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The Use of Music and Art as Directorial Tools in a Production of Kevin O'Morrison's Ladyhouse Blues

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THE USE OF MUSIC AND ART AS DIRECTORIAL TOOLS IN A PRODUCTION OF KEVIN O'MORRISON'S LADYHOUSE BLUES

by

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings make decisions every minute of the day. These decisions are based upon need, desire, impulse, mood, and knowledge. As we grow older, we learn skills in decision-making primarily through trial-and-error. The theatre artist, likewise, is constantly making decisions and constantly searching for new skills and techniques to aid this process. In life and in art, however, decision-making is not totally grounded in intellect but includes instinctive and emotional sensations. It is through finely blending intuitive responses with intellectual skills that a work of theatre art can be produced. In order to accomplish this blending however, the director needs first to identify his reactions to the dramatic work. For example, what attracts the director to this play? What sights, sounds, and sensations does the play create? How does this play relate to the director's life experiences? And what are the essential elements that enrich the play and will bring it to life in a theatrical environment? Determining the answers to these questions was my initial directorial challenge, and would guide my dramatic analysis, rehearsal methodologies, and production decisions.

I was attracted to Ladyhouse Blues for a number of reasons. From a production standpoint, it could be cast
from my available pool of talent, and technically and financially produced in the academic setting. From a literary standpoint, it dealt with women's issues and family relationships, two distinct elements which influence my worldview and have been important factors in my personal growth. But from a dramatic standpoint, it seemed to defy virtually all the Aristotlian philosophies of what constitutes a well-constructed play. There is, for example, no driving plot, no clear climax, and no true denouement. What excited me theatrically about Ladyhouse Blues was strictly emotional and sensual. It is what I define as the play's texture. By texture I refer to those elements which separate theatre from film and theatre from literature; which combine art and music and bring them to life on stage; which arouse the audience's emotions and manipulate their reactions; and, most importantly, which can be experienced distinctively and spontaneously in the immediate, live environment of the stage.

Ladyhouse Blues is a combination of those elements—it is a musical composition and a living, breathing painting contained in a realistic drama. It has that quality that makes me shudder when I listen to a symphony, jazz, or the blues, and sends my heart racing when I look at Renoir or Monet. The music and sounds provided by the playwright create visions; the pictorial descriptions create sounds—both enrich the play's dramatic structure and bring it to
life. The decisions I made, as director, were grounded in the sensual elements of sound, sight, color, texture. These elements epitomize the work for me.

My directorial task was to determine the analytical, technical, and rehearsal methodologies which would protect the play's inherent spontaneity and sensuality while remaining true to the details of staging realism. This thesis outlines my decision-making processes: the formation of my directorial concept, the techniques and theories I used in rehearsal and production, and an evaluation of the actual production in performance.
CHAPTER I

IDENTIFYING AURAL AND VISUAL SIGNS:

THEATRICAL TEXTURE

Theatrical texture is defined as the elements of music and art which enrich the drama with subconscious sensations. In its subliminal detail, a drama becomes theatrical so that, as in a painting, the layers and mixtures of colors and tones are felt though not truly seen. In a realistic play, such as Ladyhouse Blues, the identification and inclusion of these elements of texture is particularly important.

One of the starting points in dissecting a play's texture is in the action of the play. Aristotle identifies exposition, plot development, climax and denouement as essential characteristics of the drama. Indeed, these aspects of the play's action are essential to make the work dramatic, but they are not enough to make it theatrical. In his book, Dynamics of Drama, Bernard Beckerman focuses on action as a primary dramatic principle. Theatre's purpose, Beckerman says, is to affect spectators through the act of presentation. Spectators are affected because they witness the exposure of emotions, of soul, and of life on stage.

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The distinguishing characteristic of theatre is conscious self-presentation. It is not the presentation of a painting or a film, but of one's very being. Yet being, that wholeness of life in a person, cannot actually be presented in a time-bound medium, because, when observed over a span of time, being becomes doing ...\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 11.}

Through physical signs, the spectator perceives and experiences the presentation. These signs include not only physical movement—visual signs—but also vocal and incidental sounds—aural signs. Through these signs, the audience learns a character's intent, attitude, desire and inner conflict as well as the basic plot of the play. And it is also through these signs that the audience experiences the totality of the theatrical event. Since it is through what the audience sees and hears that what is felt is produced, the visual and aural signs are my basis for identifying theatrical texture.

In directing \textit{Ladyhouse Blues}, the identification and creation of these signs guided my conceptual analysis. On initial readings of a script, many directors will visualize moments of the play; others will mentally hear the sounds, lines, and musical qualities of the play. At times, these inner visions and tones guide the director's selection and analysis of a play rather than the playwright's development of plot or characters.
It is extremely important in a realistic play that the
director allow visual and aural signs to form and surface,
for it is these signs which embody the play's dramatic and
theatrical texture.

In the 1800's, the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and later
Stanislavsky, put direct focus on "creating a symphony of
visual and aural minutiae" on stage. By focusing on con-
trolling and manipulating all visual and aural dimensions of
a production, the Duke established valuable directorial
principles and objectives. His work not only inspired such
artists as Stanislavsky and Andre Antoine but have also
remained viable philosophies for over a century. The
Duke's work illustrated the importance of the director's
ability to visualize and even master every aspect of
production from acting to scene, lighting, sound and costume
design. He formulated a concept or vision of the play and
sought to bring that concept to life on stage through
rehearsal and technical methodologies. The Duke realized
the immense degree of organization and discipline needed in
order to express the soul of the play. He was, in essence,
the first to evaluate and analyze the director's craft.

In On The Art of the Theatre, Edward Gordon Craig

1Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chirney, eds., Directors on
Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre (New York:
2Ibid.
states what he considers to be the craft of the director.

... The director's work as interpreter of the play of the dramatist is something like this: he takes the copy of the play from the hands of the dramatist and promises to faithfully interpret it as indicated in the text ... He then reads the play, and during the first reading the entire color, tone, movement and rhythm that the work must assume comes clearly before him ... What (the director) must see to is that his action and scene match the verse or the prose, the beauty of it, the sense of it ...1

The explanation of my concept formation thus begins with the rhythm, tone, and musical movement of Ladyhouse Blues. The following section identifies important aural signs in terms of music and sound, with discussion of their structural and conceptual bases as they influenced my analysis of the play.

CHAPTER II

THE USE OF MUSIC IN ANALYSIS

The use and relationship of music in and to theatre can be traced from the beginnings of drama in Greek society through the present. In the 1800's, Wagner intricately examined music in terms of its necessity in creating a complete, true dramatic production. Wagner directly applied poetry to musical analysis and structure. He used, for example, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and applied Goethe's poetry to each movement in great detail, examining rhythm, tone and phrasing.¹ Adolphe Appia, impressed by Wagner's philosophies, expanded upon his concepts and related them to what he considered to be the highest form of drama--the "word-tone drama."² Appia examined the use of music as it related to both actors and, particularly, designers. He, like Wagner, saw music as the origin of the very conception


of a dramatic work. In the German version of his book, *Music and the Art of the Theatre*, he includes a diagram which illustrates this view. Figure 1 is a reproduction of this diagram.

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**Figure 1: Creation of the Word-Tone Drama**

Out of Music (in the widest sense) springs

- The Temporal Element of Drama
  - The Conception of the Drama which the author embodies
  - to form Drama and permits it to be presented through:
    - The Spatial Element of Drama
      - Actor Setting Lighting Painting and thus creates

Expressed in the Score and Libretto (Partitur) on the Stage

---

Appia's word-tone drama is the theatrical presentation, through which the soul of the drama is expressed and revealed. "By means of dramatic representation, music is transported into space, and there achieves a material form---

1Appia, p. 27.
in the mise en scene ..... 1 The word-tone drama is created from an hierarchical arrangement of elements.

This hierarchy is organically composed: music, the soul of drama, gives life to the drama, and by its pulsations determines every motion of the organism, in proportion, and sequence. If one of the links of this organic chain breaks or is missing, the expressive power of the music is cut off there and cannot reach beyond it ...

The necessity for organic harmony, which is the absolute condition for the integrity of a work of art, thus attains its fullest realization in the drama of the word-tone poet .... 2

For Appia, as for Wagner, the word-tone drama was the highest, most vital form of theatre. It was the drama which embodied all the elements of musical expression into the theatrical presentation, creating a synchronized, harmonic, totally orchestrated presentation.

Like many young (and old) theatre artists, I was deeply impressed by Appia's and Wagner's philosophies and theories. I was particularly attracted to the idea of music as being all sounds, words, and tones contained in the theatrical presentation. Music in the theatre, then, would include not only musical compositions, scores, and songs, but also the tone and rhythm of speech, the on- and off-stage activity, and incidental sounds like plates clinking, footsteps, door slams, etc. I was also intrigued by Wagner's use of music as a tool in dramatic structural analysis. It seemed that

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1 Ibid, p. 18.
music could be used as a means of identifying a play's rhythmical flow, points of crescendo and decrescendo, and major theme. I used these ideas in analyzing and directing Ladyhouse Blues, and sought to create an orchestrated theatrical presentation.

**Use of the Blues**

By entitling his play Ladyhouse Blues, Kevin O'Morrison provided a basis for using music in structural and conceptual analyses. With the blues as a fundamental starting point, I was provided with a musical mode in which to interpret the play's structure. By analyzing the origin of the blues, I was provided with valuable insights into characterizations. By examining the tonal quality of blues singing, I was able to develop a metaphor for the characters' lamentations, particularly those of Liz, the main character. And by understanding common blues subject matters, and what the blues singer wished to achieve, I was able to identify the play's dramatic theme.

**Blues in Theme**

The blues derived from the "field holler" of Southern slaves and gained popularity at the turn of the century among immigrants from the rural south to the cities. The blues are traditionally a secular black American folk music of the 20th century. Though Ladyhouse was not written as a
black piece and does not deal with black people specifically, there are many characteristics of the background of blues music which can be aptly applied to the play.

Usually, blues are sung in the first person and the lyrics deal with everyday troubles and woes. There is a searching and pleading quality to the words, a seeking of a better lifestyle and a lessening of the struggle for identity and existence. In Ladyhouse Blues, just as in blues singing, there is no great resolution of the music. Rather, there is the continuation of life and the rise-and-fall of daily dramas and activity.

Early blues singers sang of themselves and those who shared their experiences.

The ... singer expressed his anxieties, frustrations, hopes or resignation through his songs ... Some blues are tender but few reveal a response to nature; far more express a desire to move or escape ... to an imagined better land.¹

At the end of Act I, Liz expresses her desire to move to a better place and her frustration over the circumstances that surround her life. Her words hold the qualities of a blues song:

They'll be flyin' the nest - soon as they can put a face on how to do it, Fitz-love. Eylie's age, you an' me was married a year an' I had miscarried once. Terry's age, I already had Helen - Prayin' won't do no good - have to pray against one a my own girls or t'uther - Lord ... I allus said I'd never sing the Blues to you, but I'm singing 'em

now. Got no place to run--Cain't back up--They

can push me off the groun' I'm standing on--Mornin'

come Howdy, 'cause the night ... is plumb Awful.¹

It is fitting that the blues are applied to the play

for the Maddens are, in fact, immigrants forced to move to

the city in order to survive. They are victims of circum-

stances and social change, and Liz, particularly, sings

supplications to the Lord in hopes of easing her pain and

maintaining inner peace.

At the end of Act II, one such supplication is found in

Liz's plea to the Lord for understanding and easing of her

hardships. She first damns the Navy, the President and even

the Lord for striking her only son. Then, as the playwright

notes, "her rage slips into a kind of evangelical exhorta-

tion - a keening," and she says

I have tried, I have tried, Lord God I've tried -
to do what you laid on me an' bear the grief
between. When me an' Fitz stood before you, Lord,
an' took our vows, I hadn't yet seed 16, but I
knowed it was a mortal business - (Crim.) You
made me a widow when I was just 26. 6 young'uns
grabbin' at my skirts! I fought 'em up to live
the best I could - but you took Cordy! Now you
take my onliest boy! WHERE'S THE MERCY IN YOU! I
CAIN'T BEAR NO MORE! I AIN'T JOB! (She seems to
hear in the echo of her words that her grief is,
for the moment, spent. When she resumes, her tone
is more matter-of-fact:) That's all the grievin'
I got the strength for, now, Lord - but I tell you
what: an' I ain't complainin'. Nor criticizin'.
Like I tole Dot - my mind ain't up to - well, you
move in mysterious ways your wonders to perform -
(The 'wonders' she sees in store for herself make

¹Kevin O'Morrison, Ladyhouse Blues (New York: Samuel
French, Inc., 1979), p. 63. All subsequent references to
the play will be designated by Ladyhouse Blues, followed
by the page number, in paranthesis.
her pause: like someone already beaten who knows she will be beaten again:) - an' I guess I just got to face up to them ways. But lemme ask you, Lord - if you cain't find it in your heart to ease up on me - Lord, Lord can you mebbe go a little easier on my girls? (She seems to listen - as though to hear if she has anything to add to her prayer: then -) Amen. (She turns and blows out her lamp.)

(Ladyhouse Blues, p. 110)

Liz's music--her words and cries--is her vehicle of expression. She does not sing needlessly, but rather as a means of releasing her emotions and gaining strength in dealing with her world. Like a blues song, Liz's words reflect the catastrophes and triumphs private to her, yet universally shared.

In his book Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues, Paul Oliver discusses the subject matters of blues songs.

In the blues were reflected the family disputes, the upheavals caused by poverty and migration, the violence and bitterness, the tears and the happiness of all. In the blues an unsettled, unwanted people during ... periods of social unrest found the security, the unity, and the strength that it so desperately desired.1

Like the theme of so many blues songs, the theme of Ladyhouse Blues centers upon the joys and problems of the family. The necessity to survive and the changes caused by the war force Liz and her family to leave their homeland and move to the city, drastically altering their very lifestyle. The play is set in South St. Louis, Missouri, in

August 1919, a place and time of great conflict and turmoil. By necessity, the two youngest daughters, Terry and Eylie, have taken jobs as waitresses; Bud, Liz's only son, has been sent to war; Dot has married and moved to New York; and Helen is dying of tuberculosis. Virtually all of Liz's dreams and hopes have been gradually disintegrating because of the effect of socio-economic changes upon her family. The background of the characters in *Ladyhouse Blues* is essential to understanding the dramatic theme. Likewise, the background of blues singers is essential to understanding blues themes.

In the blues were reflected the effect of economic stress on the depleted plantations and the unexpected prosperity of the urban centers where conditions of living still could not improve.²

If *Ladyhouse Blues* were a blues song, it would be sung by Liz. All the trials and tribulations of the Madden family are reflected through Liz. She is the catalyst for the dramatic action and her constant effort to maintain family unity, pride, and traditional values results in the dramatic conflict. Through Liz, the play's dramatic theme is revealed.

**Blues in Character**

Through Liz is the dominant blues singer in *Ladyhouse Blues*, each of the characters in the play can be likened to

²Ibid.
a blues singer. Each character metaphorically sings the blues throughout the play. The characters' dialect can be likened with blues singing. The more each character battles with maintaining her traditional values and lifestyle, the stronger each, metaphorically, sings the blues. Liz's dialect is the strongest and she battles the most openly with holding on to the past and traditions. Dot's dialect is the weakest and she has broken away from the family more so than any of the other daughters. Yet, at times, she too uses phrases and language reflective of her family background. Throughout the play, Liz provides the overriding minor blues song, while the daughters provide the metaphoric strains of melodies and countering harmonies. All of the characters constantly sing of their hopes for a better life, of the changes to come, and the desire for happiness. This is a common trait of blues singers, and Eylie manifests this trait the most vividly. Throughout the play she talks of leaving St. Louis as a blues singer sings of finding the promised land. She longs for inner peace and sings of her longings. Helen, too, longs for a better life but her songs contain anguish and hurt. This is understandable, for Helen is stricken with T.B. Disease and sickness are common themes in blues music and the singer who sings them does so with the hopes of relieving the pain. Twice in Act II, Helen cries out loud about her disease. When Dot responds to a neighbor's singing of "Work for the Night is Coming" by
saying it is a song about work, Helen reacts bitterly with 

Work--that song isn't about work! ... It's about 

dying. Oh, God--I was so healthy, I was so strong 
until I got pregnant--I didn't mean that--I didn't 
mean that ... I didn't mean that. The consumption 
was there in my blood--waiting ... For anything. If 
it wasn't Eugen it'd have been something else ... 
(Ladyhouse Blues, pp. 86-87.)

Then, later, Helen protests going for a walk with her 
sisters for fear of the neighbors' reactions to her. When 
Liz insists she go, Helen says 

And have the eyes of every fat bitch down that 
street show me my death--not on your life! (savage-
ly imitates) "Gutenaben, Frau Kluge." "Tell me, 
Gnaidige Frau, what is your secret to stay so thin?" 
Then the fat sow laughs and slaps the lard on her 
fat ass. That's what happened the last time I went 
for "a little stroll," and I vowed I'd never let it 
happen again. (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 108.)

Helen's words and her feelings are reminiscent of the blues 
song "T.B. Blues," by Willie Jackson.

T.B.'s all right to have if your friends don't 
treat you so low-down, (twice) 
Don't ask them for no favours--they even stop 
hangin' aroun'.

Oooh--oooh, T.B.'s killing me, (twice) 
I'm like a prisoner, always wishin' I was free.

When I was on my feet I could not walk down the 
street, 
For you women lookin' at me from my head to my 
feet .... 
But ooooh now, the T.B.'s killing me, 
I want my body buried in the deep, blue sea.

Oooh--ooooh, 
I got tuberculosis, consumption's killing me.1

1Willie Jackson, "T.B. Blues", in Paul Oliver, 
Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues 
Each of the characters in *Ladyhouse Blues* sings the blues, each sings of both her troubles and her hopes. Her words are sometimes declaimed and hollered, sometimes moaned soft and low, sometimes punctuated with rising and falling strains of melody, but always sung with emotion and for a purpose. It is through the character's singing that her innermost needs and desires are revealed, and her emotions are released.

Of all the characters, Liz is the strongest blues singer. She is concerned with people, events, and situations only inasmuch as they affect her life or the lives of those she loves. This is a common characteristic of blues singers.

A blues singer seldom considers his themes apart from himself ... He does not view his subject as an objective outsider but rather from within ... the blues singer does not comment on a world as seen through a window but as a member circulating within it ... Unable to sing with completely dispassionate objectivity, he sings with uncontrolled emotion. Above all he is a realist, intimately concerned with his subjects but having no illusions about them: neither carried away with transports of sentiment nor totally insensible and devoid of feeling ...¹

Liz is not concerned with the socio-economic changes surrounding her—the labor movements, the automobile industry, the rioting, even the war—but she is concerned with how these changes affect her and her family. Her reaction, for instance, to Terry's announcement and exclamation of being

¹Oliver, p. 298.
appointed as a delegate to the World Congress of Working Women is "Well, if that ain't a howdy-do--you're aimin' to quit your job" (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 57). To Liz, Terry's involvement with politics means that she may lose her job, and may leave home, thus creating both personal and financial hardships. Liz is not insensitive to any of her daughters' feelings, but, like a blues singer, is a realist and her logic is founded in deep-set values and proven results.

Liz's value system and resulting logic is a primary source of conflict for her daughters. It affects their lives, their thoughts, and their plans. Likewise, it is the source of dramatic conflict in the play. In Act II, this conflict reaches its peak. When her daughters confront her about attaining Bud's insurance money--$4,000--Liz responds with a decision based on her unbending values and religious beliefs. The scene is one filled with compassion yet fierce pride and determination, qualities characteristics of blues singers and their songs.

LIZ: Better set down, all a you. (They do--and she regards them soberly before speaking.)
Children--I don't want you to think I'm nuthin' but a stubborn ole woman--

DOT: (Deprecating.) Oh, Mama--

LIZ: Hush up, now.

DOT: I just meant, you're not old.

LIZ: Didn't mean I was, that's just a way a speak-in'. Now hush up whilst I tell you--It ain't fair to ask nuthin' of you if you don't know what's in my heart. Now here's the Navy an' the war. My boy takes this insurance with 'em. An' they undertake to pay if'n he gets kilt or hurt. Now that's blood money to start off with--(Eylie and Helen start to protest, but Liz rides over them:) Howsomever--!--my boy
wants me to have it, an' for his sake—I am willin' to take it if'n I have to. From his hand. Now if the Navy sends it to me di-rect—it is, in a manner of speakin', from his hand. But if I have to ask 'em for it—

TERRY: (Conceding.) You always said, if you have a fault, it's you can't ask anybody for anything.

LIZ: 'Tain't that! It's—if I have to ask 'em for it, I am sayin' they got a right to keep it from me.

DOT: Mama, I'll do it for you. You won't have to ask anybody, I'll take care of everything!

EYLIE: Mom'll still have to sign.

DOT: No, she won't! I've done it for George. I'll just put per Dorothy Madden Bindless, and sign her name.

LIZ: You'd still be askin'! An' then that money—dear paid for as it is—wouldn't no longer be a gift. From my boy!

HELEN: Why, for Christ's sake—it's his money!

LIZ: NOT IF I GOT TO ASK STRANGERS FOR IT! (To the others.) Cain't you see that, cain't you see!

TERRY: Mama—

LIZ: (Riding over.) If I do what you girls are askin'—just thinkin' about it gries my innards till they're ready to bleed—

EYLIE: No, listen, listen—

LIZ: If I admit the Navy has a right to keep that money—an' that's sayin' the Navy—has a right to pay me $4,000 for the life a my only son. I cain't do that.

DOT: Oh, sweet Jesus.

LIZ: (Furious.) All right, then, lemme ask you—You tell the Navy Bud's life is only worth $4,000, how you goin' to face Bud—

EYLIE: (Incre?ulous.) Face Bud?

LIZ: (Of Course) When your time comes, girl—

EYLIE: Mama, this is 1919.

LIZ: Memmine 1919, your time'll come just like for everbuddy else. Then how'd you face him—(She turns to stare into the eyes of each of them.) If I let you do what you're askin', how'd any a you face him on your Day of Judgement. (She takes the stubborn silence of each of them in turn as a kind of concession:) Didn't think a that, though, did you. Any a you. (In helpless thrall to Liz's belief in a Hereafter, the girls look at each other, until Eylie can stand it no longer: she gets up and clumps toward the porch:) Mossir, you didn't think a that. (Ladyhouse Blues, pp. 105-106.)
Liz is a blues singer and her words contain the heart-felt passion, the pride, and the emotion characteristic of the blues. As Paul Oliver says,

The blues singer like the poet turns his eyes on the inner soul and records his impressions and reactions to the world without ... As if aware of the dangers implicit in these declarations of his inner self, the blues singer is as brutally self-examining as the true philosopher, recounting his desires, acknowledging his faults, stating his thoughts with almost frightening honesty.¹

Blues in Structure

Technically, blues are structured in 12-bar phrases with flattened 3rd and 7th degrees of the scale (see figure 2).

Fig. 2: The Blues Scale²

The asterisked notes are what is termed "blue notes" and are considered the most distinctive features of both blues and jazz.³ There is any accompanying, pulsating major chord underneath the minor chord feeling of the melody which gives a sense of dichotomy or pull to the music. From the onset,

¹Ibid, p. 299.
²Sadie, 2:812.
³Ibid, 2:812.
Ladyhouse possesses this structure and tone. The play begins with a street vendor's cry offstage. Street cries, traditionally, are sung in a blues-like wail. O'Morrison provides a tape of the street cries on which he has recorded the desired sounds. One such cry, the opening street call, could be musically diagrammed as shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Opening Street Vendor's Cry

Since these are the first sounds which the audience hears, they set the tone of the play.

I remained true to O'Morrison's recording of all the street cries' melodies, and varied only in my selection of voices (i.e., baritone, tenor, bass) and in one instance, in Act II, in the arrangement and combination of sounds. Each new unit of the play began with a distinctive street cry, designating the tone and rhythm of the dramatic activity of that section; therefore, a great deal of emphasis was put on the vocal selection of each of the street vendors. The
offstage cries provided the blues melody throughout the play and, hence, the overriding minor tone, while on-stage dialogue provided the underlying, accompanying major chord.

Vocally, the blues are slow and sustained. There is no great crescendo, no clear completion to the music. The resolution that is present is usually found in a seemingly disconnected final phrase.

A blues chorus or verse usually falls into a 4/4 twelve-bar pattern, divided into three call-and-response sections with the over-all rhyme scheme of A A B ... There is something like a double dialectic to be found in many blues renditions: on one level, every sung or spoken phrase is balanced or commented upon by an instrumental response that often carries as important a message as the preceding words.

... On another level, the three vocal stanzas, the statement, its repetition, and the resolution also have a dialectical quality, for a blues lyric rarely proceeds in a narrative fashion.1

The structure of Ladyhouse Blues is similar to the structure of blues music. Just as the vocal quality of the blues is slow and sustained, the dramatic action of the play is slow and languorous. Just as blues verses are accompanied by instrumental responses, so are the characters' lamentations accompanied by various reactions. The primary action of each scene is accompanied and commented on by the characters, as well as incidental sounds. A fine example of this is found at the end of Act I. Eylie and Terry are alone onstage, talking of the changes that have happened and

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the possibility of those to come. As Eylie wonders at the future, her words are accompanied by Dot's offstage singing of "Jada," a popular song, and Liz's offstage singing of "Rock of Ages." The two strains of melody are as responses to Eylie's questions--one pulling away from the idea of change and one supporting it. Not only do they provide rhythmic and tonal shifts to the scene, but they also texture the scene by enriching it with subliminal emotions. The result is that Eylie begins to cry and her tears are directly triggered by the tone and meaning of the music she hears.

Throughout the play, the characters sing out their individual strains while, metaphorically, pulling away from and supporting one another. When the telegram arrives with the news of Bud, there is a brooding descent of melody with variations of responses. The individual litanies come into harmonic combinations at various points in the play, but as there is no resolution in the action of the play, neither is there a completion of the music. Rather, there is the realization that even though the characters have changed, their songs will remain the same. They will continue to hope for a better life and continue to sing of their feelings and desires. The blues quality of the play is

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1Jennifer Knapp, dramaturg, program notes for Ladyhouse Blues production, 12 December 1982. See Appendix A, p. 78.
universal in its appeal and essential to the musical texture of the production.

**Use of the Sonata**

*Ladyhouse Blues* is more than a blues song; it is a blues sonata. Because of the rhythmical shifts throughout the play, the changes in tempo and mood from scene to scene and unit to unit, and the development of the dramatic theme, *Ladyhouse Blues* contains the qualities and structure of a classical sonata. In order to understand how the classical sonata can be specifically applied to the play, however, it is important to understand what is meant by sonata structure and sonata form.

Sonata structure refers to the scheme of movements contained in the musical composition.¹ The classical sonata usually contains four movements, each of which follows certain conventions of character and structure. The normal scheme of movements for the classical sonata is shown in figure 4.

Sonata form refers to the breakdown of each of the movements into three units or sections called exposition, development, and recapitulation ... usually followed by a closing section called the coda. Each of these sections has a special function and design. In the exposition, the main musical ideas are "exposed"—usually two themes or theme groups ... connected by transitional or bridge passages. The development serves to 'develop' the thematic material introduced in the exposition.

### Fig. 4: The Classical Sonata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Allegro (sometimes with a slow introduction)</td>
<td>fast, usually dramatic, exciting</td>
<td>sonata form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adagio (andante, largo, lento)</td>
<td>slow, lyrical or intensely emotional</td>
<td>sonata form ternary form binary form variations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Minuet, scherzo</td>
<td>dancelike, usually in triple meter; minuet in moderate speed, scherzo very fast. also other dance types (waltz).</td>
<td>ternary form under minuet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Allegro (presto)</td>
<td>fast or very fast, energetic conclusion</td>
<td>sonata form rondo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is done in a great variety of ways, all designed to bring about that special feeling of dynamic growth, tension, and dramatic conflict which is characteristic of the development section... The recapitulation is essentially a restatement of the exposition ... with a midification of the key scheme... The coda in early compositions ... is often hardly more than a short phrase designed to lead to a definitive close of the movement. With Beethoven and his successors the coda often assumes ... great importance, amounting to a second development section which may incorporate the most impressive climax of the whole movement, e.g., in the first movement of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony ...

There are various ways to use the sonata structure and sonata form in dramatic analysis. First, the play can be

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2 Scholes, p. 276-277.
divided into movements and the tempo and mood of each directed according to the sonata structure. Second, the play can be regarded as if it were one movement of a sonata and divided into sections according to the sonata form. Third, the play can be regarded as a complete sonata, divided into movements (sonata structure) and then each movement subdivided into sections (sonata form). The first way is of value in determining the rhythmic superstructure (dramatic tempo) and plot development, the second in analyzing the thematic development, and the third in identifying the dramatic structure of individual scenes or units.

Sonata Structure in Plot Development and Dramatic Tempos

The first movement of a classical sonata, the Allegro, sometimes contains an introduction.1 When employed, this introduction is usually slow and quiet, leading into something loud and boisterous. The introduction can foreshadow a later movement or establish a theme to be repeated throughout the piece. Ladyhouse Blues began with this type of introduction. As the preshow music slowly faded out and the first scene lights came up, the slow, blues cry of the street vendor was heard.2 Helen stood by the sink, coughing, bathed in the harsh rays of the afternoon sun through

\[1\text{Ibid, pp. 276-277.}\]

\[2\text{See Figure 4, p. 26.}\]
the kitchen windows. The feeling was one of weariness and fatigue from the oppressing heat of August in St. Louis. It was important to begin the play in the slow tempo of a sonata introduction, and especially to establish the heat of the day. This heat was analogous to the plot development; as the heat increased, so did the drama intensify. The heat and, consequently, the impending storm served as a metaphor to the effects of war and Bud's death. Just as the heat pushed its way into the Madden's house despite their efforts of prevention so, too, did the war and the city force their way into the Maddens' life. This would be a repeated theme and establishing it at the play's beginning set the tone of the play-sonata and foreshadowed a later movement.

The first movement of the play-sonata began with Eylie's entrance on stage. This was the Allegro and immediately the movement and dialogue onstage brightened and quickened. This tempo was interrupted only by the intermittent cries of the street vendors to provide the metaphoric repeated blues theme represented by the dichotomy between the onstage life--the Maddens' home--and the offstage life--the reality of wartime troubles. Thus, there is a constant effort to maintain stability at home despite the overwhelming demands for change.

The second movement of the play, the Adagio, began near the end of Act I with the realization that Terry will leave home. It begins prior to intermission, intensifying the
dramatic conflict and establishing the tense atmosphere that carries over to the second act. Act II begins with an intense feeling of oppression and heaviness as the storm clouds have continued to gather and build overhead. This Adagio movement continues with the news of Bud's death, Liz and Terry's trip to town to claim Bud's effects, and Helen, Eylie and Dot's awaiting of their return. The tempo and mood of this movement is characteristic of the Adagio--slow, yet intensely emotional. With Liz and Terry's return home, the movement ends.

Almost immediately, the tempo of the play shifts into the third movement, the Scherzo, as Liz and Terry storm on stage. Through Liz and Terry's banter of the day's events, the reading of Bud's letter and Liz's attack on Dot's blasphemy, the movement gains momentum. The tempo throughout the movement is very fast. As Liz exits and the daughters stand en tableau in the kitchen, the movement ends.

The last movement of the sonata-play, the Allegro, begins as the girls clear the supper dishes and sing "In the Gloaming." Though the tempo initially is slow, the overall feeling is lighter, as if there has been a release of pressure. Literally and metaphorically, the storm has passed and the temperature has cooled. As in a sonata, the music is brighter throughout the last movement. The tempo quickens as the daughters talk about technological changes, such as electricity and telephone communication, and with Liz's
return, the conversation shifts to the question of acquiring Bud's insurance money. The tempo remains quick within the heated discussion and the movement ends with the daughters rejoining and exiting with laughter and song, singing "On The Banks of the Wabash." Though this is the last movement of the play, there is a final coda which, very importantly, allows for Liz's breakdown and release of emotion. This coda also serves to reiterate the main theme of the play and leaves the audience with the silhouetted image of Liz against the twilight sky as she regains strength to go on despite her turmoil.

Thus, it is apparent that the sonata structure can be applied to a directorial analysis of Ladyhouse Blues. It provided a system to interpret the play's rhythms, tempos, and moods, and to analyze the dramatic action. It was useful in both analysis and rehearsal, and enhanced the musical texture of the production.

Sonata Form in Thematic Development

As mentioned, each movement of a sonata has three units: the exposition (E), development (D) and recapitulation (R). The arrangement of these units sometimes varies with each movement, but the first movement almost invariably follows the format of E D R.1 The other movements are arranged according to the wills of the composer, though each movement always begins with the exposition. If Ladyhouse Blues were a single movement of a classical sonata, it would
be the second movement, the Adagio. The thematic development and the dramatic action of the play is predominantly slow, sometimes lyrical, and often intensely emotional. Conversations revolve around the characters' dreams, desires, problems, and everyday life. The dramatic action is directly parallel to the oppressing heat of the day and impending storm. Just as the storm clouds build, so too does the dramatic action and so does the development of the dramatic theme. This thematic development can be seen more clearly by analyzing the tonal scheme of a sonata and applying it to the play.

Technically, the first unit of the sonata form, the exposition, introduces the main theme in the tonic key, and then follows with the second theme in some related key. The second unit, the development, consists of fragments or patterns from either or both themes played singly or in combination. The recapitulation is the last section, which returns to the main theme followed by the second; however, this time the second theme is played in the same key as the main (the tonic). Thus, there is a type of merging of keys, though not of themes. There is no clear resolve, both themes are still present, but there is a kind of setting of softening of the dichotomy of tones.

In Ladyhouse Blues, the main theme is tradition and stability. It is the desire for the home-life which Liz and her daughters have embedded in their souls: the tending to
the farm, the bearing and raising of children, the preparing and planning of meals. The second theme is that of change, represented in the play by Bud and the war: the leaving the nest, the working and living in the city, the disruption of the family, and the confronting of the effects of war. As the play develops, the two themes are introduced, play off each other, and finally, blend in key.

The exposition section of the play begins with Act I,i and lasts until Terry's announcement in I,iii. Throughout this section, the dialogue emphasis is on the past with secondary emphasis on the problems of the present and wondering of the future, i.e., Bud's well-being and return home. The activity revolves around traditional daily routines. With Terry's announcement of her appointment as delegate and plans to go to Washington, a more active and audible struggle begins between Liz's attempts at keeping the family together (and her girls home) and the daughters' attempts to justify their separations. At this point in the play, the development section begins. The two themes introduced in the exposition section intermix with one interrupting the other. As is characteristic of the development section of a sonata movement, this intermixing and intertwining of themes brings about the feeling of dramatic conflict and tension in the course of the action. The development section of Ladyhouse Blues lasts through the news of Bud's death and until Liz and Terry's return with Bud's letter in
Act II, iii. Throughout the section, the dialogue centers on what may happen to the family; the possibility of attaining Bud's insurance money and the changes that may happen as a result. The action is tense, the characters are temperamental, the street vendors' cries are more obtrusive, harsh, and staccato, and there is continual reference to the gathering storm. The development section closes with Liz's explosion at Dot's blasphemy and exclamation about the Eternal at the end of II, iii. The following scene begins the recapitulation section. With this, the tone of the dramatic action softens, the dialogue focuses on traditional values and the need to maintain family unity, and the activity returns to ritual-like chores. There is a rejoining of sibling bonds, but because of Liz's adamant opposition to "asking" for Bud's insurance money, the dramatic conflict still exists.1 Both themes introduced in the exposition section are still present but the second has taken a different tone and, metaphorically, is played in the tonic key. The final section of the play is the coda. Like Beethoven's Eroica Symphony, the coda in Ladyhouse Blues introduces another development section before closing with a recapitulation. These development and recapitulation sections are shorter than the earlier ones, yet equally as important. The development section in the coda begins with the

1See excerpt from the play contained on pp. 19-20.
daughters' exit near the end of the play. Liz is left alone, sitting at the table, her rage at the circumstances surrounding her life building into an explosion. She cries out against the Lord and all He has made her bear. This section is important, for it not only allows, dramatically for Liz's emotional release, but it also further develops the two dramatic themes—Liz's need for her family and for accepting and understanding the changes surrounding her. The recapitulation in the coda contains Liz's prayer for strength and request of the Lord to "go a little easier" on her girls (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 110). With Liz's "Amen" and extinguishing of the lamp, the coda ends, the movement closes, and the curtain falls. Regarding Ladyhouse Blues as one movement of a sonata and applying the sonata form to its thematic development and dramatic action lends itself well to directorial analysis. Figure 5 illustrates the application of the sonata form to Ladyhouse Blues.

Just as the sonata form is useful to the director in analyzing the overall dramatic structure of a play, it is also useful in analyzing the dramatic structure of the play's individual sections or units. As mentioned, the play can be regarded as a sonata and then broken down into individual movements (units). These movements can then be further divided into sections (subunits). The sonata form can then be applied, and each unit's development of dramatic
Fig. 5: Sonata form as applied to Ladyhouse Blues

Movement: Adagio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Begin</th>
<th>End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>I, i.: Opening--&quot;...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cool, cool melons ...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>I, iii.: &quot;... Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>workers called ...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapitulation</td>
<td>II, iii: &quot;In the gloam-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ing ...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda:</td>
<td>Development II, iv:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;God damn the Navy ...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II, iv.: &quot;... Your wonders to perform ...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapitulation</td>
<td>II, iv: &quot;got to face up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to them ways ...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II, iv: &quot;Amen&quot;--Curtain</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

action and theme identified and analyzed. Each unit would then have the subunits of exposition, development, recapitulation, and possibly, coda. The same principles used in applying the sonata form to the superstructure of the play would pertain to the substructure of the -lay. This application enables the director to identify the movement, flow, and tempo of each unit, comparable to identifying each unit's points of crescendo and decrescendo.

In directing Ladyhouse Blues, I found the application of the sonata form to the individual units useful in both analysis and rehearsal. It provided me with a means of
breaking down the play into workable and understandable terms. It provided my actors with a sense of the rhythm, tone, and flow of individual scenes. And it resulted in enhancing the musical texture of the production.

Summary

Musical terms, structures and principles can be applied to dramatic works in any number of ways. They can be used as analytical and rehearsal tools, providing the director with systems and theories which aid the decision-making process. They also aid both the director and the actors in enhancing the texture of a given work. The identification of aural signs, i.e., the use of music, was essential to producing Ladyhouse Blues as a sensually exciting, theatrical event. One of the aims of the director was to remain true to the desires of the playwright. By entitling his play Ladyhouse Blues and by designating specific musical selections and sounds throughout, O'Morrison provides the director with fundamental guidelines to conceptual analysis. Both musical forms, the blues and the sonata, were viable and useful tools in analyzing the characters, the dramatic action and tempos, the thematic development, and the very structure of the play. Together, these analytical tools enhanced the musical texture of the play through its aural signs.
CHAPTER III
VISUAL SIGNS: THE USE OF ART IN ANALYSIS

Just as musical forms helped to identify and analyze the aural dimensions of Ladyhouse Blues, so, too, did art forms aid the analysis of the play's visual dimensions. In order to translate the visual signs which formed in my mind's eye during initial readings of the play to practical application in production, I identified several artists and sculptors whose works most closely epitomized my visions. These artists and sculptors, and their works, were also influential in staging and designing the play. They helped conceptualize compositional elements, emotional qualities, and pictorial elements for the director, actors and designers.

Though Ladyhouse Blues is a realistic play, set in an actual time period, initially, focus was not upon Realism as a primary art period in research. In terms of color and form, some works in the Neoclassicist and Romantic periods appealed to me, such as Ingres and Goya. However, it was

1 Specific examples which were found relevant to images of Ladyhouse Blues were Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres', Contesse d'Honignoreville, 1845, Frick Collection, and Francisco Goya's Maja desnuda, 1800, Museo del Prado Madrid, contained in Frederick Hartt's Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, 2 vols. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1976) 1: color plate 50.
the works of American Scene Painters of the 20th Century which best encapsulated my feelings and visions of the play. One artist in particular was extremely useful in the directing and production process—Edward Hopper.

Edward Hopper: Theme and Composition

Hopper's choice of colors, subject matter, and, at times, his use of light, captured the essence of my vision of Ladyhouse Blues. Hopper focused upon the contemporary American city in his work, concerning himself with the immediate, intimate surroundings of everyday life. His colors are deep and rich, with definite contrasts in tone and hue. They are rarely pastel yet neither are they abrasive. Instead, they have a smooth, almost photographic quality to them which seems to embrace the viewer sensually and emotionally. Hopper was used as a resource in my analysis of the play's visual imagery and composition. His work also provided me with insights into the characters and the dramatic theme.

Though Hopper's "contemporary" city was predominantly that of the thirties and forties, the essence of his work is remarkably applicable to the late World War I setting of Ladyhouse Blues, and particularly to the social and personal situations of the play's characters. Hopper's city was not the boisterous, bustling environment of thousands of people, but one of the loneliness and solitude of the individual within that environment. Often, he chose times or hours
when few if any people were seen, further exemplifying the impersonalization of the city itself. His people are part of the whole scene and their environment is as important as they are. So, too, is the case with the characters and setting of Ladyhouse Blues.

Hopper's use of women in his paintings was also a particularly influential characteristic of his work in my analysis of the play. Hopper's scenes of women are usually in city interiors and are both intimate and sensual. In his book, Edward Hopper, Lloyd Goodrich examines the artist's portrayal of women.

Always she appears in entirely realistic circumstances, dressing or undressing; and often she is before a window, looking out--the intimacy of her nakedness contrasting with the impersonal city outside. There is never any academic idealizing, nor on the other hand any obvious eroticism. She is painted with complete honesty, but also with devoted attention to her solid physical existence, her statuesque roundness... Underlying Hopper's naturalism was that deep sensualism which is fundamental to all vital art, and which contributed to the masculine strength of his art.1

In Ladyhouse Blues essential scenic elements were the windows and doors of the kitchen. The characters frequently gaze out the windows, watching the activity of the city, talking of life in the city or life "back home." Purposely, the set was designed to intensify the separation between the Maddens' home (and home-life) and the existence (and

imposition) of the city. Not only is their home a second-story flat, but the action of the play takes place in the kitchen at the back of the flat. Directly upstage is the sink with a row of windows above it, and the back porch door to stage left, all of which act as a fortress against the outside world. (Figure 6 is an illustration of the ground plan used in production; Figure 7 a photo of the actual set.)

The audience hears the calls of the street vendors, the singing of the church revival meeting and the preachings of the Evangelist as he crosses through the alley, but always this city life is heard and not seen and frequently the characters will literally shut it out by closing the windows and doors which bridge their life to that of the city's. Helen, for example, tells the street vendors to "shut up" (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 85) and responds to the singing of the revival meeting with "I'll choke to death if I have to listen to that." (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 47) Eylie, by contrast, tries to embrace the outside life but is combating her fear of leaving home, and her inability to metaphorically cut the umbilical cord. She is frequently staring out the windows, standing by the door seemingly in awe or in detached wonder of the world beyond. Eylie's exchange with Helen in Act I illustrates her dilemma. As the Vegetable Vendor passes through the alley behind the Maddens' flat, Eylie is pulled to the porch door by his slow, minor-keyed melody, triggering her conversation with Helen.
Fig. 6: Groundplan for Ladyhouse Blues

Fig. 7: Front View of Set
EYLIE: (over her shoulder to Helen as she listens) Hel' you know what I'd miss most if I ever leave St. Louis?

HELEN: (like she's been slapped) Since when have you been thinking of leaving St. Louis?

EYLIE: (ear still tuned to the vendor) Ever since I heard there was a somewhere else -

EYLIE: What I'd miss though, is the street cries. VENDOR: Greens, Fresh Greens, I got Cab-ba-ge's! ' ...')

EYLIE: Oooh - somebody must've walked over my grave.

HELEN: I hate that saying.

EYLIE: (She hasn't heard) If I ever do get away - (Her doubt is palpable in the air) (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 19)

Eylie embodies much of the spirit of Hopper's paintings. Not only does she wonder at the world, but she dreams of change, travel, and adventure. Many of Hopper's works deal with travel, be it railroads, highways, or gas stations, and he focused on the sensations of the traveler. "Of Approaching A City, for example, (Hopper) said that he was trying to express the emotions one has on a train coming into a strange city--'interest, curiosity, fear'..."¹ These emotions underly the action and the characters of Ladyhouse Blues.

Another interesting correlation between Hopper's paintings and Ladyhouse Blues is the depiction of women dressing or undressing. In O'Morrison's work, Liz is constantly removing her clothing and replacing it with a lighter, freer

¹Goodrich, p. 70.
dress. Immediately upon entering the kitchen after having been downtown, Liz begins to strip herself of her garments, as if removing her protective shield against the outside world. Her clothing is analogous to her view of the city and she views both as an imprisonment relieved only by the security of her home and family. Her vehemence towards the restrictions of her city clothing is illustrated in her referral to it as a "straightjacket" and in her rhetorical questioning of wearing a corset, "Wonder if anybody ever thought of making men wear somethin' like this. 'Stead of sendin' 'em to jail." (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 87). Liz, like Hopper's women, is naked before the city yet shielded by the security of her dwelling.

Hopper's paintings provided me with a better understanding of the environment in which Ladyhouse Blues takes place. He was valuable in analyzing the dramatic theme and compositional elements of his works stimulated my visual concept of the play. Because of this, I was able to enhance the visual signs and artistic texture of the production with emotional and sensual elements which I hoped the audience would feel whether consciously or subconsciously. Hopper was an influential and valuable resource, but he was not the only one used. For further insights into characterizations, and the play's sensuality, I turned to another painter, Raphael Soyer.
Ladyhouse Blues is a play about women. Though it deals with issues, problems, and relationships with which all women can identify, it focuses on five individual women facing the effects of late World War I upon their family. Perhaps the most striking feature of Raphael Soyer's work is that for almost three decades his main subjects are women, and this time span includes the Depression of the 1930's and the Second World War. Though Soyer did not paint with a social or political message as his aim, his subjects are members of troubled time periods and, however subliminally, his art reflects these individuals and these times.

Soyer was concerned with painting each subject and particularly each woman as a unique and complete individual. In his book Raphael Soyer, Lloyd Goodrich examines Soyer's portrayal of women.

Soyer's feeling for character has always been sensitive and true, capturing the subtle differences of shape and contour that make the person an individual like no one else ...¹

Whether she is in a crowd, as with his Window Shoppers, Shop Girls, or Bus Passengers, or solitary, as with Rebecca, Pensive Girl, Figure in Blue, or The Adolescent, she is always painted with warmth, intimacy and specific body

attitudes and gestures which create striking characterizations. Soyer's works show "... an absorption in woman-kind, her occupations, actions and gestures ... and as he progressed as a painter, his work increasingly reflected this absorption."¹

Soyer's paintings of the forties and fifties show a decline in city scenes and an increase in single figures of women. Most of these paintings show women in pensive or reflective moods but always with strength and beauty.

(Soyer) acknowledges (women's) fundamental strength and bestows upon them the full measure of their power ... he sees them at once as both naked and nude, ... a combination of sensual power and vulnerability."²

"Representationalism and humanism," in Soyer's words, were primary concerns in his art.³ So, too, were they primary concerns in my art. By examining the visual characterizations of women in Soyer's paintings, I was able to identify specific body attitudes which provoked certain emotional reactions and embodied psychological characteristics. Through Soyer's women, I was able to embrace the women of Ladyhouse Blues, and hence enhance the artistic texture of the play:

¹Ibid, p. 70.


³Ibid, p. 158.
Summary

These artists were used as a stimuli for my concept formation. By examining the compositional elements of their art, their subjects, their use of color, highlight and shadow, and the emotional and sensual reactions I experienced from their works, I was able to (a) identify thematic elements, (b) create visual images of characters and scenes, and (c) articulate my conceptual ideas. Hopper and Soyer enhanced the artistic texture of Ladyhouse Blues, enriching it with color, feeling, and sensuality.
CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF MUSIC AND ART IN REHEARSAL

The director's analysis of a play and formation of a concept is only valuable ultimately in its application to the theatrical production. All the researching and philosophizing the director does in preliminary planning often must be put aside once the play begins rehearsal. This is not to say that conceptual analysis is unimportant. In fact, it is absolutely essential, for without it the director has no vision and no means of solidifying or communicating that vision. However, once faced with the task of staging the production and working with the cast of actors, the director must focus upon bringing the drama to life. This means that the director must communicate with the actors in terms which they can both understand and translate into action. Sometimes, these are the same terms which the director has used throughout the analysis process; more often, they must be more precise and less intellectual.

Director-Actor Communication

I entered the rehearsal process seeing myself as director-conductor-artist and proceeded to try to directly apply my concept and research to my work with the actors. I talked to them about its musicality, its rhythms, tempos, tones, its framed photograph quality, its artistic texture
... I still maintain that all these elements are what makes the play exciting and sensual and what embraces the audience. However, though the actors responded well to these initial discussions, in actual rehearsals where scenes were staged and worked, these discussions, as well as my concept, hindered productivity. For many hours, I concentrated on the minutiae of detail, reiterating the importance of the rhythm of speech and trying desperately to determine the technicalities involved in the stage business - i.e., where, when and how to get, set and strike the multitude of props. I was so intent upon orchestrating the dialogue and sounds, and in painting the stage pictures, that I, as well as my actors, began to lose sight of the play as drama. In essence, I was stifling my actors with my directorial concept. Moments that were at times right, were lost because I tried to make the actors see and hear themselves as opposed to helping them develop their characters, motivations, and interrelationships. In professional environments, perhaps, the director may be able to say, "I like that; keep it" and the actors will retain what they have done. In the academic environment, however, the director must often be an acting coach as well. In all situations, it is important that the director and actor understand each other. And herein lay a basic problem with my initial directorial route.

Though many young actors do not have formal training in music, it can be helpful to the actor to think of himself as
a musician and to learn his craft just as a musician learns his art. A musician begins his training learning how to play his instrument, concentrating on such elements as arm, hand and lip placement; proper fingering of keys; location of notes, strings; posture; breathing; learning note durations, rhythms, tempos, etc. After these fundamentals are learned the musician can then add emotion to his work, and allow this emotion to guide and enhance his playing. In an orchestra, too, the musician enhances the creation of an ensemble by knowing when to rest, when to accompany and when to play solo. Many, if not all, of these characteristics of learning the art of becoming a musician can be likened to learning the art of acting. In an academic situation, particularly, the director needs to enhance the actor's understanding of his art, and communicate in simple, direct terms.

Since I was using music as a principle directorial tool, I began the rehearsal process mistakenly treating my actors as trained musicians. However, only one of my actors had any formal training, and understood what I meant by, for example, rhythm or tone. For the most part, however, giving directions such as "This movement of the play needs to be staccato," or "I need more of an andante, legato feeling here" proved virtually futile. The frustration and dissatisfaction level of the cast grew to an almost devastating level. I reevaluated my approach, discussed the problems
with my actors, and thereby found that I needed to enable my cast to explore and discover the music and art of the play in what they believed would be their own way. In essence, they needed, what seemed to me at the time to be less direction.

At this point in the rehearsal process my overt directorial approach adjusted to meet the needs of my actors. I kept my conceptual ideas silent and concentrated on technical tasks and character objectives which the actors could accomplish. The results achieved from working in this manner were both impressive and satisfying.

Blocking and Actor Imagery

The importance of concentrating on details is not to be underestimated; however, it is the manner in which these details are handled which the director must determine. I determined that my actors needed to focus on their immediate surroundings and the details of their activity. We paid close attention to how their characters would perform specific chores such as washing dishes, peeling potatoes, canning fruits, and so on. Because of the time period, it was necessary to determine the procedures and steps these women would have taken to accomplish their daily chores. For example, peeling potatoes would have taken a minimum of eight steps:

1. Get two pots from cupboard
2. Fill one pot with potatoes, and run water over them (sparingly)

3. Leave water and unpeeled potatoes in pot; take both pots to worktable

4. Spread tea-towel on lap

5. Scrub potatoes in pot (by hand); peel with paring knife onto oilcloth on table; slice into new pot

6. When potatoes are peeled, run water over them and boil on stove

7. Clean peelings from table and put in slop bucket

8. Put pan in sink to use as dishpan later

Within these eight steps, the following considerations needed to be remembered:

1. Water pressure on second floor is very low, therefore it will take time to run water into pot

2. Save everything possible to use again or in some other way

3. No newspaper would be spread on table

Each daily activity required a specific sequence of steps and certain considerations to remember due to the time period and the locale. These steps and considerations were determined through research and discussion, and provided the actors with paths to follow in their actions. They also provided me with a means of determining stage business as well as a means of enhancing the musical and artistic dimensions of the play. For example, I could tell Helen to
slice the potatoes slower and thereby provide the appropriate rhythm of the sound of the potatoes plopping into the saucepan to contrast with or underly the other stage sounds. It seemed that my work actually became simpler for I could give directions such as "By this point in the scene you need to have peeled the potatoes and are beginning to prepare to set the table." The actor then had a task, namely, to accomplish the activity in a given amount of time while still playing the scene of dialogue. Often times, this task would take many rehearsals to discover the necessary time needed for each step. But, ultimately, the task was accomplished, the actors felt they had succeeded and I was able to mold and shape each dimension of the play—the sounds, sights, and moods—in an unobtrusive manner. Further, I realized that I need not dictate every move or sound from the onset but could allow the work to take shape through my actors.

I was indeed a director-conductor for I was able to orchestrate the music of the play through the actors' work. Like a conductor, I allowed my actors to fumble through the music, playing wrong notes, finding correct rhythms, discovering when they could play solo and when they needed to rest or accompany the others. With each rehearsal I was able to finely tune the work without the actors feeling a stifling of their creativity. My conceptual analysis of the play's musical dimensions and the aural composition of the production took shape in this way.
Just as the musical qualities of the play emerged in the rehearsal process through determination of activities, so too did the artistic dimensions of the play develop. As mentioned, Hopper and Soyer, were primary art sources used in conceptual analysis. By allowing the actors to examine these artists' works and then discussing the mood qualities and characters portrayed in the paintings, the actors gained a sense of my visual objectives. They were also able to identify visual images of their own character, in some cases. For example, Soyer's Pensive Girl and The Adolescent were particularly useful for Eylie's character when she was dreaming of leaving St. Louis in Act I, while his Rebecca was useful for Terry at the end of Act I. Soyer's angular and active body positions were used, for example, when one character was seated and another was standing. Hopper's works were useful more so in aiding the actors' understanding of the impact of city living on a family who was born and raised in the country. This understanding was essential to realizing the dilemma faced by Liz and by the girls of leaving home and breaking away from the family.

Music: Dialect and Vocal Work

The dialogue in Ladyhouse Blues is written both in and out of the Ozark Mountain dialect. Reference is given in the script, and the decision was made by the director, that the Ozark Mountains was the homeland of the play's main characters, the Madden family. Examination of the dialect
structure and the extent to which each of the characters uses it, were essential to both producing credible performances and developing complete characterizations.

Each of the characters' speech patterns varied in the inclusion and domination of the Ozark Mountain dialect. In terms of characterization, the more each character battles with maintaining her traditional values and lifestyle, the stronger is her usage of the dialect. Liz's dialect is the strongest and she battles the most openly with holding on to the past and traditions. Dot's dialect is the weakest and she has broken away from the family moreso than any of the other daughters. Yet, at times, Dot too uses phrases and language reflective of her family background. By determining the extent to which each character used the dialect, the actors produced a symphony of voices, each varying in pitch, tone, and stress patterns. This also allowed for underlying aspects of their characters to surface. In order for all this to be realized in the production, however, the actors had to first learn the technicalities of the dialect in rehearsal. Music was particularly useful in dialect analysis and practice.

The Ozark Mountain dialect can be musically diagrammed to illustrate the rhythm, phrasing, intonation, and stress patterns of the speech. For example, the General American sentence "There isn't any sense in it." would be translated into Mountain dialect as "There ain't nary a bit of sense in
it." and would be musically diagrammed as in figure 8.

Figure 8: Example of The Ozark Dialect in Musical Form

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THAYn Ri di UHns
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In this sentence, the words "THAYn" (there ain't) and "it" (it) receive the least amount of stress, while "i:uhn" (in) receives the greatest. A notable characteristic of the dialect is that it is heavily and frequently accentuated, and this constant accent resolves itself into a measured beat which gives the feeling of inevitability to the speech ... This is further heightened by an upward lilt at the end of the sentence which gives the impression that the speaker has more to say ... Generally, the tempo (of Mountain dialect) is moderately fast, slowing down to a drawl before a pause; the stress is marked; there is a tendency to speak in a minor key ...  

The elongated quality of the speech, is further illustrated in two syllable words such as "police" and "Detroit." In dialect, they would be spoken as "pOH:lees" and "dEE:tchrOIt." Musically, the stressed syllable takes a higher note. Likewise, in compound phrases, there is a

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heavy stress on both words, as in "EhuhVER tAH:m" (every time).

The playwright of Ladyhouse Blues aids the actors in learning the dialect through his writing. He indicates where the stress should be within the sentences and uses specific wording characteristic of the dialect. Throughout the play the most noticeable examples of this are found in Liz's speech patterns, such as in Act I where she says (and O'Morrison writes):

Mr. Grady says that's mebbe where the Bolsheviks come in--they fixed it so's his son had to go to Detroit, 'stead a bein' home where he belongs. Takin' us all to Perdition, like it says in Revelation--(Choking up.) an'--an'--if then automobiles is such great shakes, how come they got to be fixin' 'em all the time! Big gare-rodes sproutin' up ever'where you look! Saw another one a them big ugly things today--down on Olive Street--jam packed with broke-down smelly ole greasy automobiles as wouldn't work! An' it was bigger'n ugglier'n one them car-barns, yonder! (Ladyhouse Blues, pp. 36-37)

Though O'Morrison's writing was very useful in determining stress variances, applying music to the language aided the identification of pitch, rhythm, and intonation. This was a valuable tool for the actors to use in learning the dialect, attaining accuracy of speech, and producing credibility in performance.

Summary

By analyzing the play in music and art terms, I was provided with systems and methods of formulating my directorial concept. By applying basic principles of directing
laid out by Alexander Dean and Frances Hodge, I was able to allow my actors to realize my concept in production.

The music of the play emerged through the actors' determination of activities, and discovery of their characters. The sonata structure and form was present in the incidental sounds and the tempos of the dialogue. The blues were realized in the actual words spoken, the actual intonation and melodies of the street vendors, and the moments when Liz cried out supplications to the Lord, at the end of Act I and Act II.

The artistic dimensions of the play also emerged during rehearsal by determining the characters' activities. As the actors worked through the sequence of steps or followed certain paths necessary in accomplishing tasks, I was able to shape the stage pictures. Like an artist, I started with a base color and then added layer upon layer of accents or complementary colors to form the end product. Like a sculptor, I could mold the clay and smooth the edges to achieve the desired result. Giving the actors visual images in early rehearsals gave them examples of body positions and gestures to either identify with or reenact on stage. And

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finally, using art sources provided the actors with emotional qualities and an intellectual understanding of their individual characters.

It was indeed the musical and artistic dimensions of the play which made it a successful production. However, it was through patience, trust, and exploration in the rehearsal process that enabled the actors to achieve these dimensions on stage.
CHAPTER V
THE USE OF MUSIC AND ART IN PRODUCTION

The musical and artistic concepts, theories and terms previously discussed were highly useful in the technical areas of production, especially in the areas of scene and light design. By discussing my concepts with the designers early in the production process, they were able to realize the emotional qualities and specific visual elements which I desired.

Though Ladyhouse Blues is a realistic play, neither the setting nor the lighting was designed in the style of realism or naturalism. Instead, the play was designed as what the Russian director, Eugene Vakhtangov, termed "fantastic realism."

In his book Stanislavsky's Protege: Eugene Vakhtangov, Ruben Simonov discusses Vakhtangov's term "fantastic realism."

... Vakhtangov's final note completing his diaries was the note which defined and deciphered the meaning of his term "fantastic realism." Here is how he put it: "The correct theatrical means, when discovered, gives to the author's work a true reality on the stage. One can study these means, but the form must be the product of the artist's

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imagination--fantasy. This is why I call it "fantastic realism." It exists in every art.¹

Vakhtangov believed that the artist's creative fantasy, his creative imagination, should be the springboard for the recreation of life on stage. Unlike Stanislavsky and his works at the Moscow Art Theatre, where the recreation of life on stage was based upon the actualities and minute details of reality, for Vakhtangov, art was to be created by sifting through those details and allowing the ones which were foremost in the artist's creative imagination to take form on the stage. Vakhtangov allowed the play to serve as the source of inspiration for his creative fantasy. Though historical accuracy was important, he placed a higher value on the images and inner visions of the artist rather than the absolute recreation of reality on stage.

In directing Ladyhouse Blues, I placed a high value on the historically accurate details of the time period; however, my creative fantasy (or directorial concept) of the play guided the design to reflect the musical and artistic dimensions of the work. For example, all set pieces and properties were chosen with respect to the period; however, they were carefully selected and placed on the set with regard to their value in creating a painting. Each set piece and each property was textured to form the overall

¹Ibid, p.146.
composition. By working in this way, the scene designer was able to capture not only the period of the play but also the artistic dimensions which I desired.

The Design Processes: Scene, Light, Sound and Costume Design

Using art sources as reference points and a means of understanding my vision of the play, enabled the designer to identify certain visual elements to include in his design. For example, Hopper's use of line and angle aided in the design of the groundplan. The feeling that the stage picture extended beyond the boundaries of the stage itself was a characteristic of Hopper's work as well as the design of Ladyhouse Blues. Though Hopper used deeper colors than my designer decided upon, applying Hopper's use of highlight and shadow in his paintings to the texturing of scenic elements, such as the walls, furniture, and properties was a very useful and effective technique. And, finally, Hopper frequently used windows as a means of separating his people from the outside world (i.e., the city) and in designing Ladyhouse Blues, the windows of the kitchen served the same purpose.

Music was used in the scene design in a somewhat abstract manner. Because the designer understood my view of the play as a blues-sonata, he sought to capture the feelings of, particularly, the blues in his design. For example, the colors were somewhat muted and blended with
soft edges. Instead of making the kitchen spotless or stark, the designer tried to give the setting a very personal, intimate feeling through dressing props such as family pictures and other items which were indicative of the individuals which lived in this house. Blues singing, likewise, is very intimate and personal, yet the singer appeals to all people who have suffered some type of family or personal hardship. The blues singer does not indulge in self-pity but sings of his hope for a better way of life. The design of *Ladyhouse Blues* reflected these characteristics of the blues by presenting a picture of a home which was troubled but which contained both warmth and hope. In this respect, using music as a means of understanding and analyzing *Ladyhouse Blues* greatly aided the design process.

**Light Design**

The lighting design was also aided by the use of art and music. Art was useful for the lighting designer in many of the same ways that it was useful for the scene designer. Again, Hopper's paintings were primary art sources used in director-designer discussions and in the lighting design itself. Hopper's use of light, particularly when shining through windows or door openings, was very strong and directional, casting definite shadows or highlights on the subjects of the paintings. This was useful in the lighting design of *Ladyhouse Blues*. For example, when Helen stood by the windows at the opening of Act II, the bright morning
rays of the sun shone through the windows, highlighting her hair and dress, and throwing a bright shaft of light upon the floor of the kitchen. This not only provided a striking visual image of a painting but also enabled the lighting designer to sculpt the space. Because the designer understood my concept of the play and my objectives of achieving these qualities of paintings and sculpture on stage, and was able to refer to specific art sources, he did not seek to only light the space but to present the qualities of a still-life painting and a three-dimensional sculpture. Technically, he used little front light and a great deal of down, side, back and accent lights in his design. The final product was most effective.

Music was useful in my communication with the lighting designer and in the final lighting design in two ways. First, using the blues as a tool for choosing his gel colors. The foremost objective was to choose colors which would reflect the mood of the scene. In fact, blues and lavenders were dominant wash colors used throughout the play, especially for twilight and night scenes.

Music also served as a tool for understanding the soul of drama and greatly aided the designer with a means of translating my vision of the play into the lighting design. I have spoken of the importance of the framed-photograph quality of the play and how I wished to present that in the production. One of my objectives was to impress the
audience with the fact that they were watching the enactment of a story about one family in South St. Louis, Missouri of 1919 and how the war and the social changes of the time affected them. I wished to allow the audience to engage themselves in the action of the play but to color their view with the reminder that this was a time gone by and, though the problems and questions facing the characters in the play are relevant to all people, especially women, in every age, what the audience witnessed was a story and not reality.

Much like Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, Ladyhouse Blues is a memory play, in that it is a memory of American life in one period of our history. As Williams says,

Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the article it touches, for memory is seated predominately in the heart ...

Also, in The Glass Menagerie, the character of Tom says, "In memory everything seems to happen to music." I used music in Ladyhouse Blues to serve several purposes. Not only did it provide certain analytical and rehearsal tools, as discussed in Chapters II and III, but it also was used in production to provide the reminder of the play as a heart-felt memory of American life. The lighting represented the musical and, in turn, memory qualities of the play by providing

2Ibid., p. 439.
a means of bringing the audience in and out of the action of the play, or, in another way, to bring the life on stage in and out of focus to the audience. Specifically, the lighting was the vehicle through which the action of the play moved. It provided a means of flowing from scene to scene without ever having a total blackout. This use of cross-fades enhanced the musical quality of the play by providing for a continuous flow of action and thereby embracing the quality of a musical composition. Each scene change was carefully orchestrated and designed as if it were the close of a musical phrase, within the composition with a rêtard and decrescendo, immediately followed by the beginning of either a new phrase or a new movement. The actors were instructed to hold en tableau for five seconds at the end of each scene while the lights began to change.

The decision to execute the lighting design in this manner was agreed upon by both the director and the designer. It was a result of the musical concept of the play and an understanding of the importance of enhancing the play's musical texture. It was also greatly supported by many of the playwright's notations throughout the script. These notations were always in reference to a time passage and were the playwright's suggestions for accomplishing changes. For example, at the end of the first scene in Act II, he says,

The kitchen is "empty" for a moment. Then cued by the music from a nearby "Victrola," which floats
through the open doors and windows, the light begins to change from hot early morning to hot late morning.

The song the Victrola is playing is "On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away." But when Eylie comes on - now dressed for the day - she goes about her chores as though she doesn't hear it; as though she is outside the scene. She clears the breakfast things away, returning eggs and butter to the icebox on the porch, dishes and bread to the pantry. Her chores finished, she returns to the table, sits, rests her clasped hands on the table before her and waits. A moment later, Helen - now also dressed - joins her. The music ends. It is now 10:30 a.m.1 (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 77)

The playwright indicates that the lighting and music is used as a mechanism for segueing between scenes. His notations also can be and were interpreted as an aspect of the concept of the play as a musical composition.

Adolphe Appia said, "Light is to production what music is to the score: the expressive element in opposition to literal signs; and, like music, light can express only what belongs to the inner essence of all vision."1 There were moments in the production of Ladyhouse Blues that truly captured the essence of my vision and which could not have been achieved without the conceptual analysis of the musical-artistic dimensions of the play.

Sound Design

The sound design was not significantly affected by art analysis, but was directly influenced by the musical concepts of the play. Actual music selections that were used

1Appia, p. 72.
in the production were mostly those designated by the playwright. The particular arrangements of those selections were chosen with respect to the mood quality which they possessed. For example, after the news of Bud's death in Act II, Eylie awaits Liz and Terry's return from town. The scene begins with the sound of "music from a nearby 'Victrola' ... playing 'On The Banks of the Wabash'." (*Ladyhouse Blues*, p. 77). Because the playwright indicates that the music is outside of the scene itself, the selection was chosen primarily for its mood quality and its rhythm. It was slow, melodic piano with solo vocal, was played at a very low, almost subconscious level, and was limited to the backstage left speaker.

O'Morrison makes it clear that music is a vital key to the texture of *Ladyhouse Blues*. Every scene begins with some musical sound. With the exception of the last scene of the play, this music is the minor-keyed blues melody of the Street Vendor's cry. At the beginning of the play, these cries are slow, legato melodies but as the play continues and the drama heightens, the cries become louder, quicker in tempo and more staccato in rhythm. The music here is used as a reflection of the dramatic action. For example, after the news of Bud's death in Act II, Eylie, Helen and Dot anxiously await Liz and Terry's return from town. The atmosphere is tense and the dramatic action is heightened by the fact that the outcome of Liz's visit with the Chaplain will
determine whether or not the family can obtain Bud's insurance money and this will effect their entire future.

O'Morrison intermixes the offstage cries of the Street Vendors with the dialogue onstage. In the production, I decided to add an additional Street Vendor's cry to the two designated ones in the script and directed all three to sing simultaneously. This provided a deliberately chaotic array of sounds and further stimulation for Helen's reaction to them with her line, "OH, SHUT UP! Think you were downtown, the clatter goes on in this house, worse than the corner of Eighth and Olive!" (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 85).

Always, the offstage sounds and music are dramatic devices. Each character responds overtly to the sounds, either in action or in words, in accordance with her own inner conflicts or needs. For example, the slow, dreamy Street Vendors' cries in Act I make Eylie wonder about leaving St. Louis and her family; the sounds of the revival meeting members singing "Standing In The Need Of Prayer" make Liz respond with her line, "Ain't that pretty" and reinforces her need for faith. By contrast, the same sounds only aggravate Liz's daughters, causing them to shut all the windows and doors, literally trying to block out the sounds and, metaphorically, Liz's traditional values. Their attempt, significantly, is only minimally successful.

The last scene of the play begins, not with the sound of a Street Vendor's cry, but with the distant tolling of a
bell, followed by the girls singing "In The Gloaming." The atmosphere is calm, the girls have rejoined their sibling bonds, and literally and metaphorically, the storm has passed. The music here, once again, reflects the dramatic theme.

All of the incidental sounds included in the script are not only a means of stimulating the action onstage and revealing characterizations, but are also a means of intensifying the musical texture of the play. They are a necessary and vital aspect of the production, and therefore a great deal of time was spent with their composition and orchestration.

Costume Design

The final aspect of the design process that was affected by the musical and artistic concept of the play was the costuming. Artistic analysis was most useful in this area by providing visual images of the characters. Raphael Soyer's works were particularly advantageous for his subjects were predominately women. Though Soyer frequently painted nude women, his use of line and form were useful in the costume design of Ladyhouse Blues. I desired the characters' clothing to not only accurately reflect the time period, but also to contrast their home-life and city-life. This was achieved by dressing them in free-flowing, simple single-layer clothing at home as opposed to the confining, multiple layers of dress they wore when in the city. Liz's costume especially reflected her character for as soon as
she entered her home she literally stripped off the layers of clothing down to her corset, thereby removing her protection against the city, and savoring in the safety of her home. Edward Hopper's use of color and texture was applicable also in the costume design. Though the colors chosen were not as rich as those used by Hopper, they were predominately warm. Music was applicable only in the respect that understanding blues singers aided character analyses, particularly for Liz. Since she is metaphorically a Blues singer, her costumes were designed to reflect the intimate personal qualities of Blues singers. Finally, the more the other characters had broken away from Liz and the family, the more layered and confining were their clothing.

Though art analysis was useful for the costume designer in grasping an idea of my objectives for the characters, in the actual production I felt the costuming design was least successful in coordinating with the other design areas. Although the costuming accurately reflected the time period, I never truly felt it embraced the desired artistic textures of the play. Perhaps this was in part due to budget limitations and the inexperience of the designer. And perhaps it was also due to my lack of knowledge about costume design. It seems often times that the more the director knows about the technical elements of design, the greater are his or her abilities to communicate with the designer in terms the designer can understand and use; hence, the greater are the chances of the director to
realize his or her vision of the play on stage. I knew a great deal about sound, lighting and scene design and these were in fact the strongest areas of the production which translated my vision of the play into visual and aural form. By comparison, costuming is my weakest area of expertise and proved to be the most difficult area of director-designer communication. Nonetheless, the use of art and, to a lesser degree, music, did provide a starting point for the design process.

Summary

Music and art had many uses in the production of *Ladyhouse Blues*. Music analysis and theories found most viability in the lighting design and execution, and in orchestrating the combination of live and recorded sounds heard throughout the play. Art was most useful in the scene and costume design processes. Together, music and art were valuable tools in communicating my directorial concept to the designers. They enhanced the texture of the play in production and were tools for exciting the audience's senses.
Ladyhouse Blues was presented at Virginia Commonwealth University on December 2, 3, and 4, 1982, in the Shafer Street Playhouse. The positive audience response which the production received, I believe, was a direct result of the attention given to the formation and application of the directorial concept in the analysis, rehearsal and design processes. Directorial objectives in these processes were to not only ultimately provide the audience with a credible and meaningful theatrical experience but also to determine the values of using music and art as directorial tools. I have endeavored to explain these values in this thesis as well as to specifically outline the uses of music and art in script analysis, rehearsal methodologies, and design decisions.

Musical terms, concepts, and structures were useful in all phases of production. The starting point in formulating a directorial concept, I believe, is the director's initial readings of the script. What the playwright writes, or the givens of the script, is a fundamental key to discovering the soul of the drama and creating a vision of the play. Because O'Morrison entitled his play Ladyhouse Blues, I first focused on how blues music pertained and related to the play. Research and analysis showed that the blues were
particularly useful in analyzing the play's dramatic theme and in developing characterizations.

Early blues singers sang of their troubles and woes with the hope of easing their pain through their music. The music was deeply personal yet universal in its appeal. Early blues singers were often people who hoped for a better life and sang of this hope. They were people who felt displaced in society, felt torn from their family roots, and felt severed from their known way of life. All of these aspects of blues music and blues singers were of value in directing Ladyhouse Blues. In fact, at the end of Act I, Liz says "Lord ... I allus said I'd never sing the blues to you, but I'm singing 'em now." (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 63) Liz is a blues singer and Ladyhouse Blues is a story about a family displaced in American society, forced by circumstances to leave their home, seeking a better life and, like so many blues singers, Liz cries out to the Lord for strength and hope in times of need. Analysis of blues music provided essential insights into characterizations and a deeper understanding of the characters', especially Liz's, inner conflicts and needs.

Just as the title of the play provided a stimulus for using Blues music as an analytical tool, the very structure of the play provided further reinforcement of the importance of using music as a technical tool in production. In some form, music began each scene whether it was the minor-keyed melody of a Street Vendor's cry, the recorded sound of a
Victrola playing "On The Banks of the Wabash far away" or the sustained notes of a bell tolling in the distance. In this way, music was used as a means of setting the tone and mood of the scene. Music was included also within the scenes themselves. Always, this inclusion served a dramatic purpose and always it was a stimulus for the characters' action on stage. For example, at the end of Act I, Liz sings "Rock of Ages" as if it were a lullaby, offstage left, as Dot sings the popular jazz-like song, "Jada," offstage right. This combination of sounds musically illustrated the dramatic theme of the play—namely, Liz's effort to maintain traditional values and the stability of her family in the face of massive social and economic changes. Onstage, the characters responded to the music by realizing the fact that their lives were drastically changing. Amidst tears, Eylie asks, "What's goin' to happen to us, oh, my God, Terry—what's goin' to happen to us?" (Ladyhouse Blues, p. 62) Her action and words are directly triggered by the music she hears.

After analyzing what the playwright has written, a director can further develop his or her concept of the play by reading beyond the words in the script. For me, this took shape in identifying the play's rhythmical superstructure and the graphic flow of the dramatic theme. Here, the sonata was a useful directorial tool. The sonata structure enabled me to divide the play into rhythmic movements or units, and assign tempos to each one. The sonata form
enabled me to divide the thematic organization into units and apply the terms exposition, development, and recapitulation to the play's dramatic structure.

In addition to using music as an analytical tool, it could also be used as a practical method for learning the dialect designated by the playwright. By musically diagramming the dialect, the actors could actually sing the words, thereby grasping the vocal characteristics of the speech pattern.

Finally, music was used in the lighting design. By treating the play as if it were a sonata, the lighting cues were designed as a means of ending one movement and beginning another. In this way, the play was designed as a musical composition which flowed from beginning to end.

Thus, music was a useful tool in directing Ladyhouse Blues from conceptual analysis through final design decisions. By comparison, art principles and theories had fewer uses in the production process but were nonetheless valuable in their limited application. Directorial decision-making was aided by analyzing the characteristics of certain artists' works. Edward Hopper's works were particularly useful in design decisions regarding the use of light, color, line and texture, and his subject matter found viability in thematic analysis. The works of Raphael Soyer were particularly useful in embracing the sensuality of the characters and his pictorial depiction of women aided my actors in forming visual images of their characters'
individual mannerisms and physicalities. Soyer's works were also valuable in identifying angular, active body positions which conveyed specific emotional and psychological qualities.

In summary, using music and art in the analysis, rehearsal, and production processes was ultimately a successful approach to directing Ladyhouse Blues. This approach provided me with an understanding of the vital elements of the play's texture and a means of solidifying my vision of the play. Though it was necessary to communicate with my actors in active, as opposed to conceptual terms during the rehearsal process, my concept provided me a fundamental basis upon which I could make my directorial decisions. Without clearly formulating my vision of the play by recognizing the play's musical and artistic dimensions, Ladyhouse Blues could not have received the positive audience response that it did. It was indeed the texture of the play which embraced the audience, enriched the production, and provided for an exciting, theatrical experience.
APPENDIX A

PROGRAM FOR PRODUCTION OF LADYHOUSE BLUES
LADYHOUSE BLUES
kevin o'morrison

Dec. 2, 3, 4 8 p.m.
SHAFER ST. PLAYHOUSE
DIRECTOR
Roseann Sheridan

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
L.J. Szari

DESIGNERS

SCENERY
Rick Pike

LIGHTING & SOUND
James P. Kennedy

COSTUMES
Cynthia J. Biggs

STAGE MANAGER: Keri Wormald

DRAMATURG: Jennie Knapp

CAST

Helen..................Susan Quinnild
Eylie.................Deborah Stromberg
Dot...............Joan Thomas Wilkinson
Liz................Mary Best Kimball
Terry...........Michelle Marie Napier
Evangelist...........Joe Clark
Woman...............Karen Turner Ward
Vendors........Wortham E. Tinsley, III
                Henrico Crispi
                William Doan

PRODUCTION STAFF

Ass't Technical Director
Barbara J. McIntyre-Minnick
Ass't Stage Manager
Gordon Bass
Master Electrician
M.E. Ball
Electrician
C. Maxey
Sound Technician
Michael K. Stewart
Recording Engineer
Judith Bluhm
Board Operators
James P. Kennedy
Properties Mistress
C. Maxey & M.E. Ball
Costume Mistress
Angela Love
Wardrobe
Dawn Westbrooke
Wardrobe Master
Randy Ketron

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Woody Funeral Home, Walden Books, Va. Museum Theatre,
L. Hartman, M. Heiple, Ann E. Gummer, Neville Cowley

Graduate Thesis Advisor: James W. Parker
Yes, These Ladies have the Blues

Free in form and rhythm, the blues are a melancholy music. Traditionally, the blues have 12-bar phrases, "blue" flattened 3rd and 7th degrees of the scale resulting in a minor-chord feeling in the melody above an accompanying major chord that seems to pulsate. The vocal is slow and sustained.

In naming his play Ladyhouse Blues, the playwright gives us a musical mode in which to interpret the play's structure. The movement of the action is slow and languorous. There is no great crescendo; no clear climax and denouement.

The characters sing out their individual strains while, metaphorically, pulling away from and supporting one another. When the telegram arrives with news of Bud - there is a brooding descent of melody with variations of responses. The individual litanies come into a harmonic combination at various points in the play. But as there is no resolution in the action of the play, neither is there a completion of the music. Rather what we get is the rise and fall of their daily dramas; the continuity and ongoingness of life.

Usually blues are sung in the first person; the singer tells his troubles in the hope that the listener has shared the experience. By dramatizing the ups and downs of life, the singer has made his situation bearable. The experience is similar to that of the preacher who throws out worries and problems to his congregation in the hope that sharing a common problem will diminish its effect on the individual.

Much of the freedom in blues singing is derived from its origin in the "field holler" of the southern slaves. Here laborers moaned, hummed and wailed supplications to the Lord to ease the pain of existence. The blues were used as a method of venting frustrations over the miseries of life. They gained popularity among immigrants from the rural south to the cities at the turn of the century.

Their pleading quality appealed to those in search of an improved condition. There is an everydayness to the blues - they are conversational in tone. Day-to-day trials were the most common themes; the instruments most used as accompaniment were washboards, knives, combs and other articles of daily toil.

So it would seem that the loose, shifting, hard-luck quality of the music is an appropriate reflection - not only of the tone of the Ladyhouse Blues but of the very structure and development of the play.
1910–1919

1700 Unemployed Servicemen Apply for Jobs in 2 Days

Soviet Revolution Shattered in U.S.; 5,483 Radicals captured in Net

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HER $15,000 MUFF MISSING
Mrs. Shainwald of New York Gives Notice to Scotland Yard

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RATIONING MEANT:

Wheatless Mondays and Wednesdays
Meatless Tuesdays
Porkless Thursdays and Saturdays
Heatless Mondays
Gasless Sundays
The manufacture of liquor was suspended; a rough-grained substance called "Victory Bread" was substituted for bread

NO, THESE ARE NOT MEAT SUBSTITUTES.............

TURKEY TROT
BUNNY HOP
GRIZZLY BEAR
KANGAROO DIP

DRUG STORE PRICES SOAR

Wine of Cardui.................1.00
Corn Plasters..................10c
2 oz. jar of bust cream......40c
Female Pills...................33c
Wart Removers.................10c

STARVED TO DEATH WITHIN REACH OF WEALTHY SECTION
Husband Sacrificed Himself to Keep Wife Alive

5 lbs. of sugar for 9c

INVESTIGATOR TELLS OF FACTORY WAGES
Girls in Stores, Shirt, Box and Candy Trades Show the Smallest Earnings

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Red Cross ladies packed peach stones for the army. Seven pounds of pits made the filter for a single gas mask; a million men required masks.

FACT:
More than half of the 116,516 U.S. men who died in the war died from disease.

1919 Bestseller:
The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse V.Blasco-Ibanez
"As War, Conquest, Famine and Death laid waste the earth, wealthy ne'er-do-well Julio Desnoyers tangoed his way through life in the bistros of Paris."

"After all, the Ford is the best family car. It has a tank for Father, a hood for Mother, and a rattle for Baby."
In the 18th century, St. Louis was the gateway for adventurers, explorers, traders, missionaries, soldiers and settlers heading West. A good part of the South looked to St. Louis for commerce and culture in the 19th century.

The steamboat transformed St. Louis into one of the nation’s leading cities. By 1850, St. Louis was established as an industrial center. Flour mills and foundries flourished. A heavy German migration began in 1883 and by the 20th century much of the city's advertising was done in the German language. Almost half of the city's foreign-born were German.

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904) commemorated the growth of St. Louis and the Mid-West. Most of the European nations were represented. As a result of the Fair, the city acquired an improved water system, an art museum, and the general public was introduced to foreign cultures and social trends.

In 1900, St. Louis was disturbed by a series of prolonged and bloody strikes started by the railway workers. The city was the site of the first general strike in American history. From the beginning, strikes were popularly believed to have been Communist-inspired.

Shortly after the turn-of-the-century St. Louis experienced a period of stagnation and decline. World War I provided an opportunity for many industries to step up production. Factory employment lured many of the poor from rural areas into the city.

**MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS, LOUIE**

Meet me in St. Louie, Louie
Meet me at the fair,
Don't tell me the lights are shining any place but there;
We will dance the Hoochee Koochee,
I will be your tootsie wootsie;
If you will meet me in St. Louie,
Louie, Meet me at the fair.
"Ladyhouses—that's what the mailman calls them. Full of widows. Or women waiting for their men to come home from France. There isn't a man left in one of them for three blocks in any direction."

KEVIN O'MORRISON

The wartime labor shortage opened to women a host of new job opportunities at higher wages than women had been earning before the war. This raised their expectations. When these hopes were not realized and women failed to receive what they considered their just due, widespread militancy emerged among women workers. Wartime production pressures introduced women into nontraditional jobs that in turn brought them into conflict with male co-workers and veterans who expected to return to their old jobs when the war ended.

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old"

LAWRENCE BINYON

"God so hated the world that He gave several million of English-begotten sons, that whosoever believeth in them should not perish, but have a comfortable life."

WILFRED OWEN

"My God! My god! Why hast Thou forsaken me?"

"We who are left, how shall we look again Happily on the sun, or feel the rain, Without remembering how they who went Ungrudgingly, and spent their all for us, loved, too, the sun and rain?"

WYNDHAM LEWIS

"Do you ever stop to ask is it going to happen again?"
TRYIN' TO GET BY

"That was my dream, a house with all the generations, one flowin' into the other" — Ladyhouse Blues

"Since when have you been thinking of leavin' St. Louis?" "Ever since I heard there was someplace else." — Ladyhouse Blues

"It's a fact. A woman works for a livin', she can be had." — Ladyhouse Blues

"Women have a right to be just as stupid as men." — Ladyhouse Blues

IN THE GLOAMING

In the gloaming, oh, my darling, when the lights are dim and low;
And the quiet shadows falling, softly come and softly go;
When the winds are sobbing faintly, with a gentle unknown woe
Will you think of me and love me, as you did once long ago?

ON THE BANKS OF THE WABASH, FAR AWAY

Oh, the moonlight's fair tonight along the Wabash,
From the fields there comes the breath of new-mown hay
Through the sycamores the candle lights are gleaming,
On the banks of the Wabash, far away.

At ten A.M. the young housewife moves about in a negligee behind the wooden walls of her husband's house. I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb to call the ice-man, fish-man and stands shy, uncorseted, tucking in stray ends of hair....

The Young Housewife
William Carlos Williams

"Films occupy fifth place among the industries of the U.S., being surpassed by railroads, the clothing industry, iron and steel, and oil. The automobile manufacturer is minor in importance" — The Picture-Play Magazine, 1916
In deciding upon a show to produce, I wanted to put forth a part of myself. I knew that my interest in "women in society" - values, goals, obstacles, motivations, career, lifestyle and sexuality - were prominent concerns in my life. I also knew that my interest in family - solidity, dissemination, diffusion, support, trials and tribulations - was a serious force.

I began looking at women's scripts. I checked in anthologies, talked to friends, scanned libraries but all of the writing seemed dated or "banner waving", poorly structured, too large a cast, too demanding in terms of age or just plain boring.

Then I heard about Ladyhouse Blues from a friend. The decision to commit myself to directing Ladyhouse Blues was made in haste, in all honesty, to meet deadlines, to audition, to cast, to have a spot in the '82-'83 season, to have a budget, etc. I had my doubts: 1) it wasn't written by a woman 2) it didn't have a really exciting plot. The first I could deal with since the show is so sensitive, but the second had me perplexed for a long time. I found myself asking "why do I really like this script?"

I knew it dealt with all the right issues, had great characters, good dialogue, but what makes this script special? What excites me about it? What makes it theatrical?

Ladyhouse Blues is a musical composition and a living, breathing painting. It has that quality that makes me shudder when I listen to a symphony, jazz, or the blues and sends my heart racing when I look at Renoir. Music and sound bring visions to mind; pictures bring sounds - both manipulate my guts. I wondered - "could I put these two together in a 'real-life' drama and cause these gut reactions that I experience spontaneously on stage?" This is what I am seeking to discover in Ladyhouse Blues.

The decisions I have made about the show, as director, have been grounded in the sensual elements of sound, sight, color and texture - these are the elements that epitomize the work for me.

Produced by Special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.
APPENDIX B:
Photographs of Production
The Madden Family
Eylie: HAL-lay-LOO-yah, brothers. HAL-lay-LOO-yah, sisters, Abba Dabba dabba yakka hoola kickey doola... Act I.
Terry: "Ladyhouses"—that's what the mailman calls them. Full of widows. Or women waiting for their men to come home from France.

Act II.
The Telegram Arrives
Liz: What you all a-doin', playin' statues? Who was at the door?

Act II
Liz and Terry return from town.

Liz: Whole world is comin' unglued.

Act II
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


