



VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

2006

Lessons of Vocal Coaching Shakespeare in Hollywood: A Production Analysis

Deborah Thomas
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

© The Author

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1075>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

School of the Arts
Virginia Commonwealth University

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Deborah Thomas entitled *LESSONS OF VOCAL COACHING SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD: A PRODUCTION ANALYSIS* has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Janet B. Rodgers, Thesis Director, Department of Theatre, School of the Arts

Dr. Noreen C. Barnes, Committee Member, Department of Theatre, School of the Arts

Dr. Aaron D. Anderson, Committee Member, Department of Theatre, School of the Arts

Dr. Noreen C. Barnes, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Theatre, School of the Arts

David S. Leong, Chair, Department of Theatre, School of the Arts

Dr. Richard E. Toscan, Dean, School of the Arts

Dr. F. Douglas Boudinot, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

Date

© Copyright Deborah Thomas 2006
All Rights Reserved

LESSONS OF VOCAL COACHING *SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD*:

A PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts (Theatre Pedagogy: Voice and Speech) at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

DEBORAH THOMAS

B.F.A., *summa cum laude*, Boston University, 1988

Director: JANET B. RODGERS,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, VOICE AND SPEECH,
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May, 2006

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following:

Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Graduate Studies for their generous Thesis/Dissertation Assistantship; The School of the Arts, Department of Theatre, for their Graduate Assistantship;

Janet Rodgers, for her unwavering faith and unequivocal support;

David W. Frank, for his keen editorial eye, wit, encouragement, ability to simplify and clarify (in life as well as on the page), indispensable reminders to keep things in perspective and, above all, his willingness to show me that every problem is merely fodder for potential solutions;

Alexander Moudrov for his generosity of spirit and continuous presence;

The loving and nurturing Beatty Family, especially Isabella, Evelyn Hale and Amelia for providing me with such joy and laughter;

The Kupec Family for their love and support.

Finally I would like to thank my students for inspiring me on a daily basis and for giving me such faith in the future of our profession. They carry the journey onwards.

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter	
1 Pre-Production	3
Building an Aural Score	4
The Aural Score in Practice.....	6
A Search for Prototypes.....	7
Shakespearean Verse and “Ludwigese”	12
Wrapping Up the Research.....	17
2 Production	19
First Meeting with the Director	19
Getting a Feel for the Director’s Aesthetic Concerns	22
First Read Through.....	25
Damage Control	29
Diving Into Rehearsals.....	32
On Track At Last?.....	33

Individual Sessions.....	38
Overview of the Rehearsal Process.....	66
Transferring the Work from the Rehearsal Hall to the Stage.....	68
3 Performance and Post-Production.....	73
Opening Night	73
Conclusion.....	74
Reference Materials.....	77
Appendix 1: Excerpt from <i>Shakespeare in Hollywood</i>	79

Abstract

LESSONS OF VOCAL COACHING *SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD*:

A PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

By Deborah Thomas, M.F.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, May, 2006

Major Director: Janet B. Rodgers
Associate Professor, Department of Theatre

This thesis is a personal narrative of my experience as vocal coach on a production of Ken Ludwig's *Shakespeare in Hollywood* directed by BT McNicholl and performed in the Raymond Hodges Theatre of Virginia Commonwealth University in November 2005.

Chapter one covers my identification of the play's vocal and aural challenges; what I did to prepare for those challenges; the research I gathered on 1930s Hollywood prototypes for the play; an examination of Shakespearean verse, especially that in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and how Ludwig synthesized Shakespeare's verse with that of his own.

Chapter two is divided into an account of the rehearsal process; a description of my sessions with the individual actors and an exploration of the dynamics of the vocal coach-

director relationship. Chapter three focuses on the finished production and summarizes my response to the experience.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2005, Janet B. Rodgers, my adviser and head of Virginia Commonwealth University's voice and speech program, suggested that I vocal coach Ken Ludwig's *Shakespeare in Hollywood* due for production in the fall. This would be my first foray into the intricately complex world of vocal coaching and in many respects it was baptism by fire.

The play, which takes for its theme the 1935 filming of Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is a zany, farcical fusion of Shakespeare, vaudeville and Hollywood screwball comedies of the 30's. Madcap misadventures develop largely as a result of two Elizabethans, Oberon and Puck, who step right out of the pages of Shakespeare onto the Warner studio back-lot and find themselves cast as leads in the film. The magical mayhem as outlined in Shakespeare's original is echoed in hilariously off-key and strident tones. For a vocal coach, untangling the mélange of characters and their pastiche of voices would be akin to trying to scale the Tower of Babel itself.

The numerous challenges offered were both intriguing and daunting. There was the problem of impersonation: James Cagney, Dick Powell, Joe E. Brown and Groucho Marx are just a few of the real-life denizens of 30's Hollywood represented in the play. Another problem was the rapid-fire dialogue spoken by the Warner Brothers. Such dialogue is a distinctive hallmark of the 1930's and differs markedly from modern speech patterns.

There were dialects: Reinhardt is Austrian with a German-Yiddish accent; Jack Warner's girlfriend, Lydia Lansing, is a Brooklyn chorus-girl who aspires to be a great classical actress. The role of Lydia provides the additional challenge of having the actor maintain the character's integrity and avoid caricature even while doing "bad" Shakespeare overlaid with a Brooklyn dialect.

My thesis will show the challenges I faced as a first time vocal coach. I will cover my identification of the numerous vocal and aural challenges in the play, what I did to prepare for those challenges, what actually transpired in the production process with its constant need for adjustments and, finally, what I learned from the process.

I will also cover the nature of the relationship between the director and the vocal coach: what the vocal coach's role is as a member of the production team and how precarious that role and relationship can be. Nan Withers-Wilson, in her excellent book, *Vocal Direction for the Theatre*, states: "Many directors recognize the actor's need for voice and speech work, but are hesitant to engage the expertise of a vocal director due to a lack of understanding of that artist's function within the production process" (xii). My thesis will show how I negotiated the often elusive balance that can exist between director and vocal coach to a successful and fruitful conclusion.

In addition, I will show the discoveries I made while coaching the actors in individual sessions. My students have found these discoveries beneficial and I hope that others will find the same. Therefore, I believe this thesis will be of value not only to anyone coaching Ken Ludwig's *Shakespeare in Hollywood*, but it will also benefit other voice and speech practitioners.

CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION

I spent the summer doing pre-production homework. My study began, as Janet recommended, with Nan Withers-Wilson's *Vocal Direction for the Theatre* (mentioned above), which turned out to be an excellent tool. From this book I learned how to break a script down into an aural score, and how to note the challenges that are present in each scene.

After reading *Shakespeare in Hollywood* several times to get a sense of its rhythm and tone, I had a very clear sense of who these characters were and what their relationships were via their dialogue, and I could hear the dialogue clearly in my mind. As an actor I was already used to dissecting lines, outlining operative words, both primary and secondary, and noting my character's objectives and intentions. Withers-Wilson's book widened the narrow circle of my focus considerably. I could see that, to be a vocal coach, I would have to concern myself with much more than having the actors make sense of the lines and how the various voices could sound and synchronize with each other. I had to be aware of ANYTHING that had to do with sound, including music, sound effects, the ambient noise (intentional or not) made by scene shifts during an actor's beginning the next scene, etc. For the first time I realized a play's score is both vocal AND aural. In the past, I had been amazed at Janet's capacity to hear every minute detail in an actor's speech

and still retain the ability to hear any ambient noise. Would I be up to the task? Was my ear good enough? I was approaching a play in an entirely new way.

Building an Aural Score

Scene by scene, I marked what challenges I could “hear” in my mind. Thus, I constructed a sort of blueprint on paper (although much of this was to change during rehearsal and production: see Appendix 1 for the first few pages of the script).

I outlined some initial challenges as follows: At the start of the play there would be taped music played over loudspeakers. On top of (or beneath) the music, we would have the hubbub of the fans gathering to watch the arrival of the stars. Louella Parsons would begin speaking. Her play-opening monologue must generate the requisite excitement of a Hollywood opening. It must therefore have a very strong, upbeat attack.

Louella would, supposedly, be speaking into a microphone. Would this merely be a prop, or would her voice actually be amplified? If so, would the microphone be real, or would she speak through a prop while using a body microphone? Would the director want her to sound like the actual Louella Parsons? If so, were there any examples of her voice available?

Louella has important exposition to deliver: she states why everyone is gathered here. Thus she must be heard over the fans (whom the stage directions indicate are “screaming”) and over the underscore. She must also be crystal clear in her delivery of the lines because she has the important task of introducing characters as they alight onto the red carpet. Care would have to be taken that what she is saying not be upstaged by the

“busy” visuals of many extravagantly dressed characters entering and exiting the stage quickly.

Next, Max Reinhardt enters. He has a dialect—but what dialect? He is an Austrian Jew who has worked in Germany. Should he sound German, Austrian, Yiddish, or a combination of the above? One thing I always keep in mind as regards dialects, and that I believe is often overlooked, is that when the character finds himself among English speakers, he is *attempting* to speak English and is thus probably trying to minimize his dialect. When I converse with foreign speakers, I have noticed that their objective is to be understood *despite* their dialect. Yet an actor’s objective is usually to sound foreign. Learning the dialect thoroughly, and then keeping in mind that the character is struggling *against* his dialect, goes a long way in helping to avoid caricature.

Reinhardt is in Hollywood, trying to impress American movie moguls enough to buy his idea for a movie. It would, therefore, behoove him to sound as “American” as possible. And then again there would be the problem of impersonation. Should the actor sound like the real Reinhardt, and, if so, would there be examples available? In their dialogue together, Louella cuts him off many times—timing and pace would be an additional issue for both characters.

When Dick Powell enters, his line is in quotes, which leads me to believe, since Powell is a singer, that this line is from one of his signature songs. What song is it, and where would I find it?

Eventually, after all of the opening hubbub is over, Reinhardt finds himself alone. His monologue is the first of several direct addresses to the audience. Thus it must

establish a convention while giving important information about the character who, in this moment, is also acting as the play's narrator. It must do all of the above without stopping the flow of the action. Reinhardt's monologue gives us important exposition as well as a first glimpse into his personality and what he proposes to do. Therefore, Reinhardt must be intelligible despite his dialect, hints of which are supplied by the playwright. He must attack the top of the monologue, and, at its end, he must point the way to the next scene.

All of the above indicates the type of thought and planning I put into each scene. How my concerns played out in rehearsal and production made the process exciting and taught me the indispensable value of flexibility on the part of the vocal coach.

The Aural Score in Practice

Thursday, November 10, 7:30 P.M.

Lights up! The red carpet was unfurled, the stanchion and ropes were brought in, the marquee flew in, all of which took place while the crowd of fans gathered. It turned out that director BT McNicholl had not been concerned with the authenticity of either Louella Parsons or Max Reinhardt. In fact, BT felt that Reinhardt was a reincarnation of a character that Ludwig had found success with in the past, that of the impresario Bela Zangler in the hit musical *Crazy For You*. An instrumental version of "Hooray for Hollywood," located by assistant director Boone Hopkins, nicely underscored the fans' hubbub and generated a wonderful sense of excitement. At the start of rehearsals, Louella had been told she must project over both the applause of the crowd and the music, but as we moved closer to tech rehearsals this idea had been scrapped in favor of her using a body microphone—which

was a relief to me, but which also made me nervous. I knew that microphones don't always work. (In fact, there were microphone malfunctions in the course of the run, but all went well on opening night).

BT had perfectly orchestrated the interjection of applause from the crowd to punctuate Louella's opening monologue: he had set each level of response to correspond with each star's entrance so that there was a discernible build which let the crowd's sigh of disappointment at the entrance of Max Reinhardt really land. He also added a few more stars to the script to flesh things out. Powell's entrance line was changed from "I'm young and healthy, and you've got chaaaaarm"¹ to "I love all of you": a less esoteric and more generally appealing choice. BT also cut both Louella's and Max's monologues substantially to keep things moving. The gratifying audience reaction to the show's opening scenes seemed to justify BT's choices.

A Search for Prototypes

In the two previous sections I show how I "scored" the play, how the score manifested itself and changed in actual production. Another step in my research was to delve into the two chief sources of Ludwig's play: Reinhardt's film *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, of course, the original by William Shakespeare. Since *Shakespeare in*

¹ Ludwig MS p.1 Shakespeare in Hollywood was in the process of publication at the time we produced it. All subsequent page numbers refer to the unpublished manuscript I used as my score.

Hollywood is about the making of Reinhardt's film, I thought viewing the film would serve as a basis from which to approach the play. I was in store for yet another surprise. In my very first meeting with BT, he informed me that he was not at all interested in the Reinhardt version. In fact, he felt that *Singin' in the Rain*, the 1952 gem about the period when Hollywood was making its transition into the talking motion picture, represented the very heart of what he wanted to explore in this production. *Singin' in the Rain?* What in the world did this movie have to do with *Shakespeare in Hollywood?* I made a note to familiarize myself with *Singin' in the Rain* as soon as possible, but I still pursued my investigation into the Reinhardt film.

Reinhardt's film proved useful because it provided direct source material for the characters of James Cagney and Joe E. Brown. In the film, Cagney does a magnificent job playing Bottom/Pyramus, and Joe E. Brown steals the show with his characterization of Flute/Thisbe. It was useful for me both to see and hear these two consummate actors in action. In the film they have very distinct vocal patterns: Cagney's trademark jaw thrust has been fodder for so many impersonators; it was refreshing to see the actual source. Similarly, I got a good sense of the lateralized sibilant "s" that is such an integral part of Joe E. Brown's delivery. In our production, James Manno as Cagney, and Jaike Foley-Schultz as Joe E. Brown relied extensively on the work that the actual Cagney and Brown did in the film.

The film also gave me the chance to view Dick Powell as Lysander. Previously, I had been familiar with Powell's work only as the heart-throb in numerous musicals, so I found that watching his approach to playing Lysander was highly instructive. Rob Fenton,

who played Powell in our production, did not have to rely as heavily on the actual Dick Powell: it was enough that he captured the essence of a 1930's leading man and the smooth, honey-toned, sounds of the suave crooner. Powell is not as recognizable a personage as either Cagney or Brown, who, especially in the case of the former, have achieved iconic status.

I fared less well with the movie's two women: Helena, played by Jean Muir and Hermia, played by Olivia De Havilland. In Ludwig's play Olivia Darnell is the Mid-Western girl next door type. She is a novice to Hollywood and eager to do a good job on this, her very first film. Outside of the similarity of their names, Darnell and De Havilland had very little in common. Olivia De Havilland, of British descent was well schooled in producing the sonorous tones and heightened enunciation that were such an integral part of the 1930's Hollywood classical actresses' arsenal. Like Olivia Darnell, De Havilland was fairly new to Hollywood; this was only her second film but she had a regality and elegance that did not appear to fit Ludwig's conception of Darnell, who was more of the Capraesque naïve ingenue so exquisitely portrayed by the likes of Claudette Colbert. I was even more baffled by Jean Muir, Reinhardt's choice for Helena, who had nothing whatsoever to do with her counterpart in our production. Ludwig's Lydia Lansing, who wins the part of Helena, only to shred the part into smithereens with her strident voice and Brooklyn accent, has none of the stately grace of Muir's performance in the film.

Enter *Singin' in the Rain*. As it turned out, Lydia Lansing is a direct descendant of Lina Lamont in that film. Lamont is a reigning queen of the formerly silent screen who is experiencing great difficulty in adjusting to the advent of talkies. In fact, most of *Singin'*

in the Rain's plot revolves around this problem. Her New York accent, poor diction and screeching, trumpet-toned voice find their direct parallels in Ludwig's Lydia Lansing. Down to the similarity in their names, these two brassy blonde bombshells are clearly cut from the same cloth. Whether BT derived this information from Ken Ludwig himself, with whom, I was under the impression he was in communication, or whether he drew the parallel without consultation, I cannot say with any certainty.

Also in *Singin' in the Rain*, Debbie Reynolds plays Kathy Selden, a fresh young hopeful angling for her first big break in Hollywood. When the film that Lamont is starring in is about to derail because of her voice, it is Reynolds's Kathy who modestly steps in to save the day by supplying her voice behind the scenes. BT and I agreed that if we had to find a proto-type for Ludwig's Olivia, Debbie Reynolds was a much better bet than Olivia De Havilland. Clearly, these two characters in MGM's classic supplied the missing links I had been looking for.

Still, Reinhardt's film gave me a good indication of Hollywood's mindset at the time. It's tagline, "three hundred years in the making!" and opening credits stating: "written by William Shakespeare [with] dialogue arranged for the screen by Charles Kenyon and Mary C. McCall Jr." were echoed in hilariously ironic tones in *Shakespeare in Hollywood*.

When the Warner brothers find out that Jack Warner has been pushed into making his film by his Brooklyn chorus-girl lover, Lydia Lansing, a wonderfully comic and tightly written scene ensues in which Jack has to mollify his brothers over what they consider to be a financially risky choice. Fearful that Shakespeare will prove to be box-office poison,

they suggest getting a re-write man. The youngest brother, Sam, even suggests getting “this Shakespeare guy to do it”. When he is informed that Shakespeare is dead, he answers: “Then he’ll cost us peanuts” (9). At the play’s start Louella Parsons, in speaking to the fans gathered at the premiere says: “We have a night of culture ahead of us, a movie by the Swan of Avon himself, Mr. William Shakespeare” and goes on to warn the crowd, not to “let that word ‘culture’ frighten you, my darlings, because the word on the movie is sock-o-entertainment from start to finish” (1). This mix of high and low culture, Shakespeare and Hollywood, is the very pivot on which the play spins into its crazy denouement. Researching Reinhardt’s film made me realize that the studios during the 1930’s evinced just as much trepidation over the idea of a classic being rendered on celluloid as did those in Ludwig’s play.

Ludwig, in his foreword to the play, says as much and goes on to tell us that many of these classics were made at the behest of the wives or girlfriends of reigning studio heads in order to add the lustrous *cachet* that acting in a classic brought to their careers. But Ludwig also states that even before the advent of sound, Shakespeare had already been translated to film. He mentions the collection of these endeavors on the DVD *Silent Shakespeare* (Milestone Film & Video) which includes a brief segment of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Upon viewing the DVD as part of my research, I discovered that this vignette was quite charming in its innocent ingeniousness. I knew that there would be no direct benefit as regards voice and speech, but, being a firm believer in leaving no stone unturned in trying to capture the essence of the characters and the period, I found this film

useful as well. In the same vein, I also listened to a lot of music that was popular in the 30's.

Shakespearean Verse and “Ludwigese”

As I read the play for the first time, it quickly became apparent that Ludwig had taken great liberty with much of Shakespeare's verse. While some of Oberon's larger speeches were taken directly from the original intact, there were just as many instances where Ludwig had lifted lines from one character and put them into the mouth of another. He manipulated the lines, tweaking them to suit the needs of the comic moment. He did not confine himself to merely using *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Verse was taken from several of Shakespeare's plays. I went through the script and noted each allusion by play, character, act, scene, and line number. I was then able to distribute these to the actors as a point of departure for their further research. This effort was probably unnecessary.

The entire notion of the play came about during a visit Ludwig made to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, which was built in the 1930's. While backstage in the corridors which connect that theatre with the Elizabethan Swan Theatre, and watching the actors in contemporary costume from the former cross paths with those in Elizabethan dress from the latter, Ludwig got the idea of a crazy collision of both worlds in one play. He was visiting with Simon Reade, who at that time was Literary Manager of the RSC. (The RSC commissioned but did not produce the play). In his journal for The Arena Stage production in Washington DC, Reade states:

Ken's passion for Shakespeare (his family, even his personal email address all seem to be named after one Shakespeare character or another) is also evident in his new play. Shakespeare in Hollywood is thus a deeply personal play as much as a popular play. And in the spirit with which I used to commission plays at the RSC it's also poetic and political and, let's not be afraid to say it, something of a mini-epic. Yet it's also got a screw loose, the playwright's having a ball. (*The Arena Stage Production Journal*)

Ludwig is indeed having a “ball”—borrowing and pasting verse together from many sources—but for the vocal coach trying to work from a discernible verse pattern, his metered “pastiche” is anything but a party. While many of the “bits” were extremely funny, they were often impossible to scan—not that scansion is the primary criteria on which Shakespeare should be played.

It has been my experience that for students new to Shakespeare, a too ardent metrical approach can often result in a classroom full of people adhering so strictly to the iambic pentameter that the result is a parroting parsimony in which all subtlety is lost. This can lead to a stilted approach that is counterproductive to what I believe is scansion's true value. When his metrical plan changes, Shakespeare gives us important clues as to the changes in a given character's thought, or feeling, processes. It is not so much the regularity, then, that is important, but the departure from that regularity which gives useful information regarding character motivation and plot advancement. Thus, the student should be aware of iambic pentameter if only to be able to recognize clues to performance when that scheme is broken.

Clearly, Ludwig's “passion for Shakespeare” was more that of passion for the characters than for their precise expression. Much of Ludwig's verse stumbled and BT,

concerned with speed and flow, made further cuts which made the lines even more club-footed. For example, here is Olivia Darnell's first speech as Hermia:

I do entreat your Grace to pardon me.
 I know not by what power I am made bold,
 Nor how it may concern my modesty
 In such a presence here to plead my thoughts,
 But I beseech your Grace that I may know
 The worst that may befall me in this case,
 If I refuse to wed Demetrius.
 Either to die the death? or to adjure
 Forever the society of men?
 Oh, so will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
 Ere I will yield my virgin patent up. (21-22)

Up through "If I refuse to wed Demetrius", this speech in blank verse is an exact replica of Hermia's first appeal to Duke Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act 1. Sc.1, lines 58-64). Hermia's iambic pentameter is strict. Shakespeare thus offers some very important clues to Hermia's character and situation: She gives vent to her feelings in a flowing, yet controlled manner; she is highly moved in this first outpouring of her feelings as she releases all that is pent up in a young girl's heart as regards matters of her particular love and her disdain for the mate her father has designated for her. Because of her state of mind, her speech could have been full of interruptions and inversions. Yet the perfect adherence to the iambs show us that despite her youth and ardor, she retains enough command of herself to know that she must speak in as measured a way as possible in order to make a convincing case to the Duke.

But at the end of the seventh line, Ludwig interpolates the Duke's response and gives these lines to Hermia as questions. The Duke's response begins with a trochaic inversion. Shakespeare's Theseus passes sentence on Hermia; his retort rings with the

finality of a steel door slammed shut upon her impassioned declaration. In Shakespeare's original, the first syllable in "either" is a sharp change in rhythm that jolts the listener from the iambic pentameter of Hermia's fluent plea. In Shakespeare, the Duke continues (again in blank verse) with a formal exhortation to Hermia to respect her father's wishes on this, to her, undesirable marriage that runs for another 12 lines. It ends with a comparison between the fecundity of the natural world and the healthy state of relinquishing maidenly virginity to holy matrimony in contrast with the dry austerity of life in the convent:

"But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness."

When Shakespeare's Hermia responds: "So will I grow, so live, so die..." her reply makes sense. But Ludwig rolls Hermia's plea, the Duke's ultimatum and Hermia's response to the Duke into one speech, respecting Shakespeare's lack of rhyme but rejecting Shakespeare's reason. Ludwig's interpolations negate Shakespeare's metrical and dramatic precision.

This type of pastiche, which I came to call "Ludwigese", was further complicated by BT's desire to keep the pace of the show tight. Here are the first seven lines (now reduced to a somewhat clumsy five and a half) of Hermia's speech as it was performed:

"I do entreat your grace to pardon me. I know not by what power I am made bold, nor how it may concern my modesty, that I may know the worst that may befall me in this case if I refuse to wed Demetrius."

This type of truncation was common, and, while the lines still made some sense, much of their juice was gone. BT employed a sort of "three-strikes-you're-out" policy. If the actor still had difficulty with a speech after several attempts, BT axed the line. It seemed that BT felt that Shakespeare used too many words, which created too many

unnecessary complications. I admired BT's ability to keep things running smoothly, even at the expense of some fairly broken-up poetry.

In our first meeting, BT asked how much experience I had with Shakespeare. Starting with my undergraduate training, I worked extensively with Shakespeare and other classic playwrights. I love teaching Shakespeare. When doing so, my goal has never been to treat the verse with kid gloves, but rather to make it the real and living thing I believe the playwright intended.

BT admitted that he had very little experience with Shakespeare. I perceived some trepidation there. He didn't know me, and I wanted to allay any fears he may have had over working with an "interfering" vocal coach, and even worse, one who was going to be pedantic about verse. He said that he did not want the actor's "intoning" Shakespeare. BT had done much successful musical theatre and had an impeccable sense of comic timing, but I think, to him, the Shakespearean verse in Ludwig's play tended to bog things down.

I think his fears may have been legitimate. Too often Shakespeare is approached with too much preciousness. Still, to me, BT seemed unaware of the musicality in Shakespeare. As it turned out, approximately fifty percent of the Shakespearean verse was cut, leaving only that which was absolutely essential to Ludwig's plot. Trying to work through the truncated lines made things more difficult, but I think the approach was perfectly in keeping with *Shakespeare in Hollywood*, which is, after all, more "Hollywood" than "Shakespeare."

Wrapping up the Research

I spent the summer involved in this multi-faceted research: hopping back and forth between the worlds of Shakespeare and Hollywood, Hollywood and Shakespeare. Several close and careful readings of the Arden Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its comprehensive introductory notes shed much light on the formal rhetorical schemes and lyricism that Shakespeare was employing in 1595 or 1596 when he wrote the play. My reading also gave me some useful information on the sources for Oberon and Puck (more of which I will go into in the sections covering the work sessions with the individual actors on these roles).

I have already discussed the search for the Hollywood counterparts for the characters in Ludwig's play. I did not yet have the list of movies that BT was to supply, but because I have always been an ardent fan of Hollywood in the 1930's and 40's, I had a fairly good grasp of the rhythm and tone of the dialogue and of the style of acting employed in many of the wonderful classics of the period.

Underpinning it all was Nan Withers-Wilson's *Vocal Direction for the Theatre*. I thought the information she gave on what constitutes the relationship between the director and the vocal coach, and the vocal coach's role as a member of the production team, and how tenuous that role and relationship can be, might prove useful. Withers-Wilson states: "All too frequently vocal directors are not brought into the production process until midway or toward the end of the rehearsal process when 'suddenly' the actors' voices present a problem for the director" (Withers-Wilson 55). While I knew that I was going to be present in the process from the very beginning, I kept this sentence in mind as a key to

misperceptions about the vocal coach that I may need to be aware of: forewarned was forearmed. While I had no idea of what BT's conception of my role would be, I would certainly try to be an organic and integral member of the team from the start. I was aware and prepared.

CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION

First Meeting

I met BT and assistant director Boone Hopkins for the first time at auditions. I was both anxious and excited about the meeting. I arrived twenty minutes early so that we could be introduced before the auditions began. I had read about, and heard from other vocal coaches, that they had had preliminary meetings with their directors, so I was already feeling a bit behind. As I rounded the corner of the performing arts center, I saw someone make a meteoric dash out of the building and rapidly make his way in the opposite direction across the park. He had a palpable aura of electricity around him, and I am not sure why, but my instincts told me this must be BT. As it would turn out, this first impression was very accurate, because BT was more a force than a person. His reserves of energy were incredible *and* infectious: I have never seen a cast work so hard to please their director. He had just taken work on a film in New York, so he was literally in constant motion, commuting between New York and Richmond. In this case, he was in town for the weekend only, and, when I had spotted him coming out of the theatre, he was running out for a quick bite to eat before auditions started. Therefore, our introduction lasted a mere few minutes, precious little time to ask the questions I had come in with.

This would be typical of our exchanges in the future. He impressed me at once as being no-nonsense, and he seemed to know exactly what he wanted for the show. In our

brief exchange, he dismissed the Reinhardt film and told me he had a list of movies that he would email to the production team. As I mentioned earlier, most important would be *Singin' in the Rain*. He felt this film captured the type of rhythm, pace and acting style he wanted for the play. The actors in *Singin' in the Rain* act *on* the lines, not *between* the lines, and he felt that our cast should learn how to integrate this methodology as soon as possible. I could sense his obvious passion for the period. He told me that he had the “Hollywood half of the play covered” but that he would need my help with the Shakespeare. Sensing his hasty “brass-tacks” approach, I rattled off my questions in rapid-fire fashion: Did he want Reinhardt using a German or Austrian dialect? BT answered that he wanted German with a Yiddish inflection. How true to life did he want Cagney, Powell, and Brown? He told me that Ludwig was not as interested in the authenticity of these characters as he was with the impersonations of easily recognizable icons like Tarzan and Groucho Marx. Since these latter two characters make very brief cameo appearances consisting of just a few lines in *Shakespeare in Hollywood*, I thought replication could be easily accomplished.

Then I put to him what I thought was the single most significant challenge I had foreseen thus far: How would we handle the three different levels of Shakespearean verse in the play? There was the verse as spoken by the Elizabethans Oberon and Puck; there was the verse spoken by Powell, Olivia and Lydia, (three Hollywood actors with various levels of aptitude); and then finally there was the verse which these same actors spoke when bewitched by the potion of the flower. I was most concerned about the transformation the characters undergo during their enchantment, especially in the case of

Lydia. Her running gag throughout the play is that her Shakespearean verse is tangled in the nets of a heavy Brooklyn accent. Should she lose this accent when smitten? Some change, or at least some minor adjustment seemed necessary since the characters, when possessed by the potion, are madly (and erroneously) in love, so the verse should spill from their hearts spontaneously. With Lydia, I feared we may lose her character if we lost her dialect. Worse yet, the audience might think the actress had dropped the dialect not out of choice but rather through ineptitude. Yet I feared that if she lost only part of the dialect, the effect may be muddy. BT answered that when the characters are spellbound, they should be more heightened but that the “the acting should lead them.” He was concerned first and foremost that the actors follow their objectives with integrity, and that they “say what they mean, and mean what they say.” Any further question seemed an impediment to that, so I didn’t press the issue. It would later come back to haunt us.

Although BT’s answers seemed a bit vague at our first meeting, I knew that things would become clearer as we really got rolling. I spent the remainder of the audition sitting beside Janet in a numb haze of semi-anxiety. As she and BT discussed the possible choices, I again marveled at her ability to hear each actor’s strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies so quickly and clearly. I didn’t feel as if my ear was trained enough, and, while she and BT continued discussing the possibilities, I sat there wondering how in the world I was going to pull this off.

Getting a Feel for the Director's Aesthetic Concerns

As it turned out, I wasn't needed for the call-backs. As soon as they were finished and I had a copy of the cast list in hand, I sent a quick note to BT with a few more questions. Janet was concerned that perhaps Oberon should have a more heightened feel, perhaps a slight British accent or at the very least sound Trans-Atlantic. The other characters in the play, especially Olivia, keep commenting on his sounding like "a foreigner" and naturally Janet felt his speech should be distinguishable from the others. Because BT had already expressed a fear of the actors intoning Shakespeare and thereby becoming phony, I was fairly certain he would not want to go British with Oberon. I was beginning to realize how a director interested in achieving a truthful performance from his actors may perceive the vocal coach as a liability: an awareness of the voice, let alone any manipulation of it, may be perceived by the director as an impediment to truth and naturalness. After all, as actors we are often told not to worry about how we sound, not to listen to ourselves, but simply to "be." Listening to yourself means that you are not pursuing your objectives, and this in turn will lead to a self-consciousness that is the vocal equivalent to practicing a monologue in front of the mirror. And yet, the actor must be heard, and the voice should have the power to convey a host of subtleties and nuances. How could I reconcile these differences?

I also began thinking of the many times had I been in the warm-up room of an audition in New York and watched the actors prepare. They would be doing all manner of physical exertions, even to the extent of strenuous push-ups, and yet I wouldn't hear so much as a peep. They would be as physically honed as if they were going to enter an

Olympic race, yet they never considered their voices. In their auditions, they may or may not have to exert themselves as physically as they had just done in the warm-up room, (chances were that at least one of their pieces was going to be done in a chair), but rest assured they *were* going to have to speak. I am not minimizing the importance of physical readiness, but it would trouble me that the stretches were not accompanied by any sound. When I discussed my observations with Janet, she offered the keen insight that they were probably afraid to make any noise. I think, to a great extent this is true. In any case, I did not want to scare BT off, so I tried to present any vocal suggestions in as innocuous a way as possible.

BT replied to my question as regards the heightening of Oberon's speech precisely as I had surmised: he definitely did not want him to sound British, although he would consider the use of Trans-Atlantic. He said that Oberon should simply be better spoken than the others and that he did not want him to seem "arch or having it be all about the accent—the dialect must be a grace note to the performance." Once again, I could sense his trepidation about my involvement with the show's vocal aspect. After all, we did not know one another, and neither of us had any awareness of the other's aesthetic. I would simply have to prove that I was not going to be pedantic about the language and this could only come about through experience with each other. He summarized by stating that the important qualities for Oberon is that he should be "grand," "regal" and "royal."

In this same note I wanted to re-confirm that he wanted German with a Yiddish inflection for Reinhardt. He said yes, but again he cautioned me that he did not want the accent to be too thick. When I found out that Cory Holovach had been cast, I had been

delighted because my colleague, Amanda Durst, said that she had taught Cory the German dialect in class and that he had it down pat. Therefore, I was dismayed to hear that BT thought one of Cory's chief difficulties in the call backs was that his accent was too thick. However, I consoled myself with the fact that it would only be a case of lightening up what was already there as opposed to having to start anew.

Finally, in my note I asked BT if he wanted the Brooklyn dialect for Lydia, and again he shied away from the dialect question. He wanted to wait until he became more familiar with her work. He feared that applying the dialect too soon would make her a caricature—an understandable concern, given the broadness of Lydia's material and the youth of the actor. This posed an interesting challenge: on the one hand I was in total agreement that the primary focus should be on making these characters truthful and yet, if an actor, especially a young one, does not integrate the dialect into her character from the start, she may later have difficulty in breaking the speech patterns she has adopted and the dialect may simply get in the way of an organic performance, all of which would prove more of an uphill struggle for the vocal coach. In any case, from this brief exchange, I attained at least the beginnings of an awareness of BT's concerns. While I certainly did not yet know all of what BT's aesthetic consisted of, these few simple questions had served as tentacles which garnered me a glimpse into his method of working, and had consolidated my initial impression that *I was going to have to earn his trust.*

First Read Through

BT burst through the gates leaving tradition behind, for in actuality this first meeting of the entire cast was not a read through at all. I must say this unorthodox approach gave me pause. I have often heard directors say that the only reason to have a first read through is to get to the second rehearsal. And often, the actors seem to adopt this attitude. To me the first read through is like a first date. There is a heightened awareness of every inflection and gesture. Every pore should be open to what is going to happen next. After all, this is the first time you are sitting across from those with whom you are about to engage in an intimate artistic relationship. And, as with a date that turns into a relationship, many of the impulses, associations and feelings that are found at this stage are the ones that will carry over into the long term. When directing, I would encourage the actors to sit facing each other, forward on their chairs, in a good neutral position with legs uncrossed and feet planted on the floor. I would ask that they maintain as much eye contact as possible. The idea is to move forward but not to rush—not to self indulge, but also not to gloss over. Just to be as open and available to the impulses that may arise from this magical first encounter. This is something I have always felt strongly about and that has served me very well in the past.

But with a show of the magnitude and a cast as large as that of *Shakespeare in Hollywood*, BT's way of working truly made sense. BT *would* have a read through: he simply did it in smaller and more manageable pieces. When about to embark upon a scene, he would have the actors read it through a couple of times before getting up onto their feet to be blocked. Later in the process, he would have the actors read through the entire play

before a run-through in order to establish a sense of truth and simplicity before getting up onto their feet. BT did not require a read through of the entire play to give him a sense of the preliminary arc of the show; a preliminary read through may not have been of any real benefit to the actors. BT simply didn't need the read through for this first rehearsal, because he already knew exactly where he wanted the show to land. This was just one of the many wonderful ways BT's rehearsal process led me to question my former prejudices and open me to new approaches.

In the first meeting, Ron Keller and Liz Hopper respectively, presented their set and costume designs. From these visuals, the enormosity of the show dawned on me in a way that it had not during the mere reading of the script. It was new and exciting for me to approach these two aspects through the eyes and ears of a vocal coach.

The set was going to represent a massive sound stage, and BT was going to make use of the entire space, even going so far as to put scaffolding up over the vomitoriums from which the technical crew, dressed in period costume, would operate follow spots. In production, depending on where one was sitting, these would obscure the view, but, much to my surprise, they actually acted as wonderful acoustical devices since they reverberated the sound quite nicely.

Hodges Theatre is notorious for its acoustic challenges, and the show prior to this one, *Wait Until Dark*, had made sensible use of the space by portioning off a small part of it to represent that show's requisite kitchen interior. That set had been a semi circle with high walls. The arrangement effectively served as a sort of mini amphitheatre for the actors, so that, even when they were facing upstage, their voices bounced back to the

audience from all of the hard surfaces of that neat little kitchen. But there were no faux brick walls, kitchen cabinets or counters in *Shakespeare in Hollywood*. In fact there was nothing but fantasy here, and that fantasy required, as fantasy will, a huge, open space with the playing areas demarcated by small wagons that were going to be rolled on and off stage during the performance. For Oberon's entrance, he was even supposed to swing in from a rope (an idea that was later scrapped). In addition, there was going to be one large central unit with many stairs upon which the actors would be scampering up and down. How all of this translated to my vocal plan was that I knew there was not a minute to waste in getting the actors to produce as much volume as possible without sacrificing truth: they were really going to have to pump hard to compete with the visual extravaganza and not be swallowed up by the vast open space. In addition, they were going to have to be heard through what was more and more looking to be quite a physically challenging show.

We also discussed lighting and the possible use of microphones for certain effects, as when Louella speaks at the premiere of Reinhardt's movie and when Puck plays tricks on the other characters. Spotlights were going to be used for some of the speeches. I supported this idea because these lights create a sharp point of focus and the darkness around the actor acts as a sort of imaginary wall, thereby making it easier to hear them sans any visual distractions.

Liz's costumes were marvelous: the vocal considerations here would be in terms of the women wearing heels. Heels alter the actor's alignment that often leads to a higher, thinner sounding voice, not to mention the tendency for the actor to lock her knees in heels, thereby cutting off the rooted-ness of her breath. Fortunately, the 30's style of shoe

has a thick heel and platform so that the actor can feel at least a little more grounded than she would in, say, a 1950's style spike heel. Looking at the costume renderings also reminded me that I must be aware of the actor's posture: "contemporary casual," *i.e.* neck forward or any type of slouching, would not do for Hollywood stars with the elegant and upright carriage of the 1930's.

After taking in all of the production values and notating their attendant challenges in terms of vocal adjustments, I listened to BT's speech to the actors regarding some fundamentals in their approach the play. He spoke about the play's language and style and how foreign these were to the modern audience, and he likened the play to a piece of music, with just as definite and demanding a rhythm. By now the actors had seen the films on BT's list, and he asked them what qualities they had found therein. He stressed the direct and simple manner the characters in these films employ to achieve their ends and pointed out how they lead with the heart: he said "charm is the lost child of the 21st Century," and added that he wanted to recover that lost charm in this play. The rest of the speech consisted of reviewing fundamentals such as playing for truth, outlining operatives and intentions, keeping the stakes high and having a sharpness of attack. He stressed that Ludwig's characters should never slide into their dialogue. He also reminded the actors that they must earn their pauses and warned them against paraphrasing and against playing for laughs. He told them to be clear about their given circumstances and to investigate their character's histories via what they themselves say and what others say about them. He reminded them of the importance of listening to each other and making the characters they are speaking to more important than themselves. He concluded by giving the actors some

advice about keeping a professional work ethic, saying that if they had a complaint to come to either him or to assistant director Boone Hopkins directly.

Then he dropped a significant bomb: “In this process, there are only three people you will listen to: David, Patty and myself.” (Faculty members David Leong and Patty D’Beck were, respectively, the producer and choreographer for the show). Janet, who had come to the meeting and was sitting beside me, let out an audible gasp. With a single stroke, BT had wrested from me any potential authority I might have with the actors: How was I going to get them to listen to anything I would have to offer? Ironically, BT’s statement had robbed the vocal coach of her “voice” in this production.

Damage Control

I was seriously concerned about BT’s statement. Not only did I feel as if my role in the rehearsal process would be made superfluous, but I had an even greater fear that I would lose the respect from those members of the cast who were also my students. I had worked hard to achieve this respect and had had great success in class. I needed to act fast to curtail any trickle down effect from this potentially damaging dismissal.

In our weekly voice and speech meeting, Janet and I had discussed the risks involved in bringing in guest directors whose aesthetic and method of working we can never be certain of beforehand. I was discovering the ramifications of such a risk first hand, and I had to look for an opportunity to regain the status BT’s remark had cost me. In the end, Janet agreed that BT and I should meet as soon as possible to lay down a plan for working together so as to avoid misunderstandings later. If BT thought that the vocal coach

was an unnecessary appendage, then my job would be to show him that it was not, and the only way to do that was to earn his trust.

Despite having trepidation about how BT perceived my role in the rehearsal process, I was glad to see that at least he did have the desire to turn the production into an educational experience—he was approaching the actors as students as opposed to mere pawns assembled to realize his directorial concepts. BT had outlined how he would rehearse: he would work the scenes in chronological order; the actors would read through each scene a couple of times, and then they would get up onto their feet to be blocked (he had the show pre-blocked). They would rehearse the scene once—when they re-visited the scene, they were expected to be off book. This method seemed to be rather peremptory, and it was certainly opposed to how I like to work, which is to keep the book in hand as long as possible (to avoid setting patterns that may be more difficult to break later), and to allow the blocking to manifest itself in a more organic fashion via the actor's impulses. To me, the blocking and lines are a logical, organic manifestation and extension of character's motivation. If the character knows what she wants, she will move to where she needs to be in order to get it. Furthermore, her words will become necessary to reach that goal. A strange schism occurs when the lines are not married to physical motivation.

In the voice meeting, many of my colleagues agreed with me, and Janet shared my concerns about actors prematurely locking into speech patterns that would be difficult to break later on. However, I looked on the bright side and said that since *Shakespeare in Hollywood* was a farce with a lot of physical business, getting off book early might liberate the actors to pursue active physical choices. In any case, the students should get used to

working in as wide a variety of ways as possible since this is what would be expected of them in the market place.

With all these thoughts in mind, I tracked BT down for a meeting, to which he reluctantly agreed. He hesitated until I asked him a specific question: how would he like me to proceed in giving the actors their notes? Would he like me to give them directly to the actors, or would he prefer that I give them to him first?

I think bringing up a specific issue did the trick here. I had to keep in mind that BT, as director, was preoccupied with a large variety of issues, and unless I brought up a concrete and tangible “problem” he could not be expected to think of a solution.

I continued with a brief list of additional “protocol issues:” Did he want me to lead a warm-up before each rehearsal, or would he prefer one of the company members to do so? Would he like me to attend every rehearsal? How did he want me to proceed for the individual sessions with the actors? Janet had said the ideal would be to work with the actors while they were waiting to work their scenes, and then go in to watch the result—an impossibility, at least in the beginning stages, since BT adhered to such a strictly segmented schedule that no actors were ever left waiting in the hall. His organization was impressive and it did wonders for the actor’s morale because they never felt their time was wasted. However, it was clear to me that if I wanted to work with them, I would have to set up individual sessions outside of the evening rehearsal period.

Unfortunately, the meeting never really materialized. BT was held over in a meeting with the lighting design team. I tried to take in what was said, to see if any of it would translate over into voice work. By the time the meeting finished, we had a scant five

minutes before rehearsal was to begin. BT is fairly adept at multi-tasking and because he was working on the film in New York, his cell phone was almost always on. He now told me to “keep talking—I’m listening” while he checked his messages. Consequently, I received no definitive answers to any of my questions. As we walked into rehearsal, I had the distinct feeling that my presence in the process was merely being tolerated because I had been assigned to it.

Diving Into Rehearsals

At the first rehearsal I learned that BT was not averse to giving line readings and knew exactly where he wanted the actors to move, even leading them by the arm if needed. His approach seemed very inorganic to me and in direct contradiction to what he had previously said about “leading from the heart.” However, the actors seemed to feel comfortable with him and it was clear they trusted him completely. They respected his decisiveness and the fact that he had an excellent eye and ear. The latter would make all the difference in the world for me.

My work was made much easier by the fact that BT could really hear the score of the show and that we both were essentially hearing the same things. I found this out during the break when, much to my surprise, he came over to consult with me about my notes thus far. He rattled off what he saw as potential problem spots and, much to my delight I had only to go down my list checking each one off, since I had already heard and made a note of all of them. I found this very encouraging and began to think that perhaps my ear would be good enough after all.

BT was pleased that we were on the same page as regards what we had heard, and just as I congratulated myself on perhaps having earned the beginning glimmers of trust from BT, he sent yet another zinger my way. He said that we could set up a working relationship together via the “good cop/bad cop” model. He would be good cop. I almost laughed when he said it—it was so opposed to who I am as a person and the way in which I work. I really believe a nurturing environment is a flourishing environment. Surely my students would think I had gone mad (if they even believed it). On the one hand I could see BT’s logic: as their leader, he could maintain the trust, good will and camaraderie of the cast while I did the grilling and drilling as a technician. But surely there must be a better way to accomplish what we needed to do. (It made me more anxious than ever to rectify any vocal issues early on lest the “bad cop” turn into the “fall guy”). I reflected upon my own acting training in which this division of good cop/bad cop had been evident: the movement teachers had been bad cops, the voice teachers had been good cops, and the acting teachers a combination of the two. However, try as I might, I knew I would never succeed at being the bad cop: the entire notion ran counter to my philosophy of teaching and my current rapport with the students. I told BT I would get the work done—as a good cop.

On Track At Last?

After these rather inauspicious beginnings, the process began to stabilize somewhat. Apparently Janet had spoken to BT, and he told her that the remark he had made at the first cast meeting had been merely an oversight. Unintentional as it was, the

ramifications were beginning to show since I was having difficulty getting the cast to listen to any of my notes or to schedule work sessions with them. What was needed was the “go-ahead” from the commander in chief. Thankfully, BT wrote a formal announcement that Boone read to the cast (BT was absent on that day) informing them that I would be working with them on vocal issues. This was an immense relief to me, and I was very grateful to BT for taking the time to do this.

By now I knew that BT considered the vocal coach a “luxury.” He had told me that in his experience, the vocal coach had usually been present at the start of rehearsals and then again at the end. In the interim, he or she had only been called upon for emergencies. This “vocal coach as trouble-shooter” reinforced what Nan Withers-Wilson had said in her book. I told BT that prevention was the best cure. Lest he have any residual qualms, I also assured him that I was there to reinforce his direction. I knew that many directors fear the vocal coach may start directing the actors. This is indeed a very tricky management of territory.

Working out issues regarding vocal production such as lack of breath support, tongue, neck and throat tension, problems with volume, clarity and diction and special skills like dialects or even extreme voices (screaming), are all easily understood as areas reserved for the vocal coach. Not as easily understood, are times when the vocal coach must aid the actor in determining operative words and inflection, as these begin to impinge on the acting choices that the director and actors have found in rehearsal. And yet finding the meaning of lines is inextricably linked to voice work: the voice cannot be separated from the acting. This thin line has to be trod with care. I emphasize this fine distinction

because I really do believe, since BT so closely controlled the way he wanted the show to materialize, that my impingement on his territory was one of his chief initial fears. I assured him that if a contradiction came up when I worked with the actors, we would simply table it and refer it to him. But, first I would have to procure these work sessions and this, too, took some doing.

I was anxious because it had been apparent from the outset that Cory (Reinhardt) was having some difficulty. He was throaty, he was speaking too rapidly and he was swallowing medial and final consonants. Cory has a wonderful singing voice and I had heard glimmers of a higher register so it was just a matter of accessing that. BT thought that the best approach was to secure a model for his character and to let him sit with the materials before beginning any individual work sessions. I think this wasted valuable time. As I have mentioned, BT believed that Reinhardt was simply a reworking of Bela Zangler, played by Bruce Adler, in the musical *Crazy For You*. I found that the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey had done the show before it went to Broadway and that a video copy had been aired on WNET in New York. I contacted WNET but they no longer had a copy. (I have since discovered that it has become available through Great Performances, PBS Online). Thus, we had to content ourselves with the Broadway cast recording. I had misgivings about this because cast recordings do not usually include any prolonged segments of dialogue. The recording was ordered, and, when it finally did arrive, it proved useless for our purposes. In the meantime I had given Cory a list of the vowel and consonant changes for the German dialect and a copy of David Alan Stern's German

Dialect CD. I checked to see if he was marking the changes in his script and was disappointed to find that as of October 11, he still had not done so.

By now, rehearsals were well under way. BT had divided the play into scenes with catchy titles. We were making our way through the show chronologically, in the manner I have mentioned earlier. I was taking notes as we went along, and, after a week or so, I had already heard enough to know what needed to be worked on vocally. I had also been leading warm ups. BT had been resistant to the idea, saying that “professionals come to rehearsal ready to go.” While I considered our cast completely professional in aspiration, I reminded him that a) they were students and b) even professionals can benefit by a group warm up so as to achieve a unified focus. I think BT came to appreciate the warm ups when he saw how beneficial they proved in the sense of application to the timing, rhythm and pace that he wanted for the show. I would accelerate the warm up, making each step more specific and energized, and always we would end with tossing “hey” to each other, at random, around the circle. I had told the actors that the play’s dialogue was like a ball that had to be kept in the air at all times. The serve had to be energized and have a strong arc so that the recipient had something equally strong to serve back. And each actor had to be grounded and ready for the reception and consequent release. Not only did the exercise get them activated to meet the demands of the show’s dialogue, it also served as a litmus test for me to see who was dropping the ball, so to speak. There was no half-way to this approach: if someone had their knees locked (as opposed to being ready on the balls of their feet), or was a hair slow on the response, or passed the ball with a meager swat from the elbow down, it was insufficient, and, ironically enough, these were the very actors who

were also not breathing, sending, or receiving with vigor in their scenes. But as we continued every single actor improved. The actors loved the warm-up, and when it came time in the process to turn the warm-up over to one of the cast members, I was pleased to see they still used it.

We were now at a place where enough scenes were scheduled so that some of the actors had some down time before going on. I told BT that at this point I could best serve the show by meeting with the actors individually, and he agreed. He told me to pull the actors as needed, and, since we were rehearsing in Shafer St. Playhouse, we could work on the dialogue in my office downstairs. Thus, we set up a nifty system in which I notified Hope Bowman, the stage manager, that I was going down to work with an actor and she would send Eric Arnold, the assistant stage manager, to fetch us a few minutes before the actor was due back upstairs. Thus, I was finally able to implement Janet's idea of working with the actor on his or her dialogue and then going in to see the application of what we had just gone over.

For some of the actors these "mini" sessions proved enough, but eventually I needed longer sessions with some of the others. BT was now completely amenable to the idea, and we would have post-rehearsal discussions on who was next on what he now jokingly referred to as my "hit list." Things had certainly come a long way, and I felt that I had finally earned his trust. Now I will break with this narrative to go into a bit more detail on how these individual sessions played out.

Individual Sessions

Cory Holovach (Max Reinhardt)

Cory was to prove our biggest challenge. I have already mentioned how BT thought Cory needed only a model to lock into in order to be on his way. This futile search for a model continued all the way to October 10, (rehearsals had started September 20), when I received a frantic message from Boone, assistant to the director, to find something—anything, for Cory to lock into. (We were still waiting on the *Crazy For You* recording that had been ordered). Before rehearsal that evening, I hastily cobbled together some samples from the International Dialects of English Archive website and put these on CD for Cory. I was troubled because most of these were either too “northern” or else the dialect was too slight. I then remembered an old cassette that a friend had given to me of Percy Adlon’s narration of his film *Out of Rosenheim (Bagdad Café)* which had aired on WNPR. Adlon, who hails from Bavaria, had the whimsical quality and warmer, folksier tones that I was looking for. I thought this might help Cory get out of the darker, throaty vocal pattern he was using.

Cory’s dialect was actually quite good (we were still working on consistency), but it was too coolly urbane and monotonic. He was sounding more like a Nazi general than a Jewish film director. Part of Cory’s difficulty was that he was taking his research on Reinhardt too literally. He had read that Reinhardt was a suave and sophisticated impresario, and it was this image of elegance that Cory had latched onto. I did not want to deny Cory’s approach—researching this historical figure was one of the areas in which he

seemed to have attacked the work with zest. But Ludwig's conception of Reinhardt was based more on the stereotype of the beleaguered (Jewish) film producer/director, like the already mentioned Bela Zangler or, perhaps, even Bialystock (although it's a different accent) in *The Producers*.

I had been working hard with Cory to capture the Yiddish lilt which consisted of simply adhering to rising inflections on line endings. Naturally we didn't want this on every line—that would be deadly. But certainly the inflections were built into lines like “And for this I have left my homeland. True, alternative is the Nazis, but is very close race” (2). I thought that getting him into his body would help, so I had him physically shrug his shoulders on the lines. Then we could take away the actual shrug, or simply use it to punctuate certain lines. It was my hope that the “ghost” of the shrug we found physically, would linger vocally. It didn't. I then used the “negative practice” approach by having him say the line twice, once with the rising inflection and once without. He simply could not hear the difference. This surprised me, since he is a trained singer and has a good ear for music. The other obstacle here was that he was not using the comic breath to guide him in setting up punch lines, or in this case the “punch” within the line. Had he swung up to and suspended on “Nazis,” he could have released and closed in for the zinger on, “but is very close race.” It's a simple swing up, suspend, and then down. But I came to find that for Cory, the simpler the approach the better. For example, in the same monologue he had the line “...Hollywood: land of glamour and gluttony, palm trees and poodles, seqvins [*sic*] and sin” (2). I explained that each of these three elements was a slightly different pearl, each of which needed to be polished and then strung together quickly. But this approach

only aggravated his tendency toward choppiness and prevented him from driving the lines forward. Eventually, BT cut the lines altogether.

There were three major challenges at play here: Cory has a rich, resonant voice (cello) which tends to get muffled in a way that, say, a higher pitched (trumpet) voice does not. On top of his timbre we had the German dialect. And on top of *this*, BT had blocked Cory in such a way that most of his lines were said facing upstage. I knew that BT was staging Reinhardt as “the director framing his shots from his chair downstage,” but these were three major obstacles against intelligibility that had to be successfully overcome. We eventually lightened up the dialect and BT did some re-staging.

Cory had three large monologues, one near the top of the show, the second at the top of Act 2, and one that served as the show’s epilogue. In our sessions we concentrated mostly on making these as simple and as direct as possible. I still tried to continue in having him focus on clarity of transitions but not at the expense of the overall arc. He would usually start too high in pitch, leaving himself with no place to go later in the speech. I knew BT wanted him to avoid hysteria, but he seemed to rely upon it as his default.

There was also concern about his dialogue scenes. I believe that many of his issues stemmed from his singer’s instinct, which would surface not only in the delivery of his lines, (very sing-song) but also in a tendency not to listen to his scene partners as if his lines were a recitative awaiting the conductor’s cue.

BT couldn’t understand why all of the work I had done with Cory hadn’t produced better results. However, after one particularly difficult session in which he worked

extensively on Reinhardt's scenes, BT finally understood. He said he felt as if he was trying to mold jell-o, and every time he went to lift the mold, the entire edifice would tumble back down: nothing stuck, and we were left with a formless mass. While I shared the same frustration as regards Cory's inability to make anything we found repeatable, I felt BT's assessment was rather harsh and told BT that Cory had confessed in our last session that he felt overwhelmed and was losing trust in the process.

BT had been very tough on Cory throughout, and he felt that Cory was simply refusing to work. I tended to think that fear, and not obstinacy was the issue here, although in truth, it was probably a combination of the two: the former causing the latter. Suddenly, I remembered BT's suggestion for my playing bad cop to his good cop. The actual scenario was more like a mom, a dad and a recalcitrant teenager, (with mom on defense). However, while mom and dad might disagree like crazy, to the child they must speak with one voice. Similarly, although I may have disagreed with BT behind closed doors, in my meetings with Cory, I needed to support BT's agenda. Therefore, when Cory complained to me that he felt BT was constantly changing his mind about what he wanted for the character, while I, too, was having considerable doubts and frustrations, I knew better than to give in to the temptation to sympathize with Cory. I would not undermine BT's authority and create an unhealthy divisiveness, so I remained gentle, yet firm, and tried to keep things as simple as I could for Cory. When he said: "I feel as if I am getting notes from ten different people," I countered with, "Who are the other eight?" And back to work we went.

At BT's request we had been working on intentions. When I asked Cory for his action verb for beginning the first monologue in which he has to lay out the story, he replied "to be like the narrator in *Our Town*." This was definitely an inactive choice. I got him onto his feet to find something more active.

I have found that these action verbs are best found not in the head, while seated in a chair, but in the body. While the actor is casting about for the appropriate verb, he is moving, his hands are gesturing—he is running through and discarding possibilities out loud until he finds the right one. (It is like tipping one of those boards in which you are trying to get the ball to slip into the appropriate slot. When you have found the right maneuver, there is that satisfying, resounding click). In the meantime, many of the physical gestures that come up in the process of finding the precise word can later be used for the character—this is because the actor has already articulated with his body what he cannot yet articulate with words.

I have spent more time describing my sessions with Cory than I will with the remainder of the ensemble, because, a) my process with him posed some of the largest challenges; b) my work with Cory shows how sometimes a vocal coach may be requested to do double duty as an acting coach; and c) it offers some further insight on the dynamics of the director-vocal coach relationship and the importance (despite resistance or conflicting viewpoints) of the vocal coach and director remaining a unified and cohesive duo.

As we delved further into rehearsals, Cory showed some improvement, but it was always "one step forward, three steps back." Then, in dress rehearsals, the work suddenly

came together. Once he donned the requisite jodhpurs and riding boots of the 1930's film director, he *became* Max Reinhardt. Although I know BT was only moderately satisfied, I was pleased with how far Cory had come, and the audience seemed to find him charming. Some actors work best from the outside in, and clearly, once Cory stepped into costume, he transformed in a way he had not through all of our prodding. Note for self: next time find the jodhpurs early.

Chris Evans (Oberon)

In my first meeting with Chris we basically went over where in the verse Ludwig departed from Shakespeare: proper pronunciations (*e.g.* Niobe) and mythological allusions (Niobe again). He was concerned about scansion, and I told him to keep aware of it without becoming a slave to it. He mentioned that he wanted to find where Oberon "lives" in his body. I took this as a prime opportunity to solve a dilemma that had already come up. In my initial observation of Chris, I noted that he had a very contemporary, casual posture (neck forward, shoulders turned inward) which would stand in the way of the regality needed for Oberon. BT had agreed that he wanted Oberon regal, but at the same time he was loath to tamper with the wonderful simplicity and sweet sincerity Chris had found, especially in his scenes with Maddie (Olivia). He feared that imposing any restrictions on the way that Chris was carrying himself might compromise this naturalness. So I asked Chris: With what part of his body did he think Oberon should *lead* with? (I was beginning to realize at this point that I was often approaching the voice via the body and the breath first). He answered that, when he had worked on Oberon in scene class, he had

led with the hips. But Ludwig's Oberon was not as overtly sensual as Shakespeare's. While he remained a commanding presence who would not suffer fools gladly, Ludwig's Oberon had an almost foolish naivety himself, especially when he found he was falling in love with the mortal Olivia. Chris was savvy enough to pick up on this difference, so he answered that Oberon led with the heart. Great! I pounced on this: If he led with the heart, this meant he had to keep his chest open and shoulders back. Problem solved.

I had also noted that Chris had a lot of neck and throat tension (pushing); he could not sustain his breath to the ends of lines, which forced him into his vocal fry. In addition, he was playing qualities instead of pursuing objectives. I felt that this last problem was causing the other two. When Chris was unsure of what his character wanted, he resorted to bluster. Breathless, blind rage was his default. Interestingly enough, the more we worked on specificity of objectives and operative words, the fuller his breath became. Once he knew what he was saying and why, he dropped the breath in fully; much of his tongue and throat tension diminished, and he had ample breath to carry him through to the ends of the lines.

An example of Chris's improvement came near the end of Act 2, when the ramifications of Puck's mixing up the flowers had resulted in mass chaos. With the entire cast on stage, the ensuing pandemonium had reached a deafening *fortissimo*: Oberon had to run in and top everyone with his "STOP!" He then had a series of rhymed couplets in which he told Puck what needed to be done to rectify the damage. This was a situation in which Chris could easily revert to his default, resulting in a frantic mish-mash that would merely add to the confusion. However, once I told him that each of the couplets, regardless

of haste, was a *specific instruction* that he needed to get across to Puck, he maintained the pace without sacrificing clarity or volume.

Despite a limited and fairly ravaged instrument (I believe he has had vocal nodules in the past) Chris has wonderful acting instincts which compensate for this vocal deficiency. He took my notes in well and was adept at internalizing and repeating what we had worked on. However, because his voice tired easily, there were several rehearsals in which he did not pursue what we had worked on because he was resting his voice. Toward the end of the rehearsal period, Chris's periods of vocal rest became more frequent. These caused me some concern because I could not accurately gauge whether or not we still needed to work on certain sections. He kept assuring me that he would be fine. Certainly exhaustion could not be used as an excuse for mispronunciations, so I gave him notes on these (many times the same note) since he was still carrying some residual regionalisms that made Oberon sound colloquial at times. Because he was a fourth year student with extensive experience on the main-stage, I took on faith his assurances to me that he "would get there." He did. In the end, Chris may have been dropping his breath in, but he had left me holding *mine*.

Monica Dionysiou (Puck)

Monica had some difficulty with the verse, as well she might. Puck is not an easy role in either Shakespeare or Ludwig. I had her write out the score in her own words. "Nicely done, Mad Spirit" (51) became "I rock!" This emendation got her to stop treating the verse in an idealized fashion and made her attack it more directly.

With lines that were not in verse and were simply conversational, we played the “what’s the line” game. Whenever I felt Monica was imposing unnecessary complications to the line, I asked her “what’s the line?” (as if I had forgotten it) and she would invariably answer in a straightforward way. I found this exercise useful with all of the actors in the cast because it got them out of playing their roles as opposed to simply being themselves.

In a similar vein, BT felt that Monica was being too arch. She was playing the idea of Puck as a mischievous imp as opposed to playing a real person. BT felt that Puck’s having fun should be the by-product of her actions. She was getting lost in the fun rather than driving forward with the action. So establishing a sense of truth with the character was of paramount importance, and the more quickly we did this with Monica, the better. If she developed a pattern early, she was more likely than most to be unable to break it.

Monica also had a tendency to chop the lines into segments, so I kept reminding her to be aware of the through-line in what she was saying. Because Puck has a lot of rhymed couplets, she could easily succumb to a monotonous sing song. I gave her the image of driving an arrow through a wave machine. The more she simplified, the easier it was for her to drive the lines forward.

In one of our sessions, we went over operative words and this exercise seemed to open a brand new door for her. Take the moment when Puck was telling Oberon about a double date she had arranged for the two of them: “So: guess what? I got us two girls for the party!” (41) Why was she emphasizing the word, “two,” I asked her, “as opposed to one girl each?” She got it. Again, it was a matter of not imposing upon the lines, but merely saying them. In real life, we instinctively stress what needs to be stressed to get our

points across, and once she understood this concept, she was well on her way to a more truthful embodiment of the character. This breakthrough occurred on September 26, and in that evening's rehearsal she was operating the words we had worked on quite well. BT was very pleased with the adjustments.

The largest challenges by far were Puck's incantations. These are in trochaic meter, and, while the rhyme must be obeyed, enslavement to it can quickly become deadly. Ludwig used some of Oberon's lines from *Dream* (Act 2, Sc.2), for one of Puck's incantations:

...Now upon thy eyes I throw
 All the power this charm doth owe.
 What thou seest [*sic*] when thou dost wake,
 Do it for thy true love take.
 Now I go and find the girl
 To tug the heart of snoring churl... (51)

The last two lines, of course, are Ludwig's fabrication, but in these and the several following, he continued the trochaic scheme. The meter should not be fought against here: the verse is *supposed* to be unusual. When Shakespeare departs from the iambic pentameter, he is pointing out that something extraordinary is happening. Bizarre creatures from an ethereal world casting spells—this is highly strange stuff, and the unusual meter reflects, even creates, the strangeness. Monica was spinning herself into a sing song trap because she was playing the quality rather than the action. She was coloring the word “churl,” for instance, with a little snarl. When I asked her why, she immediately realized that she was “commenting” on the word. (She had by now developed a strong awareness of her habitual default and had become quite adept at self-correction). I had her sharpen her

choice of action. She was using “to cast a spell” which was too general. Instead I had her use “to give specific instructions” (to the sleeping Powell). So, once again, it was a matter of simplification and *using the language* to propel her through the actions. For Monica, simplification was everything, and her best moments were those in which she let her own distinct personality (she was an ebullient and enthusiastic team player) shine through the role.

Madolyn Smeltzer (Olivia Darnell)

The first two things Maddie and I worked on were volume and breath. Her breathing was thoracic, and she had virtually no diaphragmatic engagement whatsoever. Thus, it appeared that she was acting from the waist up and leaning forward to compensate for her lack of power. Also contributing to this bifurcation was the fact that she kept her feet very close together and her knees locked. I tried to get her to take a wider stance and to unlock her knees. We did some Kabuki squats and threw “hey” back and forth.

She was very self conscious about the exercises and said that they made her feel “manly.” This was very interesting to me, as I have noticed that many female actors her age (sophomore level) share this fear of engaging their pelvis and hips. Thus I told her to watch Rebekah Bayles (a junior), who was playing Lydia Lansing, because she was breathing through the hips with ease. I knew through my own experience on stage that some of my best leaning opportunities came through close observance of those actors more seasoned than myself, and I was hoping Maddie could benefit in the same way.

I was especially anxious to get the lower half of her body, and along with it, the lower half of her vocal range, activated because the literal success of a critical comic moment in the play depended upon it. When Olivia awakens under the enchantment of the flower, she has to do a one-hundred and eighty degree turn, from eager ingénue to voracious tigress, and it has to happen mid line: “What angel wakes me from my—(*Ping!*) I pray thee, gentle actor, sing again! Your voice transports me to another world!” (56). Two hilarious pages of dialogue ensue, in which the hapless Joe E. Brown tries to fend off the amorous advances made by the now love-crazed, thoroughly bewitched (and bewitching) Olivia. I was nervous because BT said this scene would be underscored by jungle drum beats and wild lighting, so Maddie had to be as large vocally and as deeply committed as possible. Although she had begun to access a portion of her lower vocal range, she was still playing at the emotions rather than fulfilling them. We had had a session in which we went from the animal (tiger) up to human form. I went so far as to have the two of us on hands and knees growling and snarling, hoping to loosen her up. Indeed, she did show a bit of improvement—but just a bit. I saw momentary glimmers, but she was simply too inhibited for these to ingrain themselves in any lasting manner.

In addition to volume, breath and physical commitment we also worked on enunciation. We had the Shakespearean verse to contend with, and while the script indicates that Olivia is a novice to Hollywood, BT had wanted her to sound like a conservatory-trained actress of the 1930's. This was another area where the role was not in sync with where Maddie was currently residing in her training. She was a sophomore and had not yet learned Career Speech, let alone studied Shakespeare. Approaching the verse

terrified her, and, while she eventually overcame her initial dread, we still had to work hard through her regionalisms (mostly, flat A's and hard R's) and to make clear those medial and final consonants which she had a tendency of losing. I also spent several sessions on helping her attain appropriate ladder builds. For example: when Olivia auditions for Reinhardt, Ludwig gives her Hermia's speech to Lysander from Act 1, Scene 1 of *Dream*:

I swear to thee by Cupid's bow,
By his best arrow with the golden head,
By the simplicity of Venus's doves,
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves... (22)

Because the last three lines begin in the same way (anaphora), it is imperative that each one tops the last. Maddie had a strong tendency toward falling inflections, which in this case would be deadly, not only to the ear, but because it made it that much harder for her to rise to the next line. We played imaginary ball, tossing the lines to each other, and I would purposely drop mine down, so that she could achieve a kinesthetic awareness of what it was like to have to retrieve a line that was dead in the mud. She said she felt the difference, and she worked hard on the builds, but they always read as imposed from without rather than produced from within her performance.

Next to Cory, Maddie was my biggest challenge. My work with her had been further complicated by the fact that (unlike Cory), BT rarely gave her any notes, since he was afraid these would scare her off. I believe, in the end, we may actually have done her a disservice by this, because it deprived her of the type of growth the other cast members experienced.

Rob Fenton (Dick Powell)

Rob, like Maddie, was a sophomore; thus he had many of the same technical issues: unclear articulation, especially on medial and final consonants; residual regionalisms; clavicular breathing; and a tendency to close off the upper part of his body (neck forward and shoulders rounded inward).

Because in the 1930's Powell had been a heart-throb who appeared to glide through life with a certain amount of *élan*, I wanted Rob to work on his carriage to fit this suave character. I also wanted to work on keeping him upright because the further his neck was extended forward, the more soft spoken he became.

Rob was very eager and willing and said that he was practicing this upright openness as he went about his daily life on campus, but as soon as he stepped into a scene, it dissipated rather quickly. (His Powell had more boyish charm than smooth *élan*). I knew that Rob had a very rich instrument because when he was properly aligned and his breath was dropped in, I had heard the rich sounds that he could produce. It was just a matter of accessing them. In our sessions, then, I concentrated on ensuring that he stayed "on voice." Whenever he started to get breathy, we would stop, realign, drop the breath into his diaphragm and begin again. On stage, however, when he was caught up in "acting" the moment, in his desire to appear truthful, he would again pull back on his voice to the point of incomprehensibility. It was almost as if he were afraid of the power of simply being himself.

His fear of not appearing truthful was evident in the work we did on speech as well. Because he was unused to articulating his consonants, it felt phony to him when he did so.

I would tell him to over-articulate and reminded him that BT could always pull it back if it was too much. Over-articulation for Rob was just enough for the rest of us to be able to understand him.

I was also trying to get Rob to act on the lines, not before or after. He would take huge pauses (to indulge in “acting”) and then rapidly rattle off the line. His speeches, therefore, often suffered from an unsettling, staccato effect.

BT had made a point of telling the actors to pay careful attention to Ludwig’s punctuation. For Rob, this only aggravated his tendency to act between the lines. For example, when he was trying to enlist Oberon’s help in winning over Olivia, he had a speech that was full of ellipses and many quick changes of thought:

Listen. I’m sorry to bother you, but I have sort of a favor to ask. Well. It concerns Miss Darnell. Olivia? See, I’ve just been talking to her and it’s clear to me that, well, she thinks the world of you. She looks on you as sort of a...father figure. It’s hard to put into words, but...well...I am just so in love with her! (44)

A speech of this sort was deadly for Rob because it emphasized all of the traps he had set for himself by not thinking on the line. I had him walk the lines, quickly changing direction with each adjustment of thought. My hope was that he could then incorporate these changes without physically changing direction. It had worked for me in coaching actors in the past, but it didn’t work here. The way we finally solved the problem was simply to remove all of the punctuation and the auxiliary “wells” in order to get Rob to drive the lines forward.

In our session on October 14, Rob had a very nice breakthrough. He said he felt as if he had been “skating or tip-toeing over the lines” and in the work we did that night on

his scene with Hermia, in which he was telling her to “Steal forth thy father’s house tomorrow night” (48), he finally used his full voice. (He had been especially breathy when playing Lysander, so I was heartened by this sudden change). This new access to his chest voice had solved three problems: Rob delivered his lines with volume and clarity; honesty and emotional connection; ease and directness. This new bolder voice made him enact bolder choices. He was freer, more deeply committed, and far more grounded than he been hitherto.

Alas, in rehearsal he couldn’t quite repeat what we had accomplished in our session together. This lack of repeatability was Rob’s largest obstacle, and he tended to get very discouraged about this. But he simply had not yet acquired the tools to access all his vocal resources on demand. He had admitted to me on several occasions that he was afraid of “letting BT down.” This overt eagerness to please the director, and the impatience and frustration with a technique that was still in its embryonic stages, seemed to be characteristic of the younger actors in the show. In academic theatre, it’s the progress that counts, and Rob came a long way.

Rebekah Bayles (Lydia Lansing)

My early notes for Bekah were as follows: she had some throat tension; she was attacking her lines at too high a pitch in her range, leaving her no travel room; and I was losing some of her words when her character was overly excited. All I had to do was to give her these notes for the corrections to take place.

By the time I started working with Bekah, it had been decided that we were definitely going to go with the Brooklyn dialect, even to the extent of using the period's substitution of "oi" for "er" (goil vs girl). Bekah had already mastered the dialect in Janet's class. (Janet, knowing we were about to embark on *Shakespeare in Hollywood*, had been kind enough to tackle the Brooklyn dialect earlier in the semester, which was a tremendous help to me). Nevertheless, I marked out the sound changes myself, so that I could be ready to give notes, if needed. They were rarely needed.

BT had been concerned that the Bekah's dialect might upstage her, but it never did. The only issue with the dialect arose when we were undecided about whether or not she should abandon it during her enchantment. Bekah had been playing the scenes both ways (she was exceedingly flexible in this regard), and we had tentatively decided to depart from using it. Bekah and I shared the same concern: would the audience understand that the departure was a character choice or would they think the actor had suddenly dropped out of the dialect? Thankfully, Janet saw a run-through at about this time, and she gave the note that it appeared more a case of the latter, so Bekah returned to using the dialect. The fact that she could make the switch effortlessly was one of the reasons I seldom needed to work with her.

If, as BT had said, "charm was the lost child of the 21st Century," then Bekah was the lost child of *Shakespeare in Hollywood*. I often felt that I had neglected her. I was so busy with the others that I only gave her notes on the fly. Outside of teaching her how to scream safely, I never truly had a full work session with her. She always came to rehearsals prepared, with plenty of new choices to explore, all of which she committed to fully. The

only thing I had to do was to make sure she didn't get too strident (there was a fine line between what was comically appropriate and what could become annoying to an audience), and to ensure that on certain words, she cheated on the dialect a bit for intelligibility's sake ("Madame Curie, Moby Dick").

Bekah was the first to master the play's comic timing, so my only fear was that she would peak too early and would need to be reigned back in. This type of material, unchecked, is like a puddle: it can get very broad very quickly, and the broader it gets, the thinner it becomes. The actor has to maintain a keen awareness of this danger and be constantly vigilant against becoming a caricature. This did indeed happen with Bekah, but she had no problems getting back on track and making Lydia a human being again. In fact, she did more than that: she *owned* Lydia. She was a consummate professional; she made the character entirely her own; she gave an exceedingly strong performance and, last but not least, she was a godsend for an overworked vocal coach.

Frank Alfano (Jack Warner)

The issues that I worked on with Frank were getting him to breathe properly (he was holding on the exhale), releasing his upper body tension (which was transferring itself all the way up to his neck, throat and jaw), and sharpening his articulation (he had a tendency toward swallowing some words and he wasn't able to wrap his tongue around others). We also worked on pitch variety and on minimizing his glottal attack of lines that began with a vowel or a diphthong. This last, was again attributable to improper

exhalation. The true key for Frank however, was learning to listen to the other actors on stage. Ironically enough, when he tapped into this, it rectified many of his vocal issues.

When Frank learned how to relax and remembered to exhale, he allowed an honest exchange with the other actors to happen. He had grown accustomed to taking without giving. Frank had incredible amounts of energy and had jokingly been dubbed “the human sponge,” but this sponge-like quality, which served him well in his thirst and desire for information in the classroom, served him less well in his interaction with the other characters on stage. Therefore, we practiced listening and simplification because Frank also tended to over-think Jack’s lines. BT had noted this early on; therefore I approached our sessions with caution, lest they leave Frank more confused.

In one of our first sessions, Frank said: “If I stop fighting the lines and listen to the playwright, the art will just happen.” Thus I knew he was already aware that listening would be an essential component of the growth of his character. At that point he was over-working the lines and playing qualities instead of objectives. Again this had to do with taking and not giving. When I asked him what his objectives were in Jack’s first scene with Lydia, he answered “she has me hen-pecked”. His comment was about *him*—what she was doing to *him* rather than what he *wanted* from *her*. We worked out Jack’s strategy of objectives, tactics and operative words. Frank has a very good ear and kinesthetic awareness of when a word should be stressed—he practiced the lines in different ways (I had implemented this “trying on the operatives for size” exercise with the other actors, and had had varying degrees of success), but Frank had an unerring instinct for finding the operative that fit the line like a glove.

For the character of Jack Warner, Frank's natural regionalism (New York) actually worked in his favor, although I was concerned that it sounded more Italian-American than Jewish. This was easily adjusted, however, by simply having him employ rising inflections at the ends of lines as opposed to the falling ones that are so typical of the Italian-American New York dialect.

Ever exploring, ever making new discoveries, Frank continued to grow. His explorations and discoveries continued into performance. Once Frank learned that breathing is a two-way process, that the exhalation was just as important as the inhalation, he took off. For me, watching his growth was truly inspiring.

James Manno; David Boren; Tommy Pruitt (The Warner Brothers)

The two scenes in which the remaining Warner brothers were on a conference call with their brother, Jack, were my favorites in the entire play. The actors could never understand my excitement at working on these scenes. They thought that I was merely encouraging them because of the small size of their roles and the brevity of their scenes. But the Warner brothers scenes were two of the most tightly written in the play, and, if done correctly, they would represent the play's style perfectly. The challenges in these scenes were speed (the dialogue, a series of one liners, required a rapid rate of utterance), timing (the cues had to be tight), and precision (the actors had to think and act *on* the line).

I have grouped the actors into a single section in this narrative because when they were successfully breathing together they *were* a single entity. But now I will look at the individual actors in this cohesive unit.

James Manno had replaced Danny Hugus who had originally been cast as the eldest brother, Harry. James was doing triple duty for *Shakespeare in Hollywood*. He was also playing Cagney and Tarzan. I had seen James do excellent work on the main-stage before this venture, and he was certainly doing a capital job as Cagney, but when he was suddenly given the sides for Harry, I was shocked at his articulation issues. He had an incredibly difficult time wrapping his tongue around the words, and it was not until this moment that I realized how much harder than his fellow cast members he had to work to overcome his natural speech impediments. Until then, I had only seen the successful fruits of his labors. In any event, once he took the lines home, and practiced getting comfortable with them, we were ready to work.

He was having a difficult time getting off the ground with his opening line: “Jack, you’re a schmuck!” (7). Since this was the first line in the scene, the rest of which was a rapid-fire volley of exchanges, it required a very strong attack. I had him physically serve the line as if it were a volleyball: taking a broad stance, knees bent and with one foot in front of the other, he leaned back on the toss (“Jack”), the arm was brought back while the ball was suspended (“you’re a”), and then spliced forward over the net (“schmuck!”). Breaking the line down into these minute parts achieved the precision I was looking for, and getting the lines into James’ body helped him immensely. Naturally, he would not be doing the actual physical action in performance, but the “ghost” of it remained in the reading of the line.

David Boren (Albert) had the New York Jewish dialect down pat and was a tremendous help in getting the others up to speed on it. (These actors really knew how to

help each other, and this looking out for each other is what brought about their scenes' success). I helped David with clarity of articulation and energy: one line = one thought = one breath.

Tommy Pruitt (Sam), was the youngest of the group and was having a bit of trouble adapting to the staging that had been established for the scene. The four brothers each stood in a separate pool of light, each with an individual phone to his ear, while facing the audience. Tommy had the natural tendency to want to turn and interact with the others. I told him to think two-directionally: to place the image of the brother he was speaking to in front of him, although in reality they were standing beside each other, and to receive and send the objectives sideways while remaining face forward. The artificiality of this convention required even more care with listening than usual (which I remembered from my experience in radio drama, where to deviate even one inch from the microphone could spell disaster).

Jack, of course, was the fourth brother. I have already mentioned how I worked with him on his ability to send, and, especially important for him, to receive actions. Finding the inherent rhythm in his scenes depended on finding the comic breath: inhalation = problem; exhalation = solution. As we have seen, Frank was holding on the exhalation, exacerbating his tendency to complicate things. (BT had said that Frank did his best work when he did not over-think the lines and simply let himself go).

I envisioned the Warner brother's scenes as fugues:

fugue, *n.*: a musical composition in which one or more themes are stated and then developed by means of imitation and elaborate counterpoint. (*The American Heritage Dictionary* 285)

Each verbal note had to be played with precision, adhering to a strict rhythm. It was either on or it was off—there was no in-between. This was true for the show as a whole. I kept reiterating to the actors that Ludwig's material had a line that ran right through the center of it, and that one hair's-breadth of a move to the right or to the left of that center line would throw the rhythm off. I also told them that the way to succeed in their material was through repetition, drill and practice. I used the dancers in the show as an example: to dance properly, they had to keep practicing the steps over and over again.

The Warner brothers understood the concept of routine drilling better than most. I told them they should run through both of their scenes as a part of their nightly warm-up. I was pleased to see that as I walked by their dressing-room, they were, indeed, incorporating my suggestion into their pre-show practice. Such careful team playing is what made their scenes extremely successful.

Logan Connor (Daryl)

Logan had very few lines, and the only note I had to give him was to make sure to enunciate his final consonants more fully, especially as we moved into technical rehearsals. He had to call out the slate for Reinhardt's film, giving all of the grips their directions, and it was difficult to hear him over the hullabaloo of all of the moving set pieces. His vocal quality was also very orotund, so making sure he drove the consonants forward was essential.

James Manno (James Cagney)

In my section on the Warner brothers, I have already mentioned James' articulation challenges. For this role, he had had time with the material at home and had worked out the words in his pain-staking way. I never had a single formal session with James as Cagney. I just gave him notes whenever I had difficulty hearing certain words. With James, I never had to give the same note twice.

James was a bold risk taker, constantly exploring new choices in rehearsal. With these he also unhesitatingly explored the various pitches in his range. It was a delight to observe his work, and BT was very pleased with his progress from day one. As Bottom, he had to wear a donkey's head, and even then, he was able to make the adjustments necessary for audibility in a single rehearsal.

James also had a small cameo role as Tarzan. He was a bit nervous about the jungle call, so we practiced yodeling. I had him go from his chest register to his head register, and once we had found the break in his voice, I told him to play in it up and down. While doing this, I told him to keep the soft palate flexible (practicing shooting the imaginary bow and arrow on "ng" helped with this one), and to think of the oral cavity as a wide smiling oval, as opposed to dropping his jaw. In order to avoid straining his throat, I reminded him to keep his breath supported from the diaphragm. Cupping his hands around his mouth could serve as a megaphone for the sound to carry further. He did hit Tarzan's "target" a few times in our practice sessions, but he never managed to do so fully in performance.

It was a shame that I rarely had notes for James, because every night he checked with me to make sure he had been understandable and clear. He never stopped working, and whenever I stepped out into the hall, I would invariably see him practicing. He was extremely conscientious and truly professional. It was a privilege to work with him.

Jaike Foley-Schultz (Joe E. Brown)

Like James, Jaike also mastered his character early in the rehearsal period, and BT was very happy with Jaike's choices. Both actors seemed to have taken their cues for their characters from the films they had observed. James had been using a slight New York dialect, which worked well for the Yorkville-born Cagney. And Jaike had Joe E. Brown's elongated yell down perfectly. My only concern was that, since Jaike was also employing Joe E. Brown's trademark lateralized sibilance, we might lose some clarity.

While the slushy "s" worked for lines like: "Why would they put me in a Shakespeare movie? I can hardly speak regular English" (38), they worked less well on "I don't know what girl's you've been seeing" (52). In this case, I told him to cheat a bit on the "sh" sound and bring it up to a clearer "s" and assured him that it wouldn't interfere with the consistency of his character.

Jaike was hysterically funny when playing Thisbe, but because he was using a very high falsetto for this scene, in combination with the slushy "s," I was losing some of the words. Here again, a simple reminder to clearly enunciate medial and final consonants and to lighten up the "sh" on, for example: "...My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones" (53), managed to do the trick.

Jaike also had one line for his cameo appearance as Groucho Marx. Because he was such a good mimic, he handled it with aplomb.

During rehearsals, I usually kept my eye on the script with both ears ready to hear anything that needed adjustment. Watching Jaike and James in their scenes together as Brown and Cagney was always a delight, and offered me the luxury to simply look up and enjoy.

Katie Bradley (Louella Parsons)

The two main things I worked on with Katie were volume and articulation. I have already mentioned the challenges involved in her opening monologue. (See Building an Aural Score.)

Katie has a nice “warbling” quality to her voice that I thought was perfect for this song-bird of a gossip columnist. I have mentioned that Ludwig was not concerned with the vocal authenticity of this character, so I took the liberty to make some adjustments. Since the character was a transplant to Hollywood from Dixon, Illinois, I thought it would be fun if she luxuriated in the language a bit (in imitation of those Hollywood actors she interviewed for a living). I told Katie to try employing pear or plum shaped vowels and to be sure she enunciated all of her consonants ardently. Especially in her opening monologue, I thought Louella should love herself in the language. There was a frilly quality to her lines that I wanted to take full advantage of: “...a movie by the Swan of Avon himself, Mr. William Shakespeare, and if he could only see the excitement here tonight, he would be swimming down that river just as proud as a peacock” (1). Katie was

riding over many of her consonants, so I told her to make sure to enunciate them, especially the plosives in “proud” and “peacock.” As Louella, she also had to announce each of the film stars as they entered. Katie had been announcing them list-like, until we worked on the appropriate build, and varied her tone and inflection, so that her announcement of each star was more spectacular than the last.

For Louella’s fight scene with Lydia Lansing in Act 2, we worked on preventing the words from being upstaged by the physical actions. Making sure to over-enunciate and fully support with breath were essential. There was a lot of screaming and shouting in the party scene in Act 2, and I had taught the cast how to do this safely. However, once learned, it needed to be practiced before each performance, and this is where I established a very interesting point.

In productions that involve stage combat, a fight call is usually built into the pre-show warm up. However, the voice often remains neglected, although it can be injured just as easily. I asked BT if we could have a “scream call” along with the fight call, and he readily agreed.

Katie and I had just one ten-minute session, and while I continued to give her notes on words that had not been clear, I thought she captured the “essence” of Louella perfectly.

Landon Nagel (Will Hays)

About mid-way through the rehearsal period, BT felt that the three characters who needed the most work were Reinhardt, Powell and Hays. I had been so busy with the other members of the cast, that I did not have a session with Landon until October 18.

Thankfully, he was a quick study.

Landon had had trouble with vocal nodules in the past, and he was sounding a bit raspy. He was also just beginning to understand how to drop his breath in, and he was carrying a tremendous amount of tension in the back of his tongue and throat, which became especially evident in the scenes in which he had to get angry (which, given the nature of the character, was nearly every scene).

We unpacked and put back together his monologue near the top of Act 2 in which Hays becomes enamored of himself while under the spell of the magic flower. Here Landon was breathy and did not project fully, until Hays becomes irate toward the end of the speech. Then, suddenly, he was shouting. This rapid acceleration was both unsettling and unrealistic. Instead, we found the various vocal gradations on each discovery until Hays's manic finale. We worked on this monologue in the lobby of Hodges, and when we returned to the rehearsal hall, BT was very pleased with Landon's work.

Landon also had very lazy articulators, and his soft palate was hanging down like a thick curtain blocking the free expression of vibration. Because of the latter, he was having problems with the consonant sounds: kuh/guh. I told him to start exercising the soft palate daily, breathing in and out on a whispered "kaa" in order to get this tissue springy again. To give his tongue and lips a workout, I gave him several pages of various articulation exercises and tongue twisters. He worked on these faithfully, and once he began to practice these on a daily basis, I noticed a marked improvement in his enunciation. As with other comic bits in this show, his success came as the fruition of routine drills and steady practice.

Landon was also beginning too high in his register so that he was trapped with no place to go on lines like: “Revenge?! I’m Will Hays! Do you know what I’m capable of?!” (25) (To which Oberon replies: “A lot of wind, apparently”). I think in this case Landon felt enslaved by the punctuation; he was taking exclamation points as indications for raising the voice instead of deepening the intention. (Nearly everyone fell into this trap at one point or another during the rehearsal process). I told him to start in a lower register on “revenge,” with plenty of breath to support it (the image I gave him was a blow to the stomach), and to build from there, making sure to operate the words “capable of” (he had been operating “know”) because “capable” was full of the eruptive plosives that suited his character.

Spitting out the consonants in this way was a great set up for Oberon’s punch-line. Landon went on to use these as grace notes to the remainder of his performance: whenever the censorious Hays became frustrated and was beyond words, he emitted an apoplectic shower of plosives. I must admit coming up with this twist gave me a certain amount of ironic satisfaction: it was great fun to see the man responsible for tying the tongues of so many Hollywood artists become tongue-tied himself in a rage of impotent sounds.

Landon has terrific acting instincts, and once we worked on the vocal issues that I have mentioned, he turned in a performance that was one of the show’s comic highpoints.

Overview of the Rehearsal Process

Rehearsals had commenced on September 20, and by the end of two weeks the scenes had been blocked, the actors were off-book, and a stumble-through of the entire

show had been completed. Because so much had been accomplished so quickly, the cast had developed a false sense of confidence. They did not realize that their real work had just begun.

As we moved further into rehearsals, BT was urging the actors to pick up both the pace and the cues, but this resulted in the actors running over cues and racing through Ludwig's lines. They fell into one of the most common traps in performing farce: speed for speed's sake. Thus, for several rehearsals, the overall effect was one of mania: the actors resembled wind-up toys run amok on stage.

Farce requires rapidity of thought, not rapidity of speech. BT tried to make this point clear by telling the actors to sharpen their objectives and to simplify their lines. He promulgated the dictum: one thought per line. He wanted his actors to raise the stakes but to avoid the mania.

Much of my own work at this point consisted of undoing mediocre line readings that had become ingrained as a result of early memorization. BT was growing increasingly frustrated with many of the actors who were not flexible in this respect, but I had anticipated that memorizing the lines too quickly would lead to habitual readings that would be difficult to break later on in the process. I had prepared myself for this uphill battle. A case of working too quickly was evident elsewhere as well. The actors were having difficulty making the blocking of the scenes their own, and BT was doing a lot of re-staging in order to achieve a more organic flow.

By the time of our first full run through on October 15, all sense of false confidence had vanished, and with only nine days left in the rehearsal process, cast and crew alike had

begun to panic. My main concern at this point was the inability of the actors to make repeatable what we had worked on in our individual sessions.

Janet attended the run-throughs on October 19 and on October 28. Her feedback to me was very positive, and it came at an opportune time. I had been so immersed in the problems that I had not really noticed the progress that had been made. It was refreshing to have an outside eye confirm this progress.

Transferring the Work from the Rehearsal Hall to the Stage

On November 1, we went into technical rehearsals. The first night was a cue-to-cue rehearsal. Rather than sitting around waiting for cues to be set, I kept busy. I wanted to take advantage of every moment we had left on stage before opening night, and the actors felt the same way. They readily complied with my request that they approach their cue lines as fully as possible so that I could gauge whether or not they could be heard.

I think this cooperation is a good indication of the type of morale that was present in the cast. They could easily have skated through their lines, as so many actors do during technical rehearsals. Instead, everyone pulled together as a team focused on a single goal: to turn in the best performance possible on opening night.

BT wanted me to continue working with the actors one-on-one, as many individual moments still needed to be streamlined. Thus, I divided my time between hearing how the actor's voices were carrying on stage, and then pulling those actors who were currently not needed on stage out to the lobby to work on their individual scenes and monologues. BT and I both felt that it was important to "keep the show alive" in the cast and to ward off the

inertia that is an ever-present threat in technical rehearsals. The actors had come a long way, and we didn't want them to lose the momentum they had acquired.

As we moved further into technical rehearsals, I noted where the sound system's speakers were situated and made sure to sit beneath and in front of each one during the course of the run-throughs to ensure that I could hear the actors over the taped music.

I have already mentioned the acoustical challenges in Hodges Theatre (see First Read Through). I had heard of the notorious "dead-spot" on stage in which the actor's voice is swallowed. The actors who had worked on this stage showed me where it was, but sitting in the seats I did not hear a difference. I tested the spot myself, and found that rather than swallowing the sound, it bounced my voice back to me. Thus, while it was disconcerting for the actors to hear their voices echo back to them, it made no perceptible difference to the audience. Nonetheless, I told the actors to play around in this spot as much as possible to get used to it.

The set was massive. BT had never been given an elevation drawing, and the central stair unit was much higher than we had anticipated. The actors seemed dwarfed by it, and they had to project much more because it removed them further from the audience.

The scenery shifts were built into the show: the idea was to capture the feel of the humming hive of frenetic activity that is part of the Warner Brother's studio. While the set changes added to the illusion of speed and activity, they also engendered a whole new series of problems. The actors had to be heard over the sound of wagons being moved in and out, as well as over music fading in and out. For example: Jack Warner's entrance line coincided with his desk being rolled in. The desk was a huge oval on traditional wheels (air

casters were not used) and it reverberated like a hollow drum every time it was moved in from the vomitorium. Warner had to come in looking and sounding like a man in charge of one of Hollywood's largest studios; instead he was being completely upstaged by his desk. Frank was getting shriller and shriller in his competition with this noise. I asked if the interior of the desk could be muffled, and some foam was found, which helped tremendously.

Producer David Leong had come to one of the final dress-rehearsals and expressed concern as regards Maddie's performance. BT was restaging many of Maddie's scenes to bring her in as close to the audience as possible. We began to discuss the possibility of using a body microphone for her because we were losing some of her dialogue and some of the actors could not hear the cue lines she was giving. I continued to try to get her to project but she was no longer accepting my notes. Somewhere along the way I had lost Maddie, and this greatly troubled me. After BT finished his notes I handed out carbon copies of my own. Maddie took the ones I gave her to go over them with BT. Thankfully, he backed me up on what I had enumerated for her. With Maddie, I had inadvertently become "bad cop" after all.

The rest of the actors were making the necessary adjustments. I thought that Cory's work was transferring over surprisingly well, but BT told me he still could not hear him clearly. This made me wonder if perhaps there isn't a danger in having coached someone so extensively that you can no longer hear them accurately. I had memorized his scenes and monologues so that I wasn't sure anymore whether I was hearing them clearly or experiencing them only in my head.

There were still discoveries to be made this late in the rehearsal process. The Warners were still having a little difficulty in the attack on their brother Jack in the two “fugue” scenes. I assembled the Warner brothers in the lobby to practice. I had Harry, Sam and Albert physically close in on Jack, using a step on each line to drive Jack into a corner. The Warners then transferred their physical sensations into the delivery of their lines.

During dress rehearsals I handed over the warm-up to Monica (Puck). Monica, always an enthusiastic team player, was the perfect person to handle this responsibility. Customarily, I had tailored the articulation portion of the warm-up to suit the needs of the individual actors. I wanted Cory to access the higher end of his range, so I generally tossed him a consonant cluster using a playful higher register that he could mimic. On the other hand, I wanted Maddie to access the lower part of her range, so I made sure to throw out the huskiest cluster to her. I was glad to see that Monica continued this tradition.

All through rehearsals I had kept my head buried in the script, following along and making notations of incorrect operatives, inflections, mispronunciations and the like. I would look up now and then to make sure that the actors were breathing properly, or that their bodies were correctly aligned, but otherwise I had found it distracting to watch and had preferred only to listen to the show. I continued in this way through technical rehearsals, using a different colored pen each night to designate in my script what notes the actors were still not properly incorporating. These notes I jotted down in my tiny spiral notebook, filled in the date, and handed them to the actors. I kept carbon copies for myself.

As he had done throughout the process, BT vociferously dictated notes to assistant director Boone Hopkins and dramaturg Chandra O. Hopkins. Occasionally he would throw

out a note to me. Usually I had already caught what he was telling me. Without looking up, I would nod my head and continue writing. BT would become quite impassioned and his notes were often accompanied by a splattering of invectives. In the past, I had found this unnerving because I felt his anger was directed at me, but by now I knew this was BT's style, and I knew better than to take his frustration personally. (Wisely, he never showed this frustration to the actors).

However, in the final stages of rehearsals, because of the show's technical complexities he became even more impassioned. Because I needed to hear the cast without interference, I would move off a bit from BT. This portability was made possible by keeping a music stand and flash-light with me at all times.

The cast revered BT. I admired him. His energy and organizational skills were certainly impressive. As I have mentioned earlier, he was commuting between New York and Richmond to do this show. On a few occasions during the rehearsal process, I would be leading the nightly warm-up while waiting for his plane to land. He would dash in and, without missing a beat, he would set right to work. His vision of the show was right on target. He never wasted a minute, and he had an impeccable eye and ear for the material. He demanded a lot from his cast and crew and they delivered it.

CHAPTER 3: PERFORMANCE AND POST-PRODUCTION

Opening Night

We opened on November 10. After having spent all of this time listening to the show, I looked forward to finally seeing it. I should have known better.

BT's feverish dictation of notes continued straight through the performance. Boone, Chandra and I were kept busy frantically scribbling these down. During the Invitational Dress Rehearsal, BT had stopped the performance more than once in order to do some last minute cleaning up. I had the sneaking suspicion that if he could have, he would have done the same here. In fact, I was holding my breath because I was half expecting he would.

Thus, it wasn't until the second night of performance that I actually *saw* the show. I had given the actors their notes beforehand. They had been warned during the opening night celebration that more notes were on the way. The fact that they actually welcomed further notes indicated their continued commitment to the production.

The opening night audience had definitely liked what they had seen (and heard). I was given a steady string of compliments, the most gratifying of which was the fact that the show had been consistently audible. This was no small achievement, given the

challenges of the space and the vastness of the material. I was approached the rest of the year to vocal coach various projects.

While I was very proud of the work I had done, I could not accept exclusive credit for it. Yes, I had developed my ear and discovered that I had many more resources and skills than I previously thought I possessed. But I knew to a certain extent that the show sounded great because BT had been just as concerned with how the show presented itself aurally as he had been with how it presented itself visually. From day one, we had heard the same score in our heads. Our common task had been to realize this score through the actor's performances. My note-giving usually followed his, but much of the time he had already given many of the notes I was about to give. I wondered: had I been assigned to a director with a less keen ear, would my work have turned out the same?

Conclusion

The chief lesson I learned in the production of *Shakespeare in Hollywood* is that flexibility is absolutely essential: the vocal coach in particular must prepare for all contingencies thoroughly and then be equally prepared to put all of the work aside in order to stay alive to the creative moments being found between director and cast.

Many times I felt more like an acting coach than a vocal coach. To be able to sit back and merely give notes on volume, clarity and pronunciation seemed, at times, an unattainable luxury and one that I fervently wished for. Certainly, there was much more to vocal coaching than I had anticipated. In educational theatre, coaching equals teaching. I constantly had to remind myself that training a young actor's voice entailed awareness of

every aspect of that actor's professional life. Whenever I felt frustrated I kept the finished product in mind: a polished performance of a brilliant show. All roads led to the same goal.

Yet, more important than the product was the process. Because of the time constraint in putting up a show, the students were forced to learn quickly. Their performance was the application of what they had learned in the studios and classrooms, and I could see clearly how a live production before an impartial paying audience provided a vital link in the chain of their training.

Finally, I learned to accept what I could not change. Actors are not puppets: the exciting part was watching their human (sometimes all too human) growth. The audience could never witness what I had: the arc of progress of every individual actor. To witness such growth, was a rare privilege. Even more of a privilege was the fact that I could consider myself a nurturing component in their maturation process.

I returned to the theatre once more, for the final matinee. I wanted to see how the actors had progressed and to make some final notes for myself. Oddly enough, while the performances were much richer and deeper, the script seemed thinner. I could tell throughout the run the actors had had appreciative audiences; they now knew how to ride the waves of laughter sent their way. They even knew how to navigate the unexpected: successfully: Richmond is notorious for its power failures and we had one during the final performance. The theatre went black right before Oberon's first entrance. When the lights came back on, there was Chris Evans as Oberon effortlessly blending Shakespeare and Ludwig:

Home,
Home at last to the Magic Wood near Athens,
Aweary from a night of escapades,
And frolic, where lovers meet, embrace and dream of
Immortality... (10)

And then Chris added a note of his own: “and where technical failures can happen at any moment.”

As the crowd laughed and applauded, I thought how ironically perfect this line was for this misplaced Elizabethan who has suddenly found himself stranded in this bizarre new world called Hollywood in the American city of Richmond, Virginia. The blackout and Chris’s improvised line also made me reflect upon the magic that is live theatre. Unlike the film that stands at the center of the play, live theatre is an arena where, despite the most painstaking planning and arduous practice, anything can (and probably will) happen. That is its beauty.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Crannell, Kenneth C. *Voice and Articulation*. Stamford, CT: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000.

Crazy for You: 1992 Original Broadway Cast. Angel Records, 1992.

“Fugue.” *The American Heritage Dictionary*. 2nd College Ed. 1983.

Kopf, Ginny. *The Dialect Handbook: Learning, Researching, and Performing a Dialect Role*. Orlando, FL: Voiceprint Publishing, 2003

Ludwig, Ken. *Shakespeare in Hollywood*. Unpublished manuscript.

- - -. “Foreword to ‘Shakespeare in Hollywood.’” Ken Ludwig’s Website. 30 April 2006.

<http://www.kenludwig.com/news/articles/foreword_to_shakespeare_in_hollywood_by_ken_ludwig.php>.

International Dialects of English Archives. Eds. Paul Meier and Shawn M. Muller.

10 October 2005 < <http://www.ku.edu/~idea/>>.

A Midsummer Night's Dream. Dir. William Dieterle, Max Reinhardt. MGM, 1935.

Out of Rosenheim (Bagdad Café). Dir. Percy Adlon. MGM, 1988.

Singin’ in the Rain. Dir. Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly. MGM, 1952.

Reade, Simon. “Shakespeare in Hollywood for the Arena Stage Production Journal.” Ken Ludwig’s Website. 30 April 2006.

<http://www.kenludwig.com/news/interviews/simon_reade_interviews_ken_ludwig.php>.

- Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. Harold F. Brooks. Arden Shakespeare. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Silent Shakespeare*. Dir. Jon Cassar. Milestone Film & Video, 2000.
- Silverbush, Rhona. Sami Plotkin. *Speak the Speech!: Shakespeare's Monologues Illuminated*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2002.
- Stern, David Alan. *Acting With an Accent: German*. Lyndonville, VT: Meriwether, 1979.
- . *Acting With an Accent: New York City*. Lyndonville, VT: Meriwether, 1979.
- Withers-Wilson, Nan. *Vocal Direction for the Theatre: From Script Analysis to Opening Night*. New York: Drama Publishers, 1993.

APPENDIX 1

Excerpt from *Shakespeare in Hollywood*

SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD

ACT ONE

(Hollywood, 1934. An orchestra is playing “Hooray for Hollywood,” and lights are criss-crossing the sky like enormous, reckless fireflies. We feel the excitement and glamour of movie-land at its height.

We’re at the world premiere of a new movie in front of Grauman’s Chinese Theatre. LOUELLA PARSONS, the iconic gossip columnist for the Hearst newspapers and well-known radio personality, is at a microphone, broadcasting live, and a rope barrier separates her from hundreds of screaming fans who have shown up to see their favorite movie stars. Some of these stars, glamorous and trendy, wave to the crowd as they parade into the theater past LOUELLA.)

LOUELLA

Good evening, good evening to all of you out there in radio-land, this is Louella Parsons, your eyes and ears in Hollywood, at the sensational premiere of the new motion picture “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” by the Warner Brothers. That’s right, we have a night of culture ahead of us, a movie by the Swan of Avon himself, Mr. William Shakespeare, and if he could only see the excitement here tonight, he would be swimming down that river just as proud as a peacock. And don’t let that word “culture” frighten you, my darlings, because the word on this movie is sock-o-entertainment from start to finish. And what else would you expect from a talking picture starring Mr. Dick Powell! *(screams from the crowd.)* Miss Anita Louise! *(more screams)* And Mr. James Cagney!! *(even bigger screams—as CAGNEY goes by and waves to the crowd)* Wait a moment. A limousine is pulling up. Someone is getting out... Oh my darlings, how exciting, it’s the director of the movie himself, Mr. Max Reinhardt! *(A disappointed “Ohhhh...” from the crowd as MAX REINHARDT enters. He’s a pixie-ish man in his 60’s and he has a pronounced German accent.)*

LOUELLA

Max! Over here! ...He's coming this way ... Ah, Professor Reinhardt, it's Louella Parsons. Welcome to the opening of your new cinematic sensation.

REINHARDT

Thank you, Louella. I'm—

LOUELLA

(To the radio audience) I'm sure you all know that Professor Reinhardt is considered the most distinguished director working today in the live theatre. Now tell us, Max, did it scare you a little, directing your first motion picture ever?

MAX

No, not really. But I—

LOUELLA

"No, not really." *(laughing)* Oh Max, you're priceless. Now do I hear an accent in your speech? Are you from abroad?

REINHARDT

Ja, I am from Austria. And I have—

LOUELLA

"From Austria." How adorable. And what brings you to the United States?

MAX

Heh heh, this is going to make you laugh, is funny story. There is a man in my country named Hitler who is killing people.

LOUELLA

Oh yes of course. And we're just *thrilled* that you got away. Wait! A limousine has just pulled up...Oh, it is! It's Dick Powell!

(Screams—and DICK POWELL enters. He's a good-looking, boyish actor in his late 20s. He waves to the crowd and sings.)

POWELL

"I'm young and healthy and you've got chaaaarm!"

(Bigger screams.)

LOUELLA

Dick! Dick! It's Louella!

(Louella chases after Powell, leaving Reinhardt stranded. He turns and speaks to the audience.)

MAX

And for this I have left my homeland. True, alternative is the Nazis, but is very close race. So: why am I here, you ask? It all began one year ago when I found myself in this legendary place called *Hollywood*: land of glamour and gluttony, palm trees and poodles, sequins and sin. At this time, I have just put on big stage production of Shakespeare's masterpiece "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and I get raves and kudos you would not believe. So, I ask myself, why not make a film of this production using big hot-shot Hollywood stars. It would make a great contribution to world culture, a real treat for lovers of Shakespeare, and, between you and me, I could make a few bucks in the process. With this in mind, exactly one year ago today, I go to see Jack Warner of Warner Brothers Pictures.

