Backstage view

Passage of time created through lighting illusion

By KAREN ROSEN

What color is the moon when a spy is about to bump into danger? The same color as the moon on a romantic evening? Not a chance.

A Moon for the Misbegotten, Playmakers Repertory Company's final chapter in the Tyrone family saga, takes place on a Connecticut farm during a short time period: from one afternoon through sunrise the next day.

Norman Coates, PRC lighting designer, must express those times of day through the angle and color of light, making Eugene O'Neill's characters and their mood visible. The play runs through Nov. 14 at Playmakers Theatre.

Coates read reviews of previous productions of the drama and comments which O'Neill wrote about his masterpiece, then began drafting his light plot. He also consulted with the set and costume designers and with director Gregory Boyd, "so I can read the play with his eyes."

Coates can put 200-300 lights anywhere in the theatre, and determines their spacing and how high off the floor they should be.

Then Coates, who lives in New York City, sends his plan to Chapel Hill and electricians hang the lights.

A week before opening night, Coates arrives in Chapel Hill, just in time for the technical dress rehearsal.

"I see what special things I need, like a special light on somebody's face for a few seconds," Coates said.

For the actors, who must hold still while Coates and Boyd survey the effect of their highlighted features, the rehearsal is tedium incarnate.

The actors are on stage for 10 hours out of 12 on Saturday and Sunday before the Wednesday preview.

"This show is not very technically involved, so it needs to be precise," said Kimberly Kearsley, production stage manager. She marks the light and sound cues on a script.

Coates said that *A Moon for the Misbegotten* may have 50 light cues, or it may have five. "It depends on how much we want to focus down on a given character and let the rest move away." A professional lighting designer for seven years, Coates said that the larger shows, usually musicals, may use 200 lights in 150 configurations.

Life on the Mississippi, PRC's first production this season, had 103 light cues, and that meant a steady patter of instructions between Kearsley and electrician Robert L. Orzolek. During shows at Paul Green Theatre, they sit in a booth behind the audience, up two flights of spiral staircases. They wear headsets which also connect to Lori Delk, the assistant stage manager, who is backstage.

Kearsley is armed with a prompt book, lamp, watch and tea. Orzolek sits at a complex computer console with a television screen to the side, next to the spotlight switches. The screen shows the lights' numbers and whether or not they are at full strength. It can pick up *The Dukes of Hazzard* during intermission.

The light and sound engineers can't make a move without the stage manager's command. "It's important that they trust me," Kearsley said.

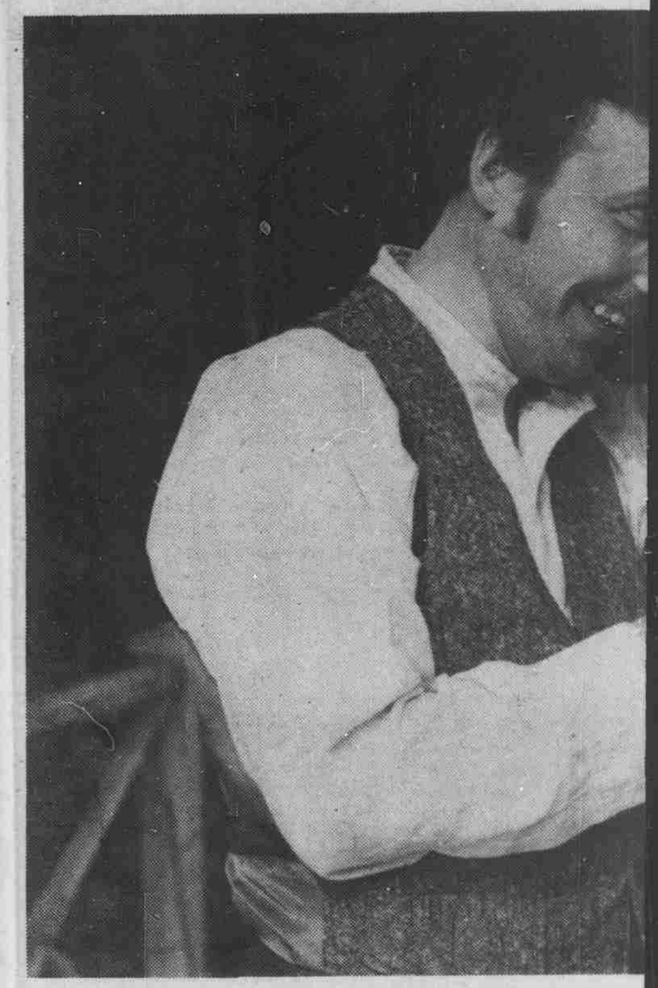
Kearsley begins working on a new show by relaying information like "this chair should not have wheels" and sharpening pencils. The smooth operation of a performance after a director is finished preparing the show, also depends on her. She does everything from telling the actors to take their places to telling the house manager to escort a crying baby outside.

It isn't easy to do all of this and still call more than 100 cues at precisely the same time every performance. Kearsley joked, "half the time it's the actors holding for the lights."

Karen Rosen is a staff writer for the **The Daily Tar Heel.**

Photo courtesy of Playmakers Repertory Company

Hope Alexander-Wills plays Josie Hogan in the Playmakers Repertory Company production . . . Eugene O'Neill's play is presented at Playmakers Theatre



Phil Hogan (Ken Grantham), left, and James T

Stage manager must keep he

By KAREN ROSEN

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you. . .

If Rudyard Kipling had been backstage at a theatre when he wrote "If," he would have had a stage manager in mind. Kipling's poem, sandwiched between notes from appreciative actors and proteges, hangs above Kimberly Kearsley's desk in Graham Memorial.

"When everything is going well, no one realizes why," said the Playmakers Repertory Company Production stage manager, who will be calling the shots for *A Moon for the Misbegotten* until Nov. 14. "When everything is going badly, all eyes turn to me."

An actor under the spotlights doesn't garner as much attention as the stage manager when those spotlights fail to come on. But that rarely happens—it is the unforeseen that can mystify both cast and crew.

During PRC's production of *Mobile Hymn* last spring, a strange noise cropped up one night. "The actors were going crazy and couldn't think because of the constant sound feedback," Kearsley said. "We turned off the entire sound system and still heard it."

The next day someone said, "I think it was these ladies sitting next to me with hearing aids."

"Every time they turned their heads, the frequency changed," Kearsley said. "I wanted to crawl into a hole and die,"

Things could be worse. Kearsley's ex-husband, also a stage manager, once almost watched part of a train roll into the orchestra pit.

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"Through This Portal Walks the Greatest Musical Cast. Ever." proclaims a sign above the Majestic Theatre's stage door.

The 57 cast members of the hit musical *42nd Street* stroll through this door—two blocks away from 42nd Street—eight times a week. As stage manager, Barry Kearsley has been in charge of the technical aspects of running the SRO show daily for the past two years. He gives cues for lights, sound, the winches that move mammoth staircases on stage and the stagehands who grab trains before they tumble off the stage.

In the early 1970s the Kearsleys traveled on the road together with touring companies of *Hair, Godspell* and *Seesaw*. They split up when Kim's career pulled her to regional theatre and Barry's best interests were anchored in New York.

"Half of my work is in rehearsal," said Kim whose shows rehearse three weeks and perform roughly two weeks. "It's like being a contractor, but once you build the house, you don't live in it.

"Barry has the same people for two years. A lot of intrigue goes on, and interrelation among cast members. If someone starts dating someone else's boyfriend, it can affect a performance. Barry has to keep everyone on the ship happy."

The same goes for Kim, but for a shorter time period. "I can sense when someone needs to go out for a drink and relax, or smooth their ruffled feathers," Kim said.

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When a principal actor leaves *42nd Street*, Barry and the other three stage managers must break in the successor. They play all the parts, unless they can round up some understudies. "After two years, you know all the words, no problem," said Barry, then in the process of replacing Peggy Cass.

The show has a tricky shadow dance and as dancers are injured performing it, Barry pulls a chemical ice pack from his desk in the wings.

"We go through 30 to 40 ice packs a month from people pulling muscles—if they're not getting accidentally kicked by someone," he said.

Bring on the understudies. After all, that's what *42nd Street* is all about: an understudy who goes on for the big star and wins everyone's heart. The splashy show, set in 1933, stars Jerry Orbach, Millicent Martin and Lisa Brown, who plays Nola Reardon on the soap opera *The Guiding Light*. Both Barry and Kim knew Brown from touring with *Seesaw*.

Barry was the stage manager and Kim, then a senior at Hofstra University, was offered the job as star dresser for John Gavin.

"John didn't want a lady dresser," Kim said, "so I was supposed to be Lucie Arnaz's dresser. But there were a lot of kidnappings going on then, and Lucille Ball, the story has it, said that her daughter had to have a male dresser/bodyguard type."

Kim became Tommy Tune's dresser. "He hadn't expected anyone," she said. "He was flabbergasted."

Kim had to keep the 6-foot-6 inch Tune's clothes cleaned, pressed and hung in the right place. "Tommy had a lot of memorabilia so I had to fix it so it was comfortable for him: post his telegrams, lay out his giraffe collection and make sure his Tony Award was out on the dressing table."

Lucky it wasn't a bus-and-truck tour like a later *Seesaw* tour when they had to set up practically every other day and sometimes camped out in the car to cut expenses.

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Barry, 35, never dreamed of occupying center stage. A Rhode Island native, he built scenery for community and civic theaters when he was 12 and has been a carpenter (for Jethro Tull), electrician and lighting designer. As a Hofstra freshman, Barry taught a freshman technical course.

Barry's first stage managing job was with Mickey Rooney on a tour of *George M!* "He has the energy of three people. He wore me out," Barry said.

Because of his stagehand background, he became fast friends with Milton Berle, a former vaudeville stagehand.

Barry was an electrician with *Equus* in Boston and on Broadway he ran the light boards for Ethel Merman's *Hello, Dolly!* Then he did five different Broadway shows, none lasting longer than two weeks. He next hooked up with *Dancin'*, the last major musical done with a hand-operated light board, instead of an overstuffed easy chair and computer like at the Majestic Theatre.

"When I was a kid, I wanted to be a dancer," said Kim, 33, who grew up on Long Island. "I didn't know what a stage manager was." She