San Fernando Valley State College

PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
Design and Technical Direction

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Drama

by

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June, 1972
The abstract of Victoria Ann Clarke is approved:

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

The designer's objective in *Playboy of the Western World* was to have the set and lighting convey the same kind of feeling for the play which John Tedesco, the director, was getting in his directing. Everything was to look well-worn, stained, old, familiar to the characters, skuffed, weather-marked, handled a thousand times a day; and by the end of the long rehearsal period of about eight weeks, the set, props, and actors had indeed become like a part of each other. This feeling was necessary to give the idea of the monotonous sameness of the everyday life of the characters.

The play has a warmth and congeniality which had to be transmitted to the audience from the moment they entered the theatre, so that when the play began the
spatial environment of the actors would not seem surprising or alien to the audience. The entrance area to the theatre was incorporated into the set, so that the audience actually walked through part of the pub to reach their seats. Chandeliers with candle-shaped amber lights were hung for house lights to create an antique warm feeling, while on the set kerosene lamps burned oil. Throughout the play, the lighting colors were basically amber with lavender backlight to create the sensation that the air itself was old yet warm. As a final touch, the poster and program were designed in the style of an old playbill to further the feeling of stepping back in time.

PREPARATION

There was abundant research material available in the libraries at San Fernando Valley State College and UCLA. Photographs of the Irish countryside around County Mayo where Playboy takes place were studied to get acquainted with the environment outside the pub, since that would affect costumes, set, props, and colors. Pictures of turn-of-the-Century villagers showed the well-worn look of the clothes, and pictures of interiors were a great help in deciding the kinds of props to have around. Books about Irish myths and legends were interesting for background, and a collection of Dublin newspapers from 1890-on proved helpful in knowing what
the actual events and concerns of the time were. An advertisement from one newspaper provided the price list of beer and spirits used on the bar wall of the set. The motion picture, Ryan's Daughter, which took place on the same Irish coast just a few years later in time than does Playboy, was also helpful.

The preliminary model was submitted to the director and discussed over Christmas vacation, then during the first week of January the final model was approved and working drawings begun. Because of this early start, all the main elements were ready to go as rehearsals began, well ahead of the March 15, 1971, opening date.

Having the set early to work with was extremely important to the actors. It enabled them from the start to build the kind of familiarity with the set that the director wanted. During rehearsals the actors would do exercises relating to the set and the world outside the pub. These insights helped determine many small details such as particular worn marks on the bar, scuff marks, dirt marks, particular hand props and set dressing, and costume details.

The designer felt it was necessary to attend almost every rehearsal in order to be able to immediately confer with the director if there were any problems or changes due to the set or the blocking. It was exhilarating to watch how the set became more and more familiar, old,
and comfortable as the actors became more used to it.

EVALUATION

The most frequently heard audience comment was how well the set and actors seemed to work together. This was partly due to having the set early to work with, and having a director who used the set extremely well.

The set and lights were generally well accepted, as was the entire play, by those who were able to attend during the sold-out run of the show.