Design and technical direction of "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"

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THE DESIGN AND TECHNICAL DIRECTION OF

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This record of the design and technical direction, as undertaken by this writer for the play The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, is offered in the hope that it may serve as an aid to others generally interested in the processes of stage design, and also to those specifically interested in designing for the Masquer Theater.

The play, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, was adapted by Jay Presson Allen, from Muriel Spark's novel about an eccentric, romantic school teacher, and her influence on the students she taught. This production was sponsored by the Montana Masquers Club, and given to raise funds to support their scholarship program for drama students at the University of Montana. One of the reasons for choosing this play was that Miss Maggie Smith had just won an Oscar for her film portrayal of Jean Brodie, and this national publicity, it was felt, would give added box office appeal to the Montana Masquers fund raising venture. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, presented as the Montana


^2Montana Masquers Club: A student club formed to, "stimulate interest in dramatic activities in particular, and all performing arts in general, at the U of M..." (from the Montana Masquers Club Constitution).
Masquers' scholarship production, was produced for the public on March 10, 11, 12, and 13, 1971, in the Masquer Theater. The play was directed by Margaret Johnson, a graduate student in Drama.

In the interest of clarity, the following definitions of terms are offered:

The **Director** is the one person responsible for unifying all the diverse elements that go into the production of a play.

He is the leader, the decider, the suggester-extraordinary, the perpetual guide, often having both the first and last word during the weeks of preparation and rehearsal.

The director has the responsibility of editing the work of all departments, so that he may co-ordinate each effort towards his approach to the play.

The director "... is the final authority on all questions of staging, design, lighting, interpretation, etc." He can delegate authority, and indeed he must if all work is to be finished in a reasonable length of time, but he cannot delegate responsibility. It is the director who must control all the variables so that he may control the final result: a production that gives the audience a unified interpretation, the director's interpretation, of the play.

The **Designer** is that person, working under the director's control, who originates proposals for the design of the physical setting for the play.

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... a stage designer is an artist conceived with dramatic expression in space, and he will use both setting and lighting to effect this end.  

The designer's "... realm includes all the visual aspects of production, other than those contributed by the actors themselves in movement and personal appearance."  

In this production the designer was responsible for both the setting and the lighting designs. The audience risers are set against the south and west walls, with the square space diagonally opposite the playing area forming a lobby between the two sections of seating. At the downstage corner of the playing area a 2½-inch square post supports the floors above. This post and the low 10-foot ceiling constitute the most prominent physical features to be considered in any design for this theater.

The Technical Director is found primarily in Educational Theater. His duties may include executing the design, coordinating construction of the set, assembly and erecting the set in place on the stage, as well as the recruiting and training of running crews for props, sound and lights. In addition, the technical director will supervise all technical rehearsals and generally oversee the technical aspects of the show during its run. For this production, the technical director was also responsible for the lighting design.

The Masquer Theater at the University of Montana is a two-sided arena with a seating capacity for just under one hundred persons. The


stage or playing area, at floor level, is approximately 23 feet square, set into the northeast corner of the larger (40 ft. x 40 ft.) room (see drawing #1, floor plan). This room contains both stage and seating within one volume. The only upstage entrance is a door, approximately 1/ feet from the east wall, piercing the north wall to an exit hall which serves as part of the backstage area.

In the following chapters an attempt will be made to communicate the processes involved in the design and technical direction of The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. Specifically included will be an analysis of the play, its atmosphere and mood, the evolution of the design, the problems of construction, painting, and detailing, and a summary and critique of the finished production as performed.

The direction, costumes and makeup will be discussed only as they affect the evolution of the design. These areas were controlled by others and, therefore, outside the scope of this thesis.
CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS AND DESIGN

The novel, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, by Muriel Spark, abounds with brief, minutely specific insights into the past, present, and future of her characters. "She works glancingly, with a razor blade . . .,"¹ to slice these details out of their lives, giving her readers bits and pieces of all that is to come. "Reading her is like hearing every whisper of one side of a telephone conversation. One side only,"² and one must wait for understanding until the other side is heard. The novel seems to progress cumulatively, forcing the reader to receive his overall impressions by digesting many small details spoon fed him, one at a time, often with distracting rapidity.

Miss Brodie said, "... What is logic, Rose?"

"To do with reasoning, ma'am," said Rose, who later, while still in her teens, was to provoke Miss Brodie's amusement and then her awe, and finally her abounding enthusiasm for the role which Rose then appeared to be enacting: that of a great lover, magnificently elevated above the ordinary run of lovers, above the moral laws, Venus incarnate, something set apart. In fact, Rose was not at the time in question engaged in the love affair which Miss Brodie thought she was, but it seemed so, and Rose was famous for sex. But in her mere 11th year, on the winter's walk, Rose was taking note of the motor cars and Miss Brodie had not advanced far enough in her prime to speak of sex except by veiled allusion, as when she said of her warrior lover, "He was a pure man."³

²Ibid., cols. 2 and 3.
This chapter will attempt to present some of the impressions and influences that, together with the director's interpretation, molded the final design for The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.

Since the director required her cast to read the novel, in addition to the play, it was used by the designer as source material for further impressions of the characters in the play. A brief analysis of the play and the novel as related to the character of Miss Brodie also proved helpful. The play, as adapted by Jay Presson Allen, uses a style similar to the novel which cumulatively presents details or impressions of the characters until, finally, the total character has been presented. The use of the flashback convention enables the play to travel across time, into the past and back to the present, in much the same fashion as the narrative style allows the novel to elude the chronological time sequence. The play begins with the ending point of the novel, with Sister Helena in her convent. It then flashes back to the earliest impressions of Miss Brodie, and proceeds chronologically forward with the flashback scenes, interrupted by an occasional scene set in the present, then reverting to the chronological progression of the flashback scenes.

The play opens with Sister Helena (once Sandy) acting under a "Papal dispensation"¹ which forces her to leave her cloisters to receive a visitor, a reporter. The reporter has come as a result of her newly published book, The Transfiguration of the Common Place, which

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she says, "... is about the cultivation of spiritual common sense."
As the reporter questions her about the influences in her life, the
play flashes back to Miss Brodie's classroom and we relive her days
as Sandy.

Miss Brodie enters, taking the stage, definitely in her prime,
and the audience begins to receive their impressions of Miss Brodie
just as Sandy did when she was one of the "Brodie set." That first
lesson was History, but then, as always, it was Miss Brodie's history.

Prop up your books in case of intruders ... If there are
intruders, we are doing our history. But we will not do our
history. Rather I want to tell you of my summer and the man
I met in the Borghese gardens... .

Miss Brodie flaunts authority, in the form of Headmistress Mackay, at
every turn. This time she triumphantly extemporizes the "Battle of
Flodden" for the headmistress.

It is a moving story. The night before Flodden at the
Mercat Cross beside St. Giles, a ghostly herald was heard
reading the names of all the noble families of Scotland,
beginning with the king. After the battle there was not one
family that had not suffered grievous loss, as you well know,
Miss Mackay.

The play cumulatively presents impression after impression of
Miss Brodie, until Sandy, staggering under their weight, begins to see
Miss Brodie as a force for harm. The news of Mary's flight to Spain
provides the trigger and Miss Brodie is slain, "assassinated." Miss
Brodie is defeated but she leaves one final impression of her pathetic
magnetic magnificence.

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5 Ibid., p. 8.
6 Ibid., p. 9.
I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie. He was a man of substance, a cabinet maker and a designer of gibbets, a member of the town council of Edinburgh, the keeper of two mistresses who bore him five children between them. Blood tells. Eventually he was a wanted man for having robbed the Excise Office—not that he needed the money—he was a burglar for the sake of the danger. He died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own devising in 1788. That is the stuff I am made of!7

Both the novel and the play hint at giving expression to some sort of universal statement concerning the teacher/pupil relationship, and both seem to fall short.

It is the play's present weakness that the inexorable downfall of Miss Brodie—her "assassination" through the betrayal of one of her favorite disciples—is never made quite clear enough, or strong enough. The crosswires of the drama, the motivation and the undersights, the cause and effect of character clash and the force of circumstances, are in the play but do not appear to be fully untangled.8

The play's weakness notwithstanding,

What triumphantly remains is the portrait of Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.9

The play, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, is the story of the end of childhood. For Miss Brodie, it is the end of her "prime". For her girls, it is growing up. Miss Brodie is a romantic, a woman, at once pathetically heroic and ridiculous, who is suddenly made to face the consequences of her actions. It is Miss Brodie who convinces Mary MacGregor to go to fight for Franco in Spain, where she is killed. It is Miss Brodie, and her amoral attitudes, who inspires Sandy to

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7 Ibid., p. 85.
9 Ibid.
become Teddy Lloyd's mistress, an act which alters the course of her future life. Sandy becomes more and more aware of Miss Brodie's powerful influence for harm, upon seeing it in her own life, that she decided Miss Brodie isn't "... good for people," and betrays her to Headmistress Mackay. For perhaps the first time in her life, Miss Brodie is called to account for her actions. She is dismissed, a blow which she would have been able to attribute to the "gangs" who opposed her, but for Miss Mackay:

Miss Brodie, I have seriously considered whether I ought to tell you this... I think now perhaps I should. It was one of your own girls—your "set"—who put the inquiry in motion. So you see, Miss Brodie, this judgment against you is rather—far-reaching. I beg you to consider this—when you do finally stop to examine your conscience.\(^\text{10}\)

Miss Brodie never does stop. She is obsessed with discovering who betrayed her, screaming "Assassin" when Sandy confesses, "... I simply put a stop to you, Miss Brodie." But Sandy, in examining her own conscience, reacts against Miss Brodie's life style so strongly that she becomes a nun and withdraws from the world, to the sanctuary of her cloistered convent to consider the consequences of her "assassination" of Miss Jean Brodie.

Miss Brodie was one of many women,\(^\text{11}\)

... from the age of 30 and upward, who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices in art or social welfare, education or religion.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^\text{10}\)Allen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 80.

\(^\text{11}\)Spark, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52.
She was alone, however, in that only she "taught in a school like Marcia Blaine's," a school of "traditional character" where she did appear to be "a trifle out of place." The men in her life were weak, and no match for Jean Brodie. She shared the endowments of the spinsterhood of women whose fathers had fostered their "shrewd wits, high-coloured cheeks, constitutions like horses, logical educations, hearty spirits and private means." Her facile mind manipulated the people around her. To her girls, Jean was a heroine fighting battles with the "gangs" who opposed her; to Headmistress Mackay, Jean was a threat on a personal level and her educational "methods" risked the school's "traditional character." Jean Brodie was a strong, flamboyant, beautiful woman, who ignored the petty trifles of the world's day to day existence and was "... not interested in human imperfections!" Miss Brodie was certainly not interested in her own "imperfections" and her search for truth never uncovered any facets that could not be ignored, if she didn't like what she saw. She admired Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, because their regimes brought order and organization to the messy rabble of their countries. That this order came at the expense of liberty and justice she cared not. Just as she cared not that Mary MacGregor died, only that she "dedicated her youth to a cause," fighting for Franco "against the powers of darkness."

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12 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
13 Allen, op. cit., p. 20
14 Ibid., p. 77.
The romantic Miss Brodie had some of that same charisma, that same leadership ability, as did her heroes. Unfortunately, she also had the same disregard for the lives of others, and her inability to see the simple truth without romanticizing it, to see her teachings as dangerous instead of liberating, to see Miss Mackay as the upholder of tradition, instead of the "gangs" who opposed her, and to see herself as a lovely woman, instead of a "Joan of Arc," kept her and her heroes from understanding why they were opposed and defeated, by the very rabble whose lives they sought to make meaningful.

In searching for some means of translating Miss Brodie into workable concepts for use in evolving a stage design, the designer became impressed with Jean's desires for order as she defined it. From first to last, Jean pressed for her girls to conform to her standards.

... are you thinking of doing a day's washing? You have your sleeves rolled up. I won't have to do with girls who roll up the sleeves of their blouses. Roll them down at once, we are civilized beings.15

In the middle of her tales of Italy, Jean interrupts herself to make a moral point.

Whoever has opened the window has opened it too wide, said Miss Brodie. Six inches is perfectly adequate. More is vulgar. One should have an innate sense of these things.16

Miss Brodie would not allow the girls to do cartwheels on Sunday when they came for tea, "... for in many ways Miss Brodie was an Edinburgh

15Tbid., p. 8.
16Spark, op. cit., p. 57.
spinster of the deepest dye."\textsuperscript{17}

The designer felt that somewhat formal, precise, yet simple lines and forms, almost prudish in their restraint, would feel at home with Miss Brodie. The impression of an ordered, clean and uncluttered setting, corresponding to Miss Brodie's romantic outlook on life, uncluttered and unsullied by intrusions of truth, seemed to feel right as a background for Jean's sometimes frantic machinations.

In terms of color, Jean Brodie was still, within her spinsterhood, a woman, one who could and did feel all the passions of life, yet was able to exercise control over them. The designer envisioned her schoolroom and her life in warm colors, contrasted with the bleak, cold stone of Edinburgh and the real world.

Once the designer reached this stage, the practical demands of the play were considered.

Basically, the play is set in two locales and two periods, the present time (1971), with Sister Helena at the convent, and the past (1930), with Miss Brodie at Marcia Blaine School for girls in Edinburgh, Scotland. The play consists of 24 scenes, five at the convent, and 19 flashback scenes played in ten separate locations at the school and in Edinburgh. In preliminary conferences, the director expressed the desire to have Sister Helena play her scenes in some kind of a convent setting. Also, a realistic setting for each of the nine flashback locations was to be attempted to test the validity and

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 33.
possibility of providing, in the Masquer Theater, actual settings for each specific locale. In addition, the importance of the transitions between scenes was discussed. In consideration of the intimate actor/audience format in the Masquer Theater, special emphasis was to be placed on making the transition quick and smooth, without extraneous noise or action. Since there were 24 scenes, all less than 10 minutes (approximately) in duration, the smooth progression of the play hinged upon the quality of the transitions.

Initially, several approaches to design were discussed. The idea of convertible scenery, used in the convent scene, and shifted or manipulated, for use in one or more of the flashback scenes was considered. This approach necessitated playing six of the ten flashback scenes in one neutral area, and providing for five specific locales out of the convertible convent setting. It became immediately apparent that the stage areas, for these five locales, would be too small for the scenes to play in. The potential problems of noise and visual distraction inherent in this somewhat gimmicky approach were judged to be unsolvable within the context of the mood of the play. Sister Helena needed her sanctuary and Miss Brodie needed her ordered, uncluttered setting to complete Miss Allen's "intensely dramatic character portrait." \(^{18}\)

At this time, the director decided that Sister Helena and the reporter should have a fixed area of their own, upstage of the flashback scenes, so that her memories would "surround" her. Also as a result of considering this first approach, the handling of scenery was to be minimized to facilitate transitions between scenes.

In an attempt to give some indication of locale to the flashback scenes, the use of projections was considered. The projections would be used as background during the flashback scenes to establish locale. However, the Masquer Theater mitigated against this approach, as its two-sided seating (see Chapter I, definitions), and the solid upstage walls forced the placement of the screen in the upstage center area, considerable distance from where the flashback scenes were to be played. The low ceiling height also limited the size of the projected image, and increased the problem of light spill on the screen. For these reasons this approach, too, was discontinued. The discussion, with the director, of these approaches to design led to the evolution of the following criteria:

1) The nun and reporter were to have a fixed, inviolate area upstage center in which to play their scenes, the convent.

2) The flashback scenes were all to be set in a neutral area, downstage, with as little manipulation of scenery from scene to scene as possible.

3) All actors, having once made their entrances, would remain on stage. Seating areas for a maximum of 13 were to be developed.

Once it was decided that the actors were to remain on stage throughout each act, the problem of establishing locales for the flashback scenes became acute. With the actors using the left and
right stage areas for seating, to "surround" the upstage convent setting, the idea of using a completely neutral or "limbo" area for the flashback scenes was discussed. This "limbo" area would utilize "shapes" instead of realistic furniture, allowing patterns of use and hand properties to establish locale.

With these conditions agreed upon, the designer discussed general blocking patterns and use of the stage with the director. From these discussions the platform size and shape evolved. Since it was desired that the front edge of the platform could be used for seating, in the classroom scenes played down center, and in order to keep the left and right areas clear for actor seating, the platform complex developed a thrust along the downstage/upstage diagonal of the square playing area (see drawing #1).

As the convent area needed to be separated from the rest of the stage, to give the feeling of sanctuary, it was raised six inches above the six-inch first level (finally 12 in., see Chapter III). Practical considerations of masking the upstage entrance, and the designer's wish to present both audiences (see drawing #1) with the same "impression," further defined the available area and shape of the convent setting.

Since the convent was "deep in the country,"19 the designer searched for rural architecture which would give the impression of simple, uncluttered strength— an impression, with which both Sandy and Miss Brodie would be compatible: Sandy could find the sanctuary she desperately needed and Miss Brodie could find a safe version of

19 Ibid., p. 155.
the "truth" she professed to seek. The period of the seventeen and
eighteen hundreds, the time of Jean's forefather, Willie Brodie, a
"cabinet maker" who "died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own devising
in 1788, was chosen to present Jean Brodie in an historical con­
text that could lend credibility to her romantic life style.

In his research the designer was inspired by an Old Tithe
Barn built in England in the 1300's, but representing a tradition
of construction, using thick masonry walls of local stone and simple
buttressing that is still in use today. Other examples which aided
the designer were: The Vicarage, the windows of the Peterborough
Cathedral Retrochoir, and the buttressing of Beverly St. Mary. The
"shapes" for use in the "limbo" area derived their dimensions
from normal desks and chairs, but were simply rectangular boxes
painted black to allow for more varied unspecific use. This lack of
specific identity, for these shapes, allowed use in one scene as a
desk (i.e., Miss Mackay's office) and use in another scene (i.e., the
Studio) as unspecific seating, without the distraction potential of
a specific, realistic piece of furniture. These shapes also lent a
theatrical or mystical quality to the "limbo" area which the designer
felt aided the acceptance of the flashback convention.

20 Allen, op. cit., p. 85.
21 Sir Banister Fletcher, A History of Architecture on the Com­
22 Ibid., p. 994.
23 Francis Bond, Gothic Architecture in England (New York:
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 364.
24 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

TECHNICAL DIRECTION AND PRODUCTION

Once the elements of the design were settled, and a rendering done to insure that the needs, for the mood and atmosphere of the play, were met, working drawings were completed. These drawings included construction details for all items to be built for the production. This writer, as technical director, undertook this task as well as that of supervising all actual construction and painting.

The problems of technical direction for The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie were complicated by the three prior productions of the Montana Repertory Theater, which bases its touring operation at the University of Montana. As a result of mounting these three shows, the use of the shop facilities was delayed until one and one-half weeks before The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie was to open. In addition, the normal work crews, students participating in Drama Workshop and Stagecraft courses, ¹ Work Study² students, staff members, this writer included, and volunteer help, were all involved in the tour preparations for the Montana Repertory Theater. Once these preparations were completed, the technical director was able to delegate the responsibility for properties and sound, to students and staff, who then worked directly

¹Workshop in theater and Advanced Stagecraft are both courses requiring practical work experience in scenery construction.

²Work Study—a nationally funded program which pays part of a student's salary (the other part being paid by the department he is employed in) allowing him to work while attending school, at jobs related to his field of study.
with the director. The technical director's construction crew throughout this production consisted of two work study students, available afternoons, and two to three students, participating in the Drama Workshop courses, available on a part-time basis. If the design had been a more complex one, more help would have been needed.

In addition to construction crews, the technical director was responsible for the location and training of running crews for sound and properties, as well as work and running crews for lights. For sound and properties as well as for one member of the lighting crew, Drama Workshop students were used. For the lighting work crew and running crew, students from the lighting class were used.

The training of these crews will be discussed in the chapter on lighting (Chapter IV) in the Technical Rehearsal sections.

As an aid to the director and to finalize the platform heights, two 4-foot by 8-foot platforms were legged to the proposed design heights. This was done prior to any work in the shop, although after approval of the final floor plan. In this way it was found that the first level, legged at 6 inches, was too low to provide the easy and modest seating the director required for the girls in the classroom scenes. The platform was raised to 12 inches, and a step 6 inches high and 8 inches wide was designed to ease movement across this level. This was found to be satisfactory. The uppermost level, first 12 inches high, was then raised to 18 inches, the maximum height the

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3Legging: the process of installing legs to platform units, in order to vary the elevation of these units.
designer wished to use, in order to provide reasonably normal angles for lighting, in conjunction with the Masquer Theater's low ceiling (see Chapter IV, Lighting).

Since the design was relatively simple, and work progressed almost simultaneously on all items, production schedules were not used. However, a ranking of priorities was done, in order to give the director, first, those portions of the set needed most for the final blocking and rehearsal of the show. In conference with the director, the priorities for construction were established, as follows:

1) The platform units
2) All flats
3) The convent benches
4) The buttresses
5) The "limbo" furniture, the screen and the chairs for actor seating.

The Platform Unit

The platform unit was constructed utilizing the two 8' x 8' platforms already legged for rehearsals. The new triangular and odd-angled quadrilateral pieces required to complete the final unit were constructed using 3/4" shop grade plywood, used to keep costs down, for the tops, which were nailed and glued to 1" x 6"" siderails,

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1) Glue: All glue used in this production was Elmers Glue-All(R), a white clear-drying polyvinyl resin glue.

5) 1" x 6": Unless otherwise noted, all lumber will be designated in stock pre-finished sizes, i.e., 1" x 6", actual size 3/4" x 5 1/2"; 1" x 1", actual size 3/4" x 3 1/2". 
already on hand in the shop. These individual platforms were legged using 1" x 3" lumber (see detail, drawing #3) nailed in place. The step units, for use with the platforms, were constructed using 3/4" plywood (shop grade) treads,\(^6\) nailed and glued to 1" x 5" risers,\(^7\) (actual size 3/4" x 5"). These units were constructed to fit the platform and nailed in place. The 5-3/4" assembled height of the step became a full 6" when the 1/4" plywood (grade A-D, used for its one good surface) "planking" (see detail, drawing #3) was applied.

The final surface of the platform unit was used to give the appearance of a wide board, wood planked floor, commonly found in construction from this period. The 1/4" plywood was ripped into approximately 5-7/8" x 8' "planks" and the top edges were beveled to give the impression of gaps between the boards. These planks were laid parallel with the front (downstage) edges of the platforms, using glue and nails. The "planking" applied to the steps was also laid parallel to the front edge of the platform, since it was desired that the step appear an integral part of the platform unit.

Flat Construction

The flats were constructed in accordance with standard flat construction techniques\(^8\) at the University of Montana Drama Department,

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\(^6\) Tread: The upper horizontal part of a stair step.

\(^7\) Riser: The vertical or upright member between two stair treads.

\(^8\) Standard flat construction techniques: At this time (Winter, 1971), the use of 9" corner blocks and keystones of 1/4" A-D plywood, glued and stapled to rails, toggles, styles, and crossbraces, using the air-powered automatic stapler with 3/8" staples, was the method of building flats. All the Stagecraft classes and all the technical staff were trained to use this method of fastening for flat construction.
since the crews were already trained in the procedure, and since the
equipment was already geared for this style of construction, it was
the logical choice of methods. The standard 9" cornerblocks and key-
stones precut (and beveled to prevent snagging costumes and for safety
in handling) from 1/4" A-D grade plywood were glued and air-stapled
with 3/16" staples. The styles, rails and toggles were cut from 1" x
3" (actual 3/16" x 3") stock, ripped from 1" x 10" lumber already in
stock, to minimize costs.

All flats, except for the 9'2" window flat (see drawing #2)
were built as single units. The 9'2" window flat was hinged in the
center in order to transport it from the shop to the Masquer Theater.
The window and door reveals were cut from upson board and glued and
stapled in place. Upson board was used for its flexibility and low
cost. Plexiglass was used for the window "glass" since it is stronger
and more flexible than real glass (a safety factor). This material
was screwed to the back of the flats using 1" x 6" blocking to hold
it in place (see detail, drawing #2). The leaded glass effect was
achieved by applying Scotch brand 3M electrical tape in 3/8" width
(obtained by slicing a 3/16" roll in half on the bandsaw) to the down-
stage side of the plexiglass windows.

The door was constructed using 1" x 3" (actual size 3/16" x 3")
flat construction using the plug from the door flat, arched to form

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9 Reveal: That part of a door or window indicating the thick-
ness of the wall in which it is installed.

10 Upson board: A cardboard material, 1/8" thick, usually avail-
able in 4' x 8' sheets, with one side given a pebbled finish.
the arch top of the door. To give it the "planked" look of the plat­form construction, in order to have all the wood units appear to be built from planks indicating period construction, the door was covered with vertical 1" x 6" boards, beveled on the edges to accent the gaps between. Since this door was to be non-operable, to provide unhindered easy access to the stage, a jack was hinged to the back of the door, and a sandbag used to weight the jack, holding the door upright, behind the arched opening in the flat. This scheme was used because the door was heavy and inoperable, it was simpler to have it free standing.

The Convent Benches

These benches were designed to fit in with the other wood of the door and floor. Their simple straight-lined construction could easily have been made by the same rural craftsman who laid the floor.

The end pieces were added to, in order to make the 18" depth. The seat, too, was pieced and then end nailed with 16D finish nails, as was the back. Blocking was glued and screwed in place for added strength and the simple molding around the legs added a small touch of detail to indicate that these benches received a little more attention, since they were for a convent.

The Buttresses

The buttressing, added to give detail and interest to the flat walls, was constructed from 1" x 1/2" (actual size 3/4" x 1/2") lumber, ripped to size, in order to reduce costs and weight, since these units were non-structural. Special small keystones were cut to facilitate construction and normal flat construction techniques were used. As
indicated (see detail, drawing #2) five separate types of buttresses were required. Types 1 and 3 rested directly on the floor and matched the 9'4" height of the flats. Type 2 rested on the floor also, but was only 8'5" in height in order to clear the beam in the Masquer Theater. Types 4 and 5 rested on the 18" platform and were constructed 7'10" in height to match the top of the flats. In addition, Type 5, consisting of only two sides, was built in place, using upson board to form the slanted top and lower step, for ease of construction since the walls did not meet at a right angle. All buttresses were nailed in place from the back of the flats.

Limbo Furniture

The limbo box "shapes" and the chairs, for actor seating, were built last so that the director could finalize the size of the boxes, and determine the number of chairs needed. The boxes were constructed using 3/8" plywood tops, 1/4" plywood sides, and using 1" x 3" (actual size 3/4" x 3") interior bracing. The thicker tops were used to support the weight of the actors without flexing or creaking, since these "shapes" were to be as unobtrusive as possible. All sides were closed in with plywood and covered with muslin, using casein paint as an adhesive, in order to retain their neutral quality even if they were tipped over during performance.

The chairs for actor seating were designed to be extremely lightweight and easy to move since they were to be carried by actors. The seat back provided for easy handling and was left open. The sides, between the legs, were covered with muslin to provide a place to set properties out of sight.
The Screen

Since it was to be lightweight, the frame was constructed of 1" x 1\(\frac{1}{2}\)" strips (actual size 3/4" x 1\(\frac{1}{4}\)""). The interior bars were 1" x 1" (actual size 3/4" x 1") stapled (with the air stapler) and glued within the frames. The three frame sections were hinged together using 2" light narrow fast pin butt hinges. The frames were covered on both sides with tobacco cloth. An attempt was made to provide a translucent quality but was rejected by the director in view of the fact that the actress was actually nude to the waist during the change. To avoid any possibility of tipping the screen over, in view of the consequences, the screen was hinged to the wall and swung into place for use. Rawl\(^{12}\) plugs\(^{(R)}\) were used, in drilled holes, to hold the screws in the masonry wall of the Masquer Theater.

Painting and Detailing

In achieving a texture for the walls, a relief greater than that provided by sandust or Vermiculite was desired, to enhance a rural or roughly finished, yet well-crafted feeling, the designer wanted for the convent. Upon a suggestion by Bill Raoul, designer at University of Montana, wood chips produced by a dado\(^{13}\) set were tried. These larger and sharper chips seemed a better solution. Two methods of applying these chips were tried.

\(^{11}\)Tobacco cloth: A cheap, loosely woven cloth, like cheese cloth.

\(^{12}\)Rawl plugs\(^{(R)}\): Fiber-like dowels inserted in holes drilled in masonry to hold screws.

\(^{13}\)Dado set: A set of blades consisting of two combination blades for cutting, sandwiching a variable number of chipper blades. Used in table or radial saws for making grooves.
In the first method, a base coat of the set color, a warm brown, was applied to the flat. The chips were then hand sown over the wet paint. A coat of the set color was then sprayed on, pigmenting and sealing the chips to the muslin surface. This method required that the flats be painted while horizontal and that they remain horizontal until the casein paint was set or else the chips would run or fall off. This method, while giving acceptable texture, slowed up the process of painting since the paint shop at the University of Montana is rather small.

The second method of mixing the chips directly into a slightly thicker paint mix and then brushing the mixture directly on the flat also worked. The relief obtained was slightly less, but the distribution could be controlled and modified more easily than could the first method. In addition, less paint was used, resulting in shorter drying time, allowing the flats to be moved out of the way more quickly. This method was also used for touch-up after the set was in place.

Once dry, the flats and buttresses were stood upside down and spattered with a dark brown, a mustard yellow and a dark red, to give life to the monochromatic walls. The spattering was concentrated towards the top of the flats, to darken them so as to better fade off into the flat black ceiling of the Masquer Theater, to de-emphasize the effect of the low ceiling.

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1Spattering: A technique of painting consisting of striking a paint-containing brush against the hand and directing the spray on the surface to be spattered. Used to give the feeling of texture, to blend minor imperfections and add interest.
All the wood on the stage, the platform unit, the benches and the door unit, were base-coated with scenic burnt umber. The door and the platforms were dry brushed with the set light brown color to "age" them. The benches were dry brushed with a dark brown and a dark red to add interest. They were then sealed with clear latex to protect the costumes.

The "limbo" furniture was all painted flat black to render it as unobtrusive as possible. The chairs and the screen were spray painted to speed up the painting process.

The floor of the playing area was painted a dark gray to provide a neutral area between the warm upstage convent and the undefined "limbo" area downstage.

The black electrical tape used for the "leaded" glass effect proved too dark and was painted a light gray to closer simulate the lead separation strips. The plexiglass was then painted with clear latex which rendered it translucent.

Once the flats were erected in the Masquer Theater, the platform unit was leveled using cedar shingles as leveling wedges to adjust for irregularities in the floor surface.

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15 Burnt umber: All paint colors mentioned are Placo Casein scene paint colors.

16 Dry brushing: A technique of painting in which an almost dry brush is used to cover the base color only partially, allowing the blend of the two colors to be seen. Used to texture or blend surfaces.

17 Clear latex: A clear latex vehicle without pigment. Used to seal the surface against wear or water.
Another part of the technical director's duties was to supervise the technical rehearsal. Since this rehearsal was, for this production, primarily concerned with lighting, it will be discussed in the following chapter on lighting.
CHAPTER IV

LIGHTING AND TECHNICAL REHEARSAL

When the design was finalized to the point where the final floor plan was approved, and once blocking patterns were established by the director, the work of the lighting designer began. For this production, this writer, in his capacity as technical director, was responsible for the design of the lighting.

In lighting The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, the technical director attempted to add to, and reinforce, the atmosphere created by the physical setting.

For the convent an aura of serene normalcy, without excessive theatricality, was desired, in order to augment the feeling of sanctuary provided by the thick walls and warm wood of the convent setting.

For the flashback scenes, a different atmosphere, suitable to the romantic and dramatic Miss Brodie, was required. Here, more theatrical lighting¹ styles and colors could be used to support the use of the flashback convention and differentiate it from the scenes set in the present.

In addition to these, two more requirements were made of the lighting for this production:

1) That the lighting should be controlled so as to provide for the transitions between scenes.

¹Theatrical lighting: Lighting whose purpose is primarily for dramatic effect rather than visibility. From Richard James' lighting class, Winter, 1970, lecture notes.
2) That there be some provision, within the style of lighting used for the flashback scenes, for setting off or differentiating the two exterior scenes from the interior scenes.

The instruments used to achieve these ends were 6" Fresnels, chosen for their wide diffuse beam pattern, compact size, and availability. These instruments allowed reasonably normal, McCandless Method, lighting to be used in spite of the low ceiling in the Masquer Theater. Ellipsoidal reflector spotlights (commonly known as lekos) were tried but available instruments (6" medium beam Century) were bulky and proved to have too narrow a beam angle to provide optimum area coverage at the short length of throw necessitated (if vertical angles near 45° were to be used) by the low, 10-foot high ceiling.

The stage area was broken up into nine areas for control purposes. These areas (see light plot, drawing #A) were dictated by the configuration of the setting, position of the furniture, and the blocking requirements, as set up by the director. The most downstage area (area 1, see drawing #A) at the post, was lit with three instruments gelled in Brigham #2, light flesh pink, Brigham #17, special lavender, and no gel for the center instrument which was hooded, to

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2Fresnel: A small lightweight lighting instrument using a Fresnel lens (a short focal length lens designed to resist heat) and having a soft-edged beam pattern.

McCandless Method: A method for lighting the stage derived from lighting conditions found in nature; involving (for the stage) two instruments, providing warm and cool light beams, situated so as to illuminate an area with their beams intersecting at a 90° angle, viewed in the horizontal plane, and at 45° viewed in the vertical plane.

Ellipsoidal reflector spotlight: A spotlight using an ellipsoidal reflector, a tubular bulb, and usually providing shutters to control the beam shape, which is characterized by its hard edge.
confine the beam to a small area. This was used for those times when Miss Brodie was alone at her desk. Area 2 lit the area close to the desk and the backlight and fill light were controlled separately. The other areas also were set up for this separate control of backlight and fill light in order to be able to vary the balance between them. Only in Area 1 and Areas 7 and 8, of the flashback area lighting, was the fill and backlight controlled by a single dimmer. This was done to ease the control of these small areas. The only time these were used alone was for the rainy street scene (Act II, scene 2), and this was lit at an intensity which allowed the blue backlight to dominate as desired for the scene. A single leko was used for the extremely restricted lighting needed for the screen area (Area 9), and shuttered down to the desired size to eliminate spill, this was gelled in Brigham #30, light blue special, to match the lighting of the studio scene.

General illumination for the convent scenes was provided by four, 6" Fresnels. Two instruments, one gelled in Brigham #62, bastard amber, and one in Brigham #17, special lavender, were positioned on either side of the upstage/downstage diagonal, to light the upstage convent area. These instruments were angled at less than 45° (45° being the McCandless optimum) so as to light the actors above the waist when they used the first level playing area. This was done to keep the same quality of light (angle and color) for the brief moments when the nun and the reporter moved into that first level playing area, without requiring additional control.

5Brigham #62, bastard amber: All gelatine color medium names and numbers, refer to gelatine made by the Brigham Gelatine Company.
Two other instruments were gelled in Brigham #17, special lavender, and aimed along the set walls to highlight the surface texture and create shadows in the window and buttress areas, adding visual interest to the setting. For the flashback scenes the designer experimented with the use of backlighting\(^6\) a somewhat difficult task in the Masquer Theater's physical setting, as the low ceiling prevented using a high angle wash effect\(^7\) from the upstage area. Instead, with several (13) 6" Fresnels aimed very slightly downstage, a battery of closely spaced beams combined to give the desired effect. These instruments could only be tipped a few degrees downstage, before they shone in the audience's eyes, but through experimentation with all the types of Fresnels available, the Little Fresnels\(^8\) with black risered lenses were found to control the flare light\(^9\) enough, to minimize the distraction and make the idea of backlighting practicable. These backlights were generally gelled in Brigham #29, special steel blue, with those instruments on the periphery of the flashback area (i.e., up left and right, near the seating areas, and up center, near the convent area) gelled in Brigham #30, a deeper blue, to create a visual

\(^6\)Rack lighting: Lighting aimed from behind the actor at a high angle to highlight and set off the actor from the background.

\(^7\)Wash: Lighting spread evenly over a large area usually in a single color to create mood effects.

\(^8\)Little Fresnels: Fresnel lighting instruments manufactured by the Little Stage Lighting Company.

\(^9\)Flare light: Stray light uncontrolled by the lens, produced by cheap or inaccurately molded lens systems. The painting of the risered portion of a fresnel lens helps to eliminate this problem.
boundary around the flashback area. This scheme of backlighting was used to set off the flashback scenes, giving the actors a slight blue highlight on their heads and shoulders. Warmer fill lighting in Brigham #17, special lavender, and Brigham #2, light flesh pink, was added for visibility and to restore the costume and makeup colors (Miss Brodie's maroon dress was quite grayed out by the blue down lights, but the pink Brigham #2 gel brought it back to life again). Within the backlight/fill light convention, balance was altered to provide variation in lighting which would suggest the atmosphere of the exterior flashback scenes without changing or altering the existing lighting convention. The warm fill light was dimmed and the rainy street scene (Act II, scene 2) played under predominantly blue backlighting. In the lawn scene (Act I, scene 10) the backlight was dimmed, allowing the warmer, brighter, fill, or frontal light to dominate, giving the warm sunny atmosphere that this scene required.

The desire to be consistent with the styles of lighting used, both for those actors and scenes set in the present, as well as for Miss Brodie and the flashback scenes, was in keeping with the designer's wish for simple, uncluttered solutions, compatible with Miss Brodie's outlook on life.

An additional factor, controlled by the lighting designer (technical director) to provide transitions from scene to scene, was the movement of light. Several techniques were used as requested by the

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10 Fill light: A term used to denote light whose purpose is to eliminate deep shadows on the actor's face and increase the general level of illumination.
director, to control the flow of action from one scene to the next. Cross fading, a technique of lowering the intensity on one scene, while raising it on the next one, was used when it was desired to keep the flow of the play in motion. Fading the scene being played, to black, and then bringing up the next scene, was used when a slight pause was required either to separate the feeling of one scene from the next, or to allow actors to move into place unseen. Also, the speed of the fades was varied, depending on the feeling of the scene. These and other decisions were made during the technical rehearsal.

The Technical Rehearsal

The purpose of the rehearsal is to provide an opportunity to check and adjust all the technical aspects of the production. During the rehearsal the attention of the director and the technical director is focussed on the integration, into a coherent whole, of the sound, the lighting, the properties, the special effects, and other solutions to the technical problems of the production, including movement of scenery and actors.

Lighting. In the flashback scenes the strong blue backlight was found to have strong aging effects upon the lead actress. The costumes, viewed at this time, were also grayed out slightly, and the decision was made to add two more instruments, gelled in Brigham #2, light flesh pink, to provide more and warmer fill light in these problem areas (this later proved to solve the problem). In addition, in some areas the lighting was found to be somewhat uneven. This was later cured by re-aiming and adjusting the instruments for more overlap.
of their beams. The execution of cues as to speed and cuing was also set at this time. The crew was familiar with the equipment already, so only the execution of the specific cues required discussion.

By the end of the rehearsal, Miss Brodie's dress, a combination of reds, greens, and blues, with yellow accents (very difficult to light and not at all attractive) was ruled unsuitable by the director and the final costume, a simple-lined maroon dress posed no problem to light.

Sound. The requirements for sound effects in this production were extremely minimal. The singing voices of the girls was recorded during the normal rehearsal period and their voices, music recorded from "La Traviata" and the noon "gun" were the only effects used. The student running the tape recorder was instructed in its operation and cuing was recorded. The final sound tape was made later (by another staff member) and with leader tape spliced between the actual recorded cues, to make starting the effect on cue possible. The phonograph (pantomimed) cuing was worked out (the actress pantomiming the operation would lift the imaginary tone arm, place it on the record and hold until the sound came on), and the cut of the girls singing, for background in Act II, scene 4, was discovered to be too short. Since the cue was to be started, then faded out, and then after a two-page break, brought up again, it was decided (since there were so few cues and time to the next cue was far from critical) to recue the single cut, and fade out as the song ended, in order to be out some time before Miss Brodie's line, "Oh, dear, can choir practice be over so
soon?" As the cut consisted of several short songs, this practice worked without problems. The speaker for the playback was located in the upstage area within the convent setting, since this was the only masked, onstage position. The equipment used was checked out from the Instructional Materials Service on the University of Montana campus.

**Properties.** During the rehearsal, the technical director reviewed the work of the prop crew. The suitability of each prop, and its movement from location to location, during the show, was noted. The only problem discovered, a white vase, that was too white, was solved by lightly spraying the vase with black and gold spray paint, to tone down the glaring white finish.

The storage of properties under the chairs worked out without difficulty and the movement of the chairs used in the office scenes required only one additional assignment: to have Mr. Lowther remove both chairs to the up left area, while Miss Brodie remained down center, ready for the next scene. Previously Mr. Lowther and Miss Brodie had each removed his own chair and the mood of the scene was impaired.

During the technical rehearsal the problems of getting the actors off stage in the blackouts for the two act breaks was discussed, and the decision, by the director, left for later. (Finally the backlights were used to provide enough light to see by, and orderly exit patterns were established. After the last actor exited, the house lights would come up for intermission.)

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The lighting changes were made before the next rehearsal and intensity levels were also readjusted at that time to increase the visibility in the flashback scenes. The technical crews for lighting and sound held one more separate rehearsal with the technical director and the show opened for the public.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND CRITIQUE

Since the designer was on tour with the Montana Repertory Theater when the run ended, there was no formal critique of this production. It seems fair to conclude, however, since a total of 438 seats (out of the 500 offered for sale) were sold, that the production was a success (see Appendix D, Financial Report).

In the designer's opinion, the overall production style worked. The quick transitions, using lighting changes, without noisy, distracting, scenery shifting, allowed the play to flow smoothly. The size and shape of the convent unit seemed to extend just far enough, towards the flashback area, to provide support, without intrusion, for the flashback scenes. The backlighting set off the flashback scenes, and supported the flashback convention.

However, the feeling of period, most important for the convent area, was lacking, and the texture of the walls was not as pronounced as the designer would have liked. Also, the flat walls could have been taken out of plane slightly, by gluing muslin to the surface, and then adding the texture, to give a more rustic feeling to the setting. In addition, more detailing, on the benches, perhaps wood trim on the windows, and a wall sconce, or rough chandelier, could have been added to bring out the specific character of this particular convent, and give a feeling of period.
The purpose of this study was to record and describe the processes of the design and technical direction of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The design process was described from first impressions, and preliminary discussions with the director, to the analysis of the play, its style, and its characters. These elements were combined to form a total impression, or atmosphere, which then became a guidepost for the evolution of the final design.

In describing the technical direction, practical problems of working within the physical limitations of the Masquer Theater were discussed, with particular emphasis placed upon how these limits affected the design. This discussion should be an aid to anyone designing for this theater.

The lighting design was discussed as it related to the total design of all the visual elements of the production. A method was discovered to allow the use of backlighting, within the limitations of the low ceiling in the Masquer Theater, which may be an aid to others lighting in similar theaters.

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is an example of how a single character can dominate an entire play. Every decision made, during the design and technical direction process, was made with Miss Brodie in mind. The other characters in the play have, as their reason for being, the existence of Miss Jean Brodie. Although the play is flawed; it is too long, its exposition, presented cumulatively, dissipates the dramatic impact of Miss Brodie's "assassination", and its characters, other than Jean Brodie, tend to be a "dull lot,"

1Barnes, op. cit.
"is at its far from inconsiderable best when concentrating upon the character of Miss Brodie herself—indeed, here it is fascinating in its insights into a marvelously portrayed eccentric human being."\(^2\)

For this writer, it was a pleasure to know her.

\(^2\)Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHS
PHOTOGRAPH OF RENDERING
PHOTOGRAPH OF SETTING
APPENDIX B

PROGRAM COPY
University of Montana Department of Drama
Montana Masquer Club

- Presents -
Montana Masquers Scholarship Production

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE
by Muriel Spark
March 10-13, 1971 - Masquer Theater

Directed by Margaret Johnson
Scenery & Lighting Designed by Clayton Hor
Costumes Designed by Marianne Nelson

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

Perry.........................Vladimir Velasao
Sister Helena..................Rae Horan
Jean Brodie....................Rebecca Stevenson
Sandy.........................Jane Fellows*
Jenny.........................Lucinda Holahue
Monica..........................Kathy Danzer
Mary...........................Judy Donham
MaKay..........................Frances Morrow**
Teddy Lloyd....................Jim Caron
Lowther.......................Everett Robertson
Clara..........................Linda Michelin
Miss Campbell..................Arlynn Fishbaugh
McCready........................Harry Gadbow*
Girls..........................Peggy O'Connell
Jan Jones
Susan Owens

Setting: Convent 1971. The action of the play takes place in the memory of Sister Helena. There will be a 10-minute intermission between Acts 1 and 2.

Produced by special arrangement with: Samuel French, Inc.

PRODUCTION STAFF

DIRECTOR ......................Cathy Larish*
MANAGER ......................Harry Gadbow
PRODUCTION MANAGER ....Peter Day, Richard Beger, Mike Loken, Mike Lyngholm, Susan Owens, Kelly Webb, Tom Morris
STAGING ......................Jim Scott, Dave Doney, Ted Kramer*
ID .............................John Bradford, Diana Dunlap
UP ...........................Colleen Brady*
PRTIES .........................Bob Burns, Anna Weber, Karen Peterson
OFFICE .........................Dale Haines*, Bill Gillespie*, Frances Morrow, Dick Russell*
GRAPHY .......................Arlynn Fishbaugh, Montana Masquers

*se refrain from smoking in the theater.
notes Members of Montana Masquers.
notes Members of Royal Masquers.
APPENDIX C

FINANCIAL REPORT
**BOX OFFICE REPORT**  
**Winter 1971**

**Production:** THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE  
**Produced by:** Montana Masquers

**Tests:** March 10, 11, 12, 13  
**Theater:** Masquer  
**Directed:** Margret Johnson

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**Total Receipts:** $530.00

**Total Attendence:** 488

**Statistical Statement (based on ticket stubs):**

- @ $2.00  $208.00
- @ $1.00  $264.00
- @ $.50   $58.00
- @  $530.00

- **Box Office Receipts $530.00**
- **Season Ticket Sales**
- **Other**
- **Estimated Total $**
- **Actual Deposit $530.00**

*Signature:*

Box Office Manager
Department of Drama
University of Montana
APPENDIX D

DRAWINGS AND LIGHTING PLOT