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Great American Trailer Park

This semester’s play, The Great American Trailer Park, which our class had the privilege of crafting the stage for, was distinctive and unique in a sense that the lighting always guided the audience of what to pay attention to, the music and sound kept the audience engaged, the costumes that the actors wore were identical to that of a white-trash Floridian trailer park, and the props were perfectly placed to show the audience the setting of a trailer park. The technical aspects of this play: lighting, sound, costumes, props, and the theatrical hierarchy that worked together created a fun and engaging experience for the audience. Personally, I enjoyed myself immensely as a member of the stagecraft crew and as a member of the audience.

As we learned in class, lighting has four functions: visibility, selective focus, modeling, and mood. The lighting designer for the play had the responsibility of using light and shadow to make the actors’ costumes visible and created the setting of a sunny trailer park in Florida. The beginning of the play, where Betty, Lin, and Pickles are sunbathing, gave the audience the ability to know that wherever the setting may be, it sure was hot. For scenes where the attention should have been on one character, for example when the three girls of Armadillo Acres were introducing themselves separately, or when Jeannie is alone in her trailer, selective focus is used so that the audience pays all their attention on such. All other lighting is dimmed down so that focus is pulled to the one desired location. Finally, the scene when Jeannie finally steps out of her trailer just to find Norbert having an affair with Pippi, the lighting creates a mood upon her so that the audience feels her sadness of her husband’s betrayal. If there is one critique of lighting that I could think of, it would be that there was not much variety of lighting, however, I understand that there was only so much to work with in the theater.

One of my favorite aspects of The Great American Trailer Park play were the musical numbers. I am not sure what the name of the band that played was, or if they even were a band, but for the sake of this paper I will call them Roadkill. I must have had ‘This Side of The Tracks’ stuck in my head for days after the play. One critique that I heard from my friends that attended the play with me, was that Roadkill’s music was too loud for them to hear the singing of the actors. Perhaps their music could have been turned down, or the microphones of the actors turned up. The person in charge of sound for this play had the responsibility of turning the microphones on for the actors on stage and turning them off for the actors that were not. Thankfully, there were not any mishaps where the audience could hear the actors talking while they were not on stage. However, there were at least two instances where I heard feedback coming from the speakers. With that said, the music and sound effects were still my favorite part of the show.

As someone who was born and raised in Florida, but thankfully not in a trailer park, I could honestly say that the costumes were spot on. I could be shopping in the grocery store and easily pick out the people that live in the trailer parks not too far from my home. Betty, Lin, and Pickles had the perfect attire to portray white-trash trailer park residents, and Pickles’ condition of being convinced she is pregnant may be more common than someone who is not from Florida thinks. Hell, I may have mistaken trailer-park women for being pregnant when they were not on more than one occasion, myself. One costume, in particular, that I enjoyed most was Duke’s. The audience could tell at first-glance that he is a magic-marker sniffin’ redneck that almost certainly carries a gun with him at all times. Of course, as he learned on his visit to Florida, most people there are carrying there as well, even the ones you may not expect. This brings me to my next aspect of the play, props.

The use of props for this play, like Duke’s gun as well as the women of the trailer parks’ guns created a fun experience for the audience. I loved how Duke repeatedly pulled out his magic-marker to take deep sniffs to get high. Furthermore, the use of set props, like the $5 dollar couch bought from Goodwill, fit perfectly for Jeannie’s trailer, and it sure as hell looked like the type of couch you would expect to find in a trailer home. Also, the decorative props, like the sign for Armadillo Acres, and the stripper sign that was hung up above Pippi’s strip club gave me, and others in the audience a chance to know exactly where each scene was taking place. Finally, Duke’s car was obviously a wooden construction that was not a real car, but like we learned in class, this prop was perfectly constructed so that the audience knew at first glance, along with the acting, that Duke was driving a car.

To conclude, almost every critique I have for The Great American Trailer Park play and musical is one that is positive. The lighting, music and sound, costumes, and props created a very enjoyable experience for me, and I assume the others that were in the audience with me by the way I heard them laughing. I must say that I wish I played a bigger role in crafting the stage, but the times that I did were enjoyable, and taught me lessons that I could use for many more aspects of my life. I am thankful for being a student in this class and I am thankful for now recognizing theatre as an art that every person should experience, whether as a member of the crew, or the audience.