director to help with all of this. I shouldn't be calling around, driving around, and send friends driving around on the day of the show to figure out how I'm going to create a fire effect on stage. My fellow director who just produced the show in the fall suggested lithium chloride and sterno, so my friend drove to Santa Clara for the chemical this morning. Meanwhile, my lighting designer friend called in this morning to explain that any open flame in a public performance requires the fire marshal to come approve it. He suggested creating the effect with small fresnels on the floor shining up at the faces. In the end, I opted for this safer choice, but wasted several man hours on this dilemma today, which seems ridiculous, in hindsight.

Since I don't have professional technical help, and it seemed impossible to complete my task list alone, I decided to have the students in each of my classes today help me work on it. Students cooked blintzes and filled them with mashed potatoes, varnished the turkey, taped down

the lighting cables, blacked out the windows, added the special lighting effect, and many other odd jobs. By 5:00 the list was finished and we were ready to open.

Tonight at the show I noticed that the two-minute scene change between scenes one and two is too long and rather annoying. I had asked the servants in the cast to clear the dinner table, as their characters would, but this choice wasn't the best. If the whole cast had helped with the scene change, we could do it in thirty seconds and the flow would be much smoother. If we have time to fix it on Friday, I think we should.

The fire effect at the end of Act One is also not working well. Just yesterday, after various unsuccessful attempts at creating this effect, we finally chose to create it with lighting rather than an open flame on stage, which I think was wise, but it still does not look believable. I need to work with the actor and the light board operator to make the timing work out for better believability.

Despite these imperfections, the audience loved the show. They laughed and reacted well, and many came to me afterwards with high praise for the sets and the attention to detail. That praise was due to Janice, who painted the detail work on the set, found the bulk of the period costumes and props, and helped me refine the play list to better fit the period.

15 May 2009

Tonight Scott Robinson came to see the play, and we went out afterwards to debrief. Many of his comments I completely agreed with. He noticed the long scene change between the first two scenes that I never had time yet to fix. He also several details I had somehow missed. For example, we were serving food at meals without the proper serving utensils. Students were picking up blintzes with their bare hands. Once mentioned, it seemed absurd that I missed it, and that no actor ever mentioned that feeling odd, either, but that is easy enough to fix tomorrow. He also noticed that sound effects were set at strange volumes. The doorbell was way too loud and

the fireworks were not loud enough. I completely agreed, and had worked on both of these many times with the sound board operator, but I think I just gave up on it after she could never seem to get them at the levels I wanted. In hindsight, I would probably add a dry technical rehearsal to work out these kinds of problems, rather than just throwing the sound and lighting in for the first time during a run-through.

Scott asked what I had used in my set design to pin down the corners. The original design had Penny's desk down stage left and the door to the cellar down stage right. However, in the end, the rug with the mat under it was far more downstage than either corner, for safety reasons. We needed to have a mat under it for the when Kolenkhov flipped Mr. Kirby onto the ground. We also had to have the corners be upstage of the wooden beam that held our curtain, so that the cellar door would not be downstage of the curtain line, leaving no way to escape on an exit. Finally, when dressing the stage, I had decided to add a bookshelf to Penny's desk area, which looked best downstage of her desk. In hindsight, I would agree with Scott that the desk should have been more downstage to allow for more diagonal crosses on that side of the stage.

As for the acting, Scott noticed that my students are too slow on their cues and too fast on their lines, a great observation, particularly for teaching comic timing. I had done many drills to work on volume and articulation, but for rate, I had only told them repeatedly to slow down, which clearly was ineffectual. In watching my fellow drama teacher Megan Ahern work with my student Briana Juarez today after school, I noticed that she worked one line at a time and helped Briana decide what was funny in each line, and what word or phrase to emphasize in that line to get the comedy across. Working in this way is a bit slow and tedious, but it definitely paid off. The scene she worked on was exponentially better in the show Saturday night. Briana spoke much more slowly and emphasized the words perfectly, resulting in a much funnier scene. I could see that this type of work is exactly what my actors need to help them all slow down and

communicate more clearly. This inspired me to add more time for table work in my rehearsal schedule. Perhaps if each rehearsal were thirty minutes to an hour, we could devote the extra time to helping the actors learn to interpret and speak their lines with maximum effectiveness.

16 May 2009

We nearly sold out all three shows, which was exciting for the students and energizing for the audience. Tonight's audience was very receptive, as the other two have been. The students did really well, and even the problems, such as one or two late entrances, led to some creative improvising, giving the actors the opportunity to grow as problem-solvers. Many problems, such as speaking too fast, were still present, but in general, the show was strong, the message was communicated, and the audience was entertained.

The set strike went very smoothly, with the entire cast, some student volunteers, and several adults pitching in to help take everything apart, store it, and put the room back to order for church Sunday and school Monday. We finished the entire process in two hours.

21 May 2009

This morning I met with my scenic painter and costumer, Janice, to debrief and plan for next year's show. I wanted to ask her advice about starting a Drama Boosters' Club, recruiting more help in designers for the show, and setting up an appropriate budget to hire designers like herself. Her advice was very encouraging. Janice agreed that I should have parents helping with the various production responsibilities: set construction, scenic painting, props, costumes, and hair/make-up. She also suggested they help with publicity and overall fundraising (through refreshments, program ads, and ticket sales). I feel certain that these goals are exactly what my program needs to keep improving and expanding next year. If I can recruit and train more volunteers, as well as hire professionals as needed, I believe that I will be able to have more balance in my life and more enjoyment of the entire production process.

Final Evaluation of the Play

In reviewing the performance in light of my original goals, I can say that my program has made another major leap with this production. We managed to recruit more actors and crew members than we have had for any other show at Bridgmont, involving nearly half of the entire school in this production. The seniors did an excellent job of mentoring the younger students not only in acting, but also in how to hang and focus lights, build sets, and set up sound. I hope that this effort will help sustain our program as some of our strongest theatre students graduate this year.

The sets were more dimensional and detailed than we have had in past productions, thanks in large part to Janice, our scenic painter. I loved the arch and the view into the hallway, as well as the view of the last few stairs to the upper floor. For such a non-theatrical space as a cafeteria, I felt that our sets were interesting and effective. The color palette used to paint the walls was beautiful and set the tone for the era. The oval-shaped table we found was a gorgeous focal point of the set. The rounded shape made a nice central image of the unbroken circle of family and friends whenever they joined hands to pray before meals. The large size of the table opened up the stage and solved many of the stage picture problems we had been having in rehearsals when we were using smaller tables. The added touches of painted crown molding and door frames finished the set nicely. My one regret is that my corners were not as pinned down as I had originally designed them to be. Penelope's desk stage left and the door to the cellar stage right were intended to pin down the corners. In the end, however, Penny's desk got reversed with the bookshelf, placing it too far upstage, and the cellar door had to be behind curtain line, placing it too far upstage. These two issues flattened out the angles and made the stage much shallower than I would have liked.

Costumes were fair, though my concept for Depression-era cotton dresses was not fully

Costumes were fair, though my concept for Depression-era cotton dresses was not fully realized. These were hard to find, and we didn't have the resources to make all of our own costumes, so we had to settle for what we could find at thrift stores. We focused on the proper silhouette, and made compromises on the fabrics and colors I had in mind. In the end, the men's costumes looked much more convincingly from the 1930's than the women's, but as a whole, costumes were still adequate to set the tone of the era.

The lighting was a weak link, with many annoying shadows being cast unintentionally. The poor lighting was somewhat due to my own lack of expertise in this area, but even more to the limited electrical capacity of the room, and most of all because of our limited budget and resources. Still, if I had it to do over, I would have found a way to hire a lighting technician to help create better lighting and fewer shadows on stage.

The sound balance was another weak spot, as mentioned before, with extremely loud doorbells and only mildly loud fireworks. I think these areas got overlooked due to the fact that there was never an actual dry technical rehearsal in which our entire focus was on rehearsing perfecting the sound and lights, without any actors. With no technical director, my attention was pulled in too many directions during the three rehearsals we had with sound and lights, and these, not surprisingly, became weaknesses simply because there were higher priorities on my list and not enough time to perfect everything. Next year, I hope to have a technical director, as well as more than three rehearsals with sound and lighting, and at least one rehearsal dedicated as a dry technical run.

My students definitely improved as critical thinkers, communicators, and community assets through their involvement in this play. As beginning actors, they still have many areas in which they will need to continue growing, chiefly in slowing their speaking rate and articulating more clearly. However, many of them made great strides in volume and articulation, and all of

them grew in characterization and confidence.

Section Four: Appendix

Lisa Nelson

Professor Parisa Joyce

Analysis and Criticism

14 July 2008

You Can't Take it With You: Forces in Conflict

In twentieth century America, a time and place dominated by rationalism and capitalism, a Romantic idealist who challenges the status quo can be viewed as naive, illogical, or even dangerous. Is it possible for such a person (or persons) to survive in a world ruled by rational thinking and the capitalistic machine? This is the question that Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman tackle in their 1936 comedy, You Can't Take it with You. When analyzing the text using Raymond Williams' tripartite theory, we find three forces competing for power in the play. The dominant force in society is capitalism, the residual force is the government, and the emerging force is family.

Almost from the beginning of the Age of Reason in the eighteenth century, Romantics began to react against the dominant force of rationalism, fearing that it "negated the emotional character of life" to the point that it eventually "negated life itself" (Koch 123). Yet rationalism remained at the core of American thinking for decades to come, eventually giving birth to capitalism. "The modern spirit of scientific inquiry defeated scholastic dogmatism and enabled growth of a generally individualist and rationalist spirit; casting off of Church authority led to a general individualism in all fields; the Calvinist spirit and ethic, emphasizing the positive value of hard work, thrift, and money-making, led to a flowering of capitalism" (Rothbard). Fast forward to the 1930's, "a decade of unparalleled contradiction and complexity . . . marked by the depths of the depression on one end and the height of the modern age on the other" ("America"). In the midst of this decade of government work projects and Calvinist work ethic, Kaufman and

Hart introduced a play that questioned the validity of work for the sole purpose of capitalistic gain, particularly when that work negates one's true self.

The negation of life that the Romantics warned about is seen most clearly in the character of Mr. Kirby. To the outside world, he is the pinnacle of the modern man: industrious, inventive, and financially successful. He has taken over his father's vacuum cleaner business, earned money and power in the marketplace, and lined up an heir to take over the business empire one day. However, it quickly becomes clear that Mr. Kirby's embracing of the dominant force of society has created problems for himself. First, he "suffers from indigestion--he can only eat certain things" (Hart 50). Kolenkhov suggests that this "indigestion" might actually be ulcers, a condition then thought to be brought on by stress. Though Kirby denies it, the audience is left to wonder if this might be true. Next, Kirby admits that he needs a hobby, no matter the cost, in order to "relieve the daily nerve strain" (Hart 53). At this point, Grandpa suggests that men on Wall Street who need yachts to relieve their stress might be better off just giving up Wall Street (Hart 53). The suggestion is, to Kirby, so preposterous that he easily believes it was, as Grandpa claims, just a joke. Finally, when Kirby and his wife agree to play a word association game with Penny, his wife responds to the word "honeymoon" with the word "dull," a telling sign of the lack of sexual vitality in their marriage (Hart 59). These signs all convey to the audience that the dominant force of capitalism that rules Kirby's life may be failing him on a personal level.

The Sycamore family, on the other hand, has refused to follow the beat of the capitalistic drum. Instead, each of them devotes him/herself wholly to various creative endeavors in the home. Penny writes plays and paints, Paul creates fireworks in the basement, Essie makes chocolates and studies ballet, Ed plays the xylophone and prints flyers on his printing press, and Grandpa attends graduation ceremonies for entertainment. Their close friends are equally loyal

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for a painting, and then staying for dinner and, eventually, becoming a part of this extended family. Their "work" rebels against the capitalistic society outside of their home in that it is like play to them, almost like a favorite hobby rather than a money-making labor. None of these characters seem particularly concerned about earning money at all, though Paul does sell his fireworks, and Essie sells her chocolates occasionally. However, when the IRS man questions Ed about his income last year, Ed reveals that he and Essie earned only "twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents" (Hart 20). This amount, even in the 1930's, was so insignificant that Henderson dismissed them from the conversation. Yet, in spite of their lack of capitalistic fervor, they all seem very happy, healthy, and functional, at least within their own contained space. They are seemingly oblivious to the dominant force in society outside of their home--at least until outsiders enter their home and disrupt the utopia they have created.

The first such interruption from the outside world is from the Internal Revenue Service, in the form of Mr. Henderson, an agent set to collect unpaid taxes dating back to 1914--the past twenty-four years. As in income tax agent, Henderson represents the residual force in society--the government. When Grandpa refuses to pay his back taxes, Henderson threatens, "You'll go to jail if you don't pay, do you hear that? That's the law, and if you think you're bigger than the law, you've got another thing coming. You're no better than anybody else, and the sooner you get that through you're head, the better . . . you'll hear from the United States Government, that's all I can say" (Hart 21). Henderson has no concept of living outside of the expectations of society; he is completely shaped by the dominant and residual forces at play in society. He has never questioned the value of hard work or of paying taxes. His reaction to Grandpa reveals a sort of herd mentality within the dominant force, a blind following of the expectations.

As any playgoer of the time would have known, in the real world outside of the text, "Economics dominated politics in the 1930's. The decade began with shanty towns called

Grandpa, on the other hand, sees an alternative solution. If he can convince Mr. Kirby to defy the dominant capitalistic force of society, then the family differences will be reconciled and Alice and Tony reunited. However, when Grandpa first tries to explain his anti-capitalistic views to Tony's father, Kirby retorts, ". . . it's a very dangerous philosophy, Mr. Vanderhof. It's--it's un-American . . . Why--why it's downright Communism, that's what it is" (Hart 75-76). In spite of his initial protests, Mr. Kirby is quieted when his son reminds him of the dreams he once wrote letters about--of wanting to be a trapeze artist, of playing the saxophone, and of not wanting to take over his father's business. In other words, Mr. Kirby once fought against the capitalistic machine himself. With that revelation, Tony quits his job at the family business. In doing so, Tony has cut himself loose from the dominant force of capitalism and joined rank with the Romantic ideals of the Sycamores.

Kirby is not completely convinced until he meets the Russian Grand Duchess, Olga Katrina, dressed in an evening gown and an apron. She represents a complete break from societal expectations, cooking blintzes for the family on her day off as a waitress at Child's. Kirby marvels at her presence in this home, in this kitchen, at her willingness to deviate so completely from what society had shaped her to be. At last persuaded to defy society, Kirby declares to his wife, "I'm staying, Alice. The families ought to get to know each other, don't you think?" (Hart 78).

In the closing scene, the emergent force of the play becomes apparent. The "family" that is made up of the Kirbys, the Sycamores, and their friends begins to reshape Mr. Kirby. He joins the others at the xylophone before dinner, and when he sits down with the family to eat, discovers that his indigestion is now completely gone. By embracing the emergent force of family over the dominant force of capitalism, Kirby can finally relax and enjoy his life.

Theorist Raymond Williams believed that naming the forces at play in society was only the first step toward change. "The dynamic movement is elsewhere, in the difficult business of gaining confidence in *our own* energies and capacities . . . It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope" (Edwards).

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You Can't Take it With You



Bridgemont High School

May 14th - 16th, 2009

7:00 p.m.

\$5 Students

\$7 Adults

777 Brotherhood Way,

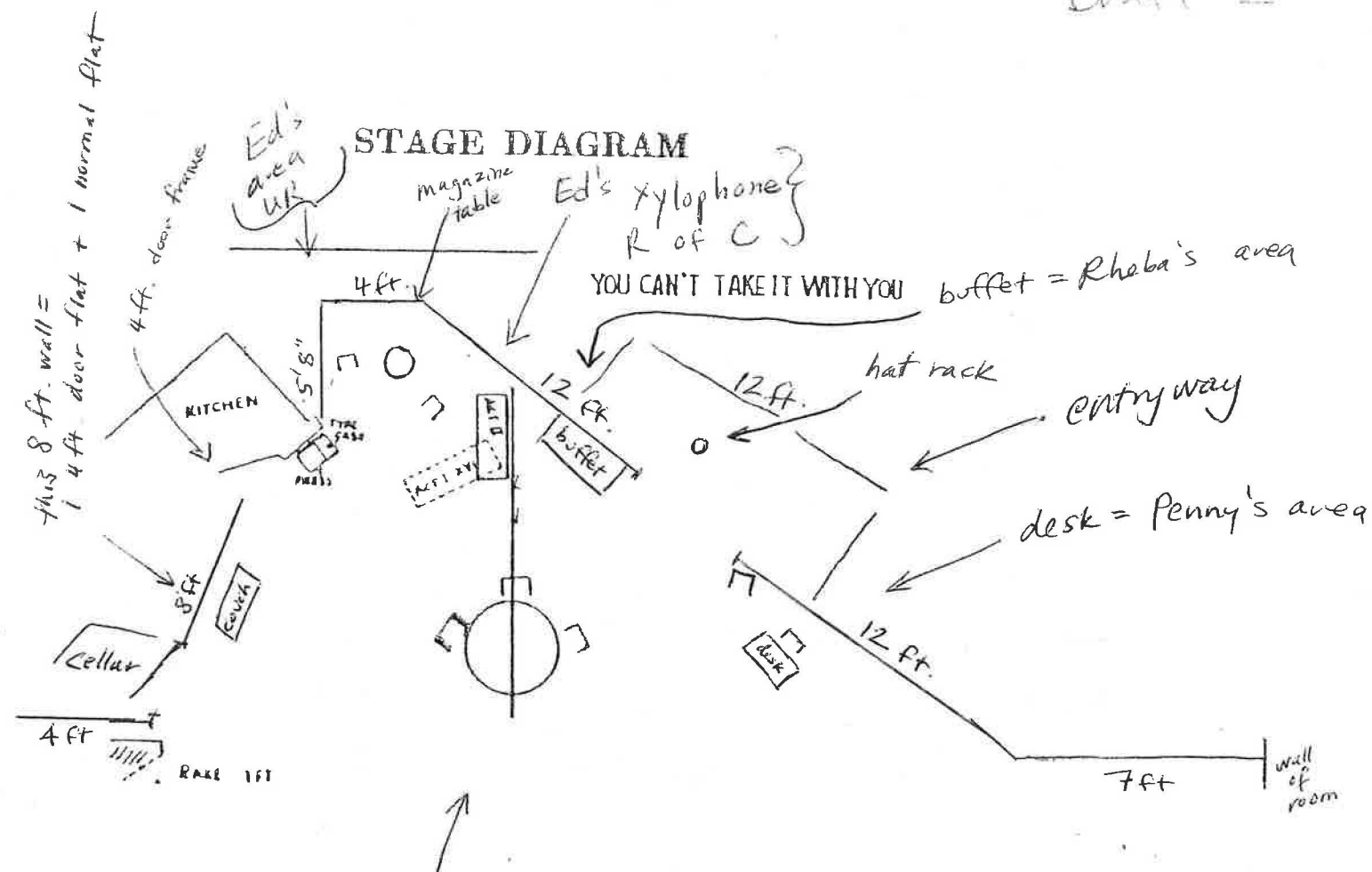
San Francisco











Flats Needed:

- normal = 13 (we have 12)
- cellar door = 1
- kitchen (swinging) door = 1 } (we have 2)
- 3' flat = 1
- 1'8" flat = 1
- 6' archway flat (2 x 3'ers) = 2
- window flat = 2 (by desk) + (by "bay window")

YCTIWY Sound List

<i>Pre-show:</i>	<i>Starts at 6:30: 30 min. of upbeat swingy 1930's music:</i>	
	<i>Happy Days are Here Again</i>	3:13
	<i>It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got that Swing</i>	3:11
	<i>L-O-V-E</i>	2:33
	<i>S'Wonderful</i>	3:32
	<i>He Loves and She Loves</i>	2:50
	<i>Goody-Goody</i>	2:32
	<i>They All Laughed</i>	2:09
	<i>Ain't Misbehavin'</i>	2:37
	<i>Gettting Some Fun Out of Life</i>	3:13
	<i>Nice Work If You Can Get It</i>	3:36
<u>Act 1, 1</u>		
p. 7	Firework pop (in pan)	
p. 10	boom! (Explosion in basement—balloon too close to the powder)	
p. 11	doorbell (Donald's entrance)	
p. 18	doorbell (Henderson's entrance)	
p. 21	explosion in basement (while Henderson is there)	
p. 22	doorbell (Tony's entrance)	
p. 24	doorbell (Kolenkhov's entrance)	
p. 27	<i>music at blackout: Sonata in A major</i>	3:20
<u>Act 1, 2</u>		
p. 27	bang from cellar to start I, 2	
p. 29	bang from cellar (during Tony's scene)	
p. 35 (intermission)	<i>music at blackout: 10-min. playlist of romantic songs:</i>	
	<i>In a Sentimental Mood</i>	4:52
	<i>Two Sleepy People</i>	2:53
	<i>If I Were a Bell</i>	2:08
<u>Act 2</u>		
p. 41	doorbell (Kolenkhov's entrance)	
p. 46	doorbell (Kirbys' entrance)	
p. 62	HUGE explosions for fireworks	
p. 63 (intermission)	<i>music at blackout: 10-min. playlist</i>	
	<i>Down and Out Blues</i>	3:07
	<i>Stormy Weather</i>	3:10
	<i>I Ain't Got Nothin' But the Blues</i>	5:57
<u>Act 3</u>		
p. 73	doorbell (Kirby's entrance)	
p. 80	<i>music for bows: Happy Days are Here Again</i>	3:13
<i>Post-show:</i>	<i>Let the 30-min. pre-show music continue to play as people mingle</i>	

About the Cast

Briana Juarez (Penny) is a sophomore who enjoys volleyball, music, drama, cooking, talking, shopping, and triathlon club. Her interests are like the items on her desk: all over the place!

Jose Villavicencio (Paul) is a sophomore in high school who likes school, girls, video games, soccer and baseball. He hopes to become an aviation specialist when he grows up.

Matthew Custus (Mr. De Pinna) is a senior who will be attending SF State next year, where he plans to major in professional firework building—or engineering. He's still undecided.

Gabby Moreno (Essie) is a sophomore in high school who likes reading, singing show tunes, and practicing her mermaid skills. She will be doing her first triathlon this June.

Richard Altamirano (Ed), a tenth grader, is happy to be participating in his first full-length play. He loves the ladies and refers to himself as a *G.Y.T.* (gorgeous young talented) man.

Brianna Charles (Rheba) is a senior who is counting down the days to graduation. Next year she plans to major in biology so that she can become a pediatrician after college.

Rhoyal Foston (Donald), a junior, enjoys being creative: from painting his jeans to making music; from taking photographs to running the official Bridgemont Barbershop.

Xavier Juarez (Grandpa) is a senior who is attending Columbia College in Chicago to major in film directing. He is going to miss Bridgemont Theatre and appreciates all it has done for him.

Junior **Jessica Tropper (Alice)** enjoys sports, boys, shopping, and hanging out with friends. This summer she will be on work crew at Woodleaf, a Young Life Camp in Northern California.

Matt Lee (Tony) is a junior who likes playing guitar, singing, listening to music, and jamming with his band. His day job is going to school. He moonlights at "Hi's Tackle Box," his dad's store.

Todd Morgan (Mr. Kolenkhov) is a teacher who has generously signed on year after year to help however he can in the drama department. This year, he graduated from soundboard to stage.

Jose Juarez (Anthony Kirby) is a senior who is excited to be attending DePaul University next year. Though he can't wait to see lies ahead, he is sad that this is his last play at Bridgemont.

Sophomore **Cassie Palmer (Gay Wellington)** loves stuffed animals, porcelain dolls, Irish dancing, and sour Warheads. She hopes to be an interior designer some day.

Desiree Anderson (Olga Katrina), a junior, is making her stage debut this spring as the Grand Duchess. Off stage, Desiree loves playing sports and working out with her dad.

Kathy Cusguen (Miriam Kirby) is a junior who spends her time reading, hanging out with her family and friends, and laughing—a lot. She likes karaoke and baking cakes and cookies.

Sophomore **Jonathan Berhane (Henderson)** is a master in the art of video gaming, television watching, and tax collecting. This is his first role in the spotlight at Bridgemont.

Mario Moreno (G-Man) is a sophomore who spends his time reading NFL stats, watching TV, wrestling, video gaming, playing basketball, and going to the gym.

Herbert Wong (G-Man), a freshman, makes his debut on the Bridgemont stage. Coincidentally, he wants to grow up to be a *G-Man*. He also likes to play guitar and sing.

Chris Warren (G-Man) is a junior who enjoys reading, chain making, video games, and origami. His future plans include going off to college and becoming a chemical engineer.

You Can't Take it With You



May 14th, 15th, 16th, 2009

Bridgemont High School

7:00 PM

You Can't Take It with You

By Moss Hart and George Kaufman

Order of Acts

Act 1, Scene 1.....a summer day in New York, 1938, the Vanderhof house

Act 1, Scene 2later that night

(10-minute intermission)

Act 2.....one week later

(10-minute intermission)

Act 3.....the next day

About the Play

You Can't Take It with You was written in 1936, during the heart of the Great Depression, and it won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1937. In an age when jobs were scarce, this play was a welcome reminder that money cannot buy happiness. The message is as timely today as it was in the 1930's, and as timely then as it was when Matthew wrote, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? . . . See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Matt. 6: 27-29). The Vanderhof clan you will meet tonight is a colorful bunch of wildflowers.

About the Playwrights

Kaufman and Hart were one of the most successful writing teams of their time. Known for their comedic wit and their zany characters, they had a long line of successful plays on Broadway in the 1930's and '40's. Kaufman was fifteen years older and already well established as a playwright when he met and collaborated with Hart. Whenever they were working, Kaufman usually sat at the typewriter, keeping them focused on meeting their daily goal of four pages a day, while Hart roamed the house looking for interruptions. In this general fashion, You Can't Take It with You was finished in five weeks. For all of their differences in age, personality, and approach to writing, Kaufman and Hart made a dynamic team, complementing one another's abilities and getting along well enough to work together for a very successful decade.

You Can't Take It with You

The Cast

Penelope Sycamore	Briana Juarez
Paul Sycamore	Jose Villavicencio
Mr. DePinna	Matthew Custus
Essie Carmichael	Gabby Moreno
Ed Carmichael	Richard Altamirano
Rheba	Brianna Charles
Donald	Rhoyal Foston
Grandpa Vanderhof	Xavier Juarez
Alice Sycamore	Jessica Tropper
Tony Kirby	Matt Lee
Boris Kolenkhov	Todd Morgan
Anthony Kirby	Jose Juarez
Jay Wellington	Cassie Palmer
Olga Katrina	Desiree Anderson
Miriam Kirby	Kathy Cusguen
Henderson	Jonny Berhane
G-Man: Captain	Mario Moreno
G-Man: Mac	Herbert Wong
G-Man: Jim	Chris Warren

Behind the Scenes

Lighting	Chris Warren
Sound Designer	Jose Juarez
Sound Board Operator	Alexandria Elias
Props	Janice Wolfe-Phey, the Cast
Costumes	Edith Lee, Janice Wolfe-Phey, Pearla Moreno, Marianne Custus, the Cast
Set Construction	Tony Moreno, Milton Landry, the Cast
Set Painting	Janice Wolfe-Phey, the Cast

Help Miss Nelson get a Day of Rest!

During intermission, you can order subscriptions of your favorite magazines from Miss Nelson's team at the refreshments booth. If her team wins, Miss Nelson will get to take a whole day off work! You get your favorite magazines, the students get great prizes, and Miss Nelson gets some sleep. That's a win-win-win!!!

The 2009-2010 Drama Season

The Drama Department proudly announces next year's season: The course will be Musical Theatre, a class which will produce Arts with Dessert in October and Working in March.

You can't Take it With You

