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THTR 468

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The Spitfire Grill Lighting Design

The Spitfire Grill at Drury University ran from 11/12/2025-11/15/2025 and 11/19/2025-11/22/2025. The production team included Dr. Gretchen Teague as director, Mikayla Pink as assistant director, Olivia Kusick as stage manager, Sophia Stricklin and Bri Garcia as assistant stage managers, Allyson Roberts as scenic and sound designer, Katie Mizell as costume designer, Bob Robins as co-lighting designer and mentor, Jordan Hart as properties master, and Joshua Skeen (myself) as co-lighting designer. This paper aims to follow the process of the production's lighting design. It includes conceptional underpinning, preliminary research, lighting systems, gel/gobo selections, show photos, and a reflection of the project.

In our first production meeting, Dr. Teague shared a moodboard that included her conceptual underpinning for the whole production. As part of this she shared the plot summary from Concord Theatrical, which describes *The Spitfire Grill* as a “heartwarming and inspirational musical tale of redemption, perseverance, and family”. It also notes the setting as small-town Wisconsin. Wisconsin has a lot of birch trees, which Dr. Teague mentioned that she believed symbolized “rebirth, new beginnings, and growth”. She went on to describe the music style as American folk and rock, although Concord's description simply referred to it as “soulful”. The importance of the musical style was highlighted greatly throughout this meeting as it helps highlight the cyclical nature of the lives everyone in Gilead was living pre-Percy and how she changed not only her own life, but their lives as well. This helped in the discussion of symbols

and themes (see fig. 1). Using all of this, she formed the production's concept statement:

“through creating an immersive experience, the audience will discover the struggle of starting over in a small town, the joy of community, and the hope found in persevering through all seasons of life”.

Repeated Symbols

- **Stone, Quarry** - Unmovable, challenging, stuck
- **Light** - Moon, Morning, Shining
- **Woods/Trees** - Can't see the forest for the trees, wide wood
- **Community** - Cafe, meals, cooking, home
- **Bird** - Wild Bird, Caged Bird
- **Letters** representing what each person is looking for the most.
- **Home** - come home
- **Safety** -
- **Seasons** - Winter to Spring to Summer to Fall - seasons of life, regrowth, cycles
- **Hiding and Revealing**
- **Reunions**

Themes

- Individual vs community
- Outsider vs. insider
- Cycles
- Redemption
- Perseverance
- Family

Figure 1

Dr. Teague planned for the production to occur in the Sunderland Studio Theatre. She wanted a thrust formation with flats put up between the actual walls and the audience on the stage left and right sides to allow for a small backstage hallway area within the studio and entrances from all 4 corners of the room. A big part of these flats for her was that they should have 3D birch trees between them and the actual seating to help create the immersive environment. It was requested that the only permanent set pieces be the trees and a stump for The Visitor. Other set pieces requested at this time included a movable counter, movable tables, movable chairs, and a movable rocking chair. Scenic met privately with Dr. Teague to formulate a plan, and eventually helped me formulate a sketch (see fig. 2) to help base my systems around until we had a real groundplan (see fig. 3).

From costumes, Dr. Teague requested that everyone wear “hand-me-downs and homemade items”. This helped highlight the lower incomes of the area, and again the cyclical nature of the lives of



Figure 2

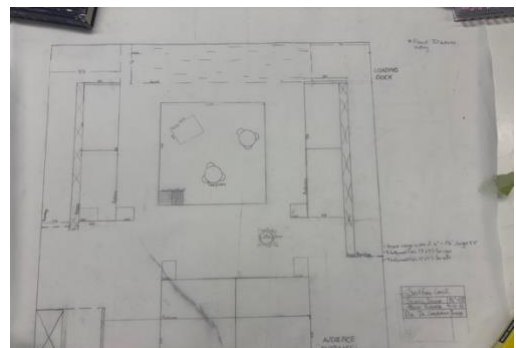


Figure 3

everyone in Gilead. She wanted lots of changeable layers to help showcase the passage of time, as well as “earth tones until ‘life comes back’[,] then introduce lighter colors”. These requests helped me see what kind of environment and city we were trying to create.

Dr. Teague wanted the lighting to be “immersive[,] reflect time of day and season[, display] rich colors[, create depth around the audience[, and create] possible isolation of areas allowing for multiple locations in one moment”. She included inspiration photos of Wisconsin through the winter (see fig. 4, fig. 5, & fig. 6), spring (see fig. 7 & fig. 8), summer (see fig. 9 & fig. 10), and fall (see fig. 11, fig. 12, & fig. 13) to help display the kind of looks she was going for.



Figure 4



Figure 5

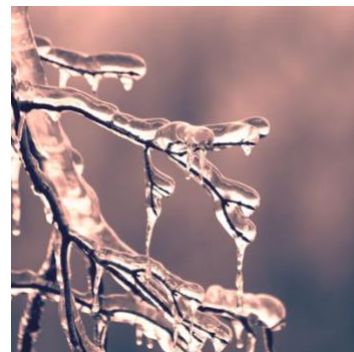


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

In my analysis of *The Spitfire Grill*, I identified it as a realistic drama with folk and rock musical influences. Between my own judgements and what we discussed at the production meeting, I came to the conclusion that the show takes place over the course of a year in Gilead, Wisconsin in the late 90's. The themes of change, community, and hope were what stuck out to me most as influenceable by lighting. Using all of this information, I began creating my research slides. The first slide included my concept: "this lighting design aims to create an immersive environment by utilizing a combination of rich color and heavy texture to highlight place, time, change, community, and hope". When I presented, I explained that overall I wanted to start the show with cooler-toned lighting and slowly build it warmer as Percy built herself into the Gilead community and developed a greater sense of hope. I also shared that I hoped to create depth and immerse the audience by painting (with light) rich color behind the 3D trees with breakups over

them visible both inside and outside of the grill. I felt that doing this would help highlight changes in season, time, and mood throughout the show while also really bringing the audience into the space. I wanted to incorporate a light haze throughout the show up until the song Shine to help showcase Percy and The Visitor's troubles with fitting into the community and highlight the gobo textures, but this design point would later be cut due to sound quality issues that were being caused by how loud the rental hazer was and output issues with our rental hazer.

The second slide included my vision for the outside of the grill: this included locations such as the porch, the street, and the woods (see fig. 14). The images shift through the seasons

from left to right, starting in winter and ending in fall. As one big responsibility of the lighting in this production was to help showcase the setting, I felt that the outdoor scenes should include a lot of tree breakup textures (both directed at the 3D behind the audience and onstage) so I tried to highlight this (see fig. 15, fig. 16, fig. 17, & fig. 18). The research images also display a large amount of color shown throughout the seasons in the



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

form of sunsets and sunrises, which I wanted to utilize in the fixtures I planned to place behind the 3D trees. I was particularly drawn to the way the colors shifted through white, blue, purple, pink, orange, and amber throughout the day and time of year.

The third slide included my vision for inside the grill (see fig. 19). As a production team we decided that the grill was likely an older building, so I was drawn to the images that showcased the idea that the grill was not very well-lit. I also included images with lots of window blind textures, as I felt that multiple window blind gobos could help showcase both time of day and the fact that the scene was taking place in the grill (see fig. 20, fig. 21, & fig. 22). I wanted the research images from this slide to help indicate what the lighting on the stage and actors would look like, while still

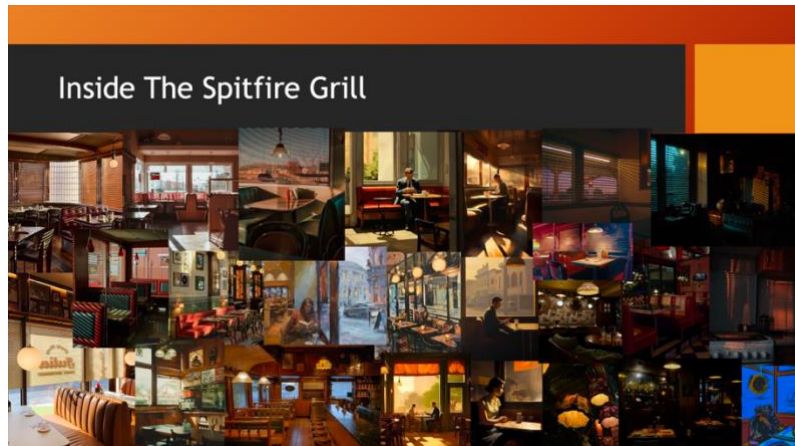


Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

using some of the looks from the previous slide on the 3D trees behind the audience to help highlight the theme of change and the time of year.

In developing my plot, Bob encouraged me to get creative with my usage of instruments. He challenged me not to use any of our old equipment like the fresnels or Altman 6x9 ellipsoidal reflectors. Due to the quantity limitations of our stock, I needed to pick a conservative key lighting system in order to have enough fixtures to create the heavy texture I wanted to achieve.

My initial idea was to utilize 36° Source Four ERs and go for a 3-point system that included a cool, warm, and neutral front light along with an LED top light for each area (see fig. 23), but Bob later suggested that I try a 2-point key lighting system that included a warm and neutral front light with 2 LED top lights for each area instead (see fig. 24).

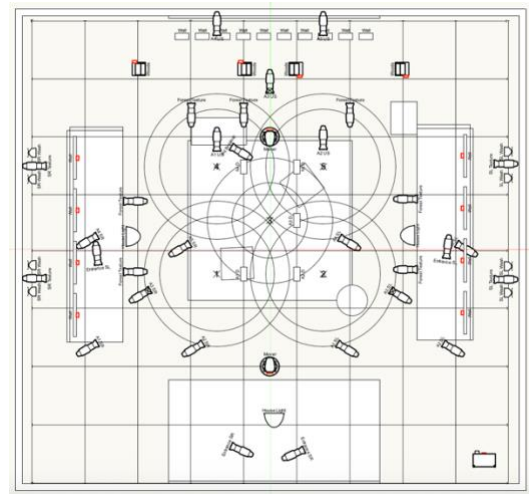


Figure 23

When suggesting this, he mentioned that it would be a good opportunity for me to learn his signature thrust lighting system and that it would help control spill better than the original plan, so I decided to go with it. I held off on picking gel colors and exact gobos until Bob arrived, but we eventually settled on R02 “Bastard Amber” for the fronts, R51

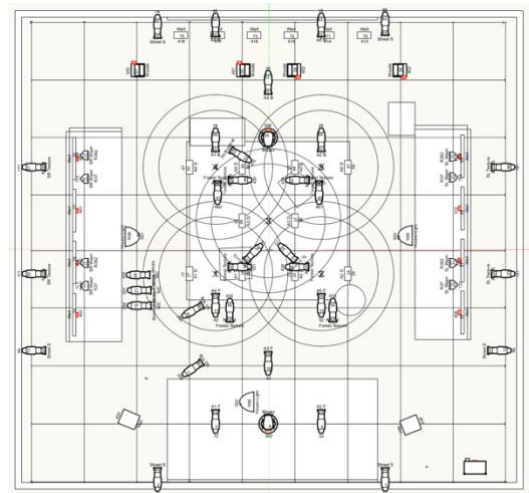


Figure 24

“Surprise Pink” for the backs, R362 “Tipton Blue”

for the cool fill, R37 “Pale Rose Pink” for the warm fill, and R3203 “Three Quarter Blue CTB” for all of the leaf breakups. The leaf breakup gobo I selected from our stock was R77119 “Leaf

Breakup Small” (see fig. 25). I also included window gobos for the bus from our stock, which was R77139 “Venetian” (see fig. 26) with the semi-circle section of the window shuttered off. I was unable to find window blind gobos that I liked in our stock and was not able to purchase any due to budgetary constraints, so I ended up making my own out of heavy duty grill foil and metal gobo tape (see fig. 27, fig. 28, and fig. 29) with various angles for different times of day based on Apollo ME-6024 “Window Old Blinds” (see fig. 30).



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 30

With all of these elements, I feel that I did a good job in differentiating between place and time as I intended. Bob agreed with this, especially in regards to the locations from the opening montage. The prison (see fig. 31) was significantly different from the bus stop (see fig. 32), the grill (see fig. 33), and the porch (see fig. 34). I achieved this through a combination of changing top light colors, changing gobos (bus windows for the bus stop, window blinds for the grill, and leaf breakups outside), and changing key light intensities to model the actors differently in each location.



Figure 31

Winter (see fig. 35),
 spring (see fig. 36),
 summer (see fig. 37), and
 fall (see fig. 38) were all
 distinguishable from each
 other, as were night (see
 fig. 39) and day (see fig.
 40). I achieved this
 through a combination of
 changing tree colors,
 changing fill light colors,
 changing top light colors, and changing key light
 intensities to model the actors differently in each
 time of year and day. I feel that the included
 photos also help showcase that I did well in
 helping highlight the themes of change,
 community, and hope.

This doesn't mean that the design was
 without its issues, of course. Bob and I both
 agreed after the show that I would've had an
 easier time shifting color temperature throughout
 the show to create variety and showcase
 emotionality as Percy found her place in Gilead



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39



Figure 40

if I had gone with the original 3-point system or if I would've stuck with the 2-point system but added in a second set of cool and warm fill light colors, but I didn't receive any notes on this from directors so I don't feel that it was a glaring issue. We both felt that the color choices were still strong despite this and conveyed what we were going for. Bob also felt that the show was a little dark at times, but he acknowledged that faces were still visible and we didn't receive any notes on this from Dr. Teague. I felt that the dimness fit in well with the concept of an older, run-down diner and enjoyed the environment that it created. We both agreed that there were a few cues that could've transitioned in a smoother way as well to help lean into the musical style of folk as opposed to rock (for example, the button at the beginning of 01B – Hannah's Harangue likely would've looked a little better had it been smoothed instead of set as a button), but the majority of them were well-timed and created the effect we were going for.

Bob and I both felt that the opening montage was a very strong force in pulling in the audience, as was the depth/immersion effect we created with the trees. In our post-mortem, I was told that I utilized the stage space very well in a dynamic way leading to good differentiation between locations and times to help establish the setting. He also mentioned that I did a good job at working with what fixtures I had, as wanting to use so many gobos but not use old stock took out a lot of options. The scene that I feel like best highlights all of this also happens to be my favorite: Ice and Snow. It was a big turning point in the show where everything began to warm up as the seasons shifted and Percy began to feel like she really belonged in Gilead, and I feel like the lights really represented that.

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