



PRODUCTION ELEMENTS: THE SET

BY DAN ADRIAN

MOSCROP SECONDARY | MEMBER, VANCOUVER PLAYHOUSE TEACHER ADVISORY BOARD (VPTAB)

- ✓ **PRE- AND POST-VIEWING LESSON/ACTIVITY**
- ✓ **TYPE:** POINTS TO PONDER, DISCUSS OR WRITE ABOUT
- ✓ **SUITABILITY:** ENGLISH 9-11, DRAMA 10, ACTING 11&12, DIRECTING AND SCRIPTWRITING 12

The Set

The set for this play is minimalistic. The stage is fairly bare, and every prop used comes from a prop box that is placed in the middle of the stage at the beginning of the play.

Attached is a 3-page glimpse into the mind of the playwright, as he explains why he chose to use the specific type of style for the production. (***See attachment that follows called "A Word about the Style"***)

Read the notes, and then assess/evaluate whether or not The Playhouse's production of *The Fantasticks* met Tom Jones' vision. Did they accurately follow his vision? How did they do this, or where they fall short? Choose specific items to assess, and then explain clearly how they succeeded or failed. Use specific examples. End, but giving and overall evaluation of the play in general, and whether or not it matched Jones' initial vision.

Please note:

Part 1: Story, Background, Paraphrasing, Creators, Characters, Glossary... is available for downloading at

VANCOUVERPLAYHOUSE.COM

Send us feedback and questions regarding our Play Guides | Request a copy of a script (for educational purposes)

Contact: Stasa Andric at **604 637 3094** / sandric@vancouverplayhouse.com

or Meredith Elliott at **604 629 2097** / melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com

SEE YOU AT THE PLAYHOUSE!

ALL PERFORMANCES AT HAMILTON & DUNSMUIR

"PRODUCTION ELEMENTS: THE SET" LESSON/ACTIVITY for THE FANTASTICKS by Dan Adrian

A WORD ABOUT THE STYLE

It is very difficult to make clear the style of a play. We all know what regular musicals are like, and how they are normally staged. And yet this musical is different. It has a small cast. It has no scenery to speak of. The people in it are realistic and at the same time stylized too.

This being so, I would like to preface this script with one or two notes about the concept of production. If they help you, good. If you don't need them, then that is even better.

First of all, this musical was intended ideally for an open stage, a simple space surrounded on three sides by audience. It may be played and has been played successfully, upon proscenium stages and in the round. One thing is important however. It should be played as closely to the audience as possible, whatever kind of stage may hold it. People speak to the audience at many points. And even when characters are not "taking their case" directly to the audience, it is well for them to keep the audience in mind. Thus, when the OLD ACTOR in his first scene asks EL GALLO to imagine him in wig and make-up, he is speaking to the audience just as much as he is to EL GALLO. When the PARENTS and the CHILDREN quarrel in the beginning of Act Two, each of the four speaks often to the audience. Perhaps the best way to explain it is that each actor considers the audience to be his friend. Each actor, upon entering into the play, has been given a speech directly to the audience. Therefore, each quite naturally assumes that the audience will understand him even if the other characters in the play do not.

Given this somewhat stylized premise of presentation, it is not necessary for the actors to add any theatrical icing of their own. That is to say, asides are not spoken in the melodramatic "theatrical" way, but simply and directly. And the parts should not be "spoofed," even when the romanticism becomes extreme. Search for the reality of the people. Try to believe in their existence. Try to feel what they feel. Don't play it "for laughs." Play it for humanity. Do that and the laughs will take care of themselves.

Point: The actors do not leave the stage, but wait outside the center of action for their turn to come back on. Sometimes they watch the actors in the light, as in the beginning, when LUISA and MATT have their solos. Later on, after the show is underway, they simply sit on the back of the platform with their backs toward us — or upon benches upstage which have been left there for that purpose. They are soon accepted and forgotten by the audience. And their presence serves to underline the basic point of view — i.e., this is not literally real. We are players, this is a stage. You

are an audience. What we do together is to create a special reality — the reality of the mind and the emotions.

Point: Lights become vastly important when there are no sets. A careful use of light will help to set up the moods and to relieve the visual sameness.

Point: Costumes should be theatrical — should have flair — should even suggest commedia dell'arte in a way. But they should be basically contemporary. No tights, please! But B.V.D.s are okay.

Point: In proscenium productions, where the masking of the wings is usually advisable, a good method is to set this up during the Overture. Suppose, for example, that the side masking will not be the usual heavy blue velours, but rather strips of unpainted canvas or muslin attached at both top and bottom to sticks of wood. In the beginning of the show, these canvas "legs" can be lying folded, on the stage floor, with rope riggings clearly visible going up and out of sight into the grid. Then, during the high point of the Overture, when the music swells to its fullest, the members of the cast, or out-of-sight stagehands, can hoist up the pulleys, not only masking the wings but giving an impression of circus or carnival. This effect can be enhanced, by the way if the canvas "legs" do not go all the way up and out of sight, but stop at around ten feet or so, leaving the ropes in view and suggesting the canvas sideshows of the carnival midway.

It is nice, if possible to have the lighting instruments in full view of the audience.

Point: The musicians should be placed on the stage behind the platform if at all possible. If your theater has a scrim, put it between the musicians and the set. And if you have a good grid system, bring in the scrim at the same high point in the Overture when the side canvas "legs" go up. Very gala.

If there is an orchestra pit in your theater, try to build out over it if possible. Keep this show "forward" down close to the audience.

Point: The MUTE should not be coy or elfin. He should not intrude with pantomime specialties. His function is essentially to function. He hands out props — swiftly. He provides chairs and benches as needed. And removes them the instant we don't need to make use of them anymore. He holds up a stick to represent the wall but only when we feel that we need it. He hangs up a multicolored drape before "Soon It's Gonna Rain" and walks across the stage with a grey strip of china silk in Act Two when EL GALLO says "October is over and the sky grows grey." His job is a

hard one. He must move well, have a prodigious memory and concentration for detail. His face should be pleasant – but not distracting. He is always there. We must always sense his presence and yet he must never intrude. The MUTE may be played by a girl or by a very young boy, provided he is agile and unselfconscious. Upon occasion, the MUTE is played by two people, which is all right too.

Point: Capital letters will be used to indicate the lyrics of a song. It is difficult to indicate in a reading script all of the musical underscorings of a piece such as this without cluttering the pages with notes about notes. Also obligatos and vocalise sections become ludicrous in print. Therefore, I would like to suggest that the new 2006 Off-Broadway cast recording of the show might be a helpful tool in clarifying any points which are not covered in detail by this script.