The Production of Live and Taped Versions of "Master Harold...and the boys"

An Honors Thesis (Honrs 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

The production of Athol Fugard's "Master Harold" is a study in subtility. The underlying theme of Apartheid must be strengthened, but not emphasized. If this happens, the play becomes a lesson or "circuit" play similar to Everyman, which is highly inappropriate. In addition, the play is different because the development of the play rests in the change of emotion, rather than fact and situation, which makes the plays development much more internal than external. Additional research has shown that the events of the play actually occurred, and in fact the authors full name is Athol Harold Lannigan Fugard. I will attempt to relate this to the audience.

A project of this magnitude is unheard of in the telecommunications department. The taping of a full length production is a new experience for nearly all those involved. This project will underline the organization for the production, organization which attempts to prepare for the foreseen and the unpredicted obstacles that happen during the preparation of a made-for-broadcast show.

Commentary

I would like to express what new experiences and knowledge this project has given me. In the theatre, my technical crew continually procrastinated in completing their portion of the production. This is a problem connected solely to the college experience, because in the real world they would lose their job, while here there is nothing at stake for them. I also learned that the set design and construction will take most of my attention, second only to the actors. Most importantly, delegation of positions and responsibilities was highly useful and made production possible.

The aspect of taping the play taught me much more. Mainly, in a full length play, it is nearly impossible to get exactly what you want when you leave the studio. What is possible is to get what you need, and rework it later. The post-production work, for that matter, can be lessened, but requires more time from all those involved. A medium must be found between final product from the studio and roughshod footage which requires a lifetime editing.

I think that, personally, I learned just how great the need for communication can be. If not for my assistant directors, my twins, communication between all those involved would have taken all my time, and no work would have been accomplished. Their efforts allowed me communicate directly, where and when I was needed. It is to those two, Wes and Mickie, that I dedicate this video. The two are worth more than all the tea in China, and that is why their pictures are at the end of the video. I never want to forget the effort they gave towards my project. Thanks guys.
Christmas Break 91-92: Here is where I have spent most of my time working with the script. I have completed the script analysis over the summer. I plan to spend the greater part of this vacation concentrating on the individual character analysis. To clarify, the script analysis entails making a flowchart of action for each character, and a central flowchart for the entire play. This analysis will help determine, for the director, why things happened in the order they happened. The character analysis is a different concept entirely. In a sense, it tells why the character acted the way he did to the particular situation. Not only does the character analysis entail the facts about the character derived from the script, but also abstracts such as "If Sam were an animal, what animal would he be?" This gives the character a personality with which the audience can identify.

Mon., Jan 27: Ten scripts arrive. Brings home the fact that in two months, I will be performing the play.

Tues., Jan 28: My advanced video class is specializing in dramas this semester. I have talked with Dr. Pacino, and he has allowed me to use the class to find my crew. The final crew list is as follows:
- Asst. Dir. Tcom-Mickie Roister Theat-Wes Herron
- Sound Designer Jennifer Snyder
- Set Designer Marnell White
- Lighting Tcom-Jeff Marks Theat-Myself
- Technical Director Bill Thomas
- Cameramen Jeff VanWilligan, Melissa Drake, Mark Nirrengarten
- Floor Director Wes Herron
- Props/Costume/Makeup Pat Shawn King
- Graphics/Character Generator Pedro Cardoso
- Sound Operator [Theatre] Wes Herron
- Lighting Operator [Theatre] Pat Shawn King

Wed., Jan 29: Created my call out sheets. I have decided not to ask for prepared monologues because I am currently afraid of a small turnout. If I have many people, a second round, where a monologue is required will weed them out. I include the fact that the show will be taped, because this should attract more actors.

Sat., Feb. 1: Picked out several monologues and scenes from the play which should force actors to attempt a wide range of emotion and character. I have also prepared a questioner which they will fill out. This form includes name, address, experience, phone number, and a synopsis of why they want the part.

Tues., Feb. 4: A very small turnout, as I expected. It seems that, unless you have several friends in the theatre department and pre-cast the entire show, no one from the department comes to the auditions. I, however, did luck out somewhat. Mark Anderson, who starred in Othello, tried out. He will fit the physical type of
Willie, but I know he had his eye set on Sam. I cannot cast him as Sam because, for one, he doesn't play emotions with the range of subtlety that I need. Secondly, he has a conflict until the latter part of February. I have had many try out for Sam, but only one for Hally, and I'm afraid I can't use him. I went to a friend who is shooting a film and talked to him about it. He gave me the numbers of several of his actors, and they agreed to try out.

Thurs., Feb. 6: I have a Hally! His name is Chris Raleigh. He shows quite a bit of talent, but I am afraid of how well he will take direction. The final cast is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willie</th>
<th>Mark Anderson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hally</td>
<td>Chris Raleigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Warren Jackson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I choose Mark and Chris for their parts largely because they were really the only real choices I had. Mark was the only person who could do Willie. The physical type was there and his ability meant that he would do very well. Chris is the only person who tried out who could begin to pass for 16, and he has talent as well. The casting of Sam, however, is another story. I had several talented and physically suited people try out for the lead role. I choose Warren over them all because when he read for me, the emotion may have been incorrect, but there was a definite character behind the words. He wasn't just reading; it seemed that he made the lines his own, that they were his words. Also, he is a freshman, new to the college theatre, has a background in drama, and will take direction well. I am very pleased with him.

Fri., Feb. 7: Have arranged our first production meeting for 2/12 at 5 p.m. in AC 6, better known as the green room.

Mon., Feb. 10: Our first read through. I have my assistant director, Wes, attend all rehearsals. Unfortunately, Mark cannot show up until later, but that is why he is in the smaller role. He knows enough to do the smaller role on his own, and his absence will not destroy the other characters.

Tues., Feb. 11: My first meeting with Dr. Heady, the advisor for my theatre practicum. He has suggested that I hand out character development sheets to all the actors to fill out. Includes several questions to fill out the character, like "How educated is...?", or "What is...favorite food?" We concentrate on giving the blocking from pages 6-35, roughly half of the play. Actors take the blocking direction well. I have made most blocking minimal, only that which is essential. This way, once the actors feel free enough to move around, they will move where they feel it is appropriate, not where I tell them. It will be their own character development, and a great way to find and recall that character.

Wed., Feb. 12: Many of my production designers have no idea of what they should do with their portion of the play. Marnell, my set man, has several ideas, but is
restricted because of commitments to other productions. I tell Jen Snyder, sound, that her biggest problem will be to find the Sarah Vaughn song, "Little Man, You've Had A Busy Day." This is the ending song, and I have been unable to find it for two years. She understands the rest of the sound department job. She knows where to find introduction and exit music, as well as the sound effects. I tell her we want upbeat music for the entrance and beginning music, with obviously sad music at the end. Pat, my props/costume/makeup man, in having trouble. We make a props list, and Pat, Wes, and I take certain props responsibility, mainly because we know where we can get our hands on them. As for the cash register and jukebox, Marnell says he can get his hands on those through the theatre department. Rehearsal went well. Finished all the blocking.

Thurs., Feb. 13: Had a full run through. My AD (Assistant Dir., Wes) watched the blocking and tells me when the actors deviate from it. Chris is reading quite well, but Warren and Mark are having some problems. Warren is unsure of how to deliver his lines, and Mark has a problem about opening up. I didn't expect this from Mark. We work on this, and when Mark overacts for a tension breaker, I tell him that is more Willie than I had seen all night. Willie is a very emotional person, and his moods sway just as much as a thought changes.

Fri., Feb. 14: No rehearsal. It's my birthday, and my girlfriend came down for a visit.

Mon., Feb. 17-21: This week, the actors and I are discussing objective and intention, another method of character development, mainly because they have no characters in their readings, only emotions. It starts with a Super Objective, a goal which the character strives to complete through the entire play. Sam's is to be a friend to Hally and Willie, unless one of them doesn't takes away his respect. Hally's is to ignore his anger with his father, and Sam helps him do this. Willie is to try and find his place in the relationship between Sam and Hally. Next is the objective, a direct attempt to reach this main goal, and last is the intention, several small ways in which to reach the objectives. Working from the back forward, the guys make quite a bit of progress in their characters. we spend most of the week doing the analysis, and read at the end. At first, Mark had quite a bit of problem, which I feel is mainly the lack of time at rehearsal. He seems uncomfortable with the script and the actors. By Wed., this has corrected itself. Warren needs hints on basics, like being aware of where the audience is at all times. It is slow work, and by Friday, he rarely spends a length of time with his back to the audience. Production meeting rescheduled to Tuesdays at 5:00. Most didn't show up. Had AD get on horn and remind them about next Tues.

Sun., Feb. 23: Ran through the show in the Cave, AC 7, where the show will be held. I talked to Patrick Kelsey, the department theatre manager, and arranged rehearsal time for 6:30-9:30 for the month of March. Unfortunately, that was the soonest I could get into the actual performance area. I found there was
unused time for today in the middle of last week and called a rehearsal. I wanted the actors to see the space they would be working in before Spring Break. The transition was very difficult, and the blocking was terrible. After the actors left, Wes and I set lights.

Feb. 24-28: Maintained the work on characters. If I could not feel a character of motivation behind the previous line, I would stop and ask the actor what their intention and objective was, and then discuss what they did to convey this. Warren is very good at this, although his retention of our discussions is somewhat less than I had hoped. Still, we continue to take notes, and once I slowed him down to talk. I said I didn't care if the pace went off, as long as I could see the intentions, that was fine. He did very well after that talk. Chris, however, seems to resent me and discourage most attempts at development. If I tell him I didn't like the way that was done, he takes it as an insult. He will not develop the character on his own, and the process feels more like I'm dragging him, and I don't want to do any forcing. I could tell him the way I want to hear and see Hally, but instead I refrain from giving him the answers and try to lead him to them himself. He highly resents this, feeling that my direction won't work. On Thursday, we were working on his second phone speech, and it came out as if Hally was full of righteous indignation, which is highly uncharacteristic of him. I asked him to try the lines with love and then with fear, which he had the audacity to call inappropriate. No actor, and I mean NO ACTOR, should ever talk to his director in that manner. Instead of yelling, I proved my point. Lately, he has become disruptive with his interjections. Chris sees himself as a very funny comedian. I told him to do the monologue in dramatic tone, and switch to comedic tone when I snapped my fingers. He accomplished that quite easily. I then said "Now that was inappropriate. It was not, however, impossible. I'm not saying we will keep it, but I need to see the monologue this way." He continued to read the same way, but afterwards he said he was doing it the way I asked him. I told Chris to bring it out more. Instead, he got angry, and although he wouldn't admit it, I'm sure now that he felt embarrassed.

Mark has begun to come to the rehearsals quite regularly, and is making great strides. We have begun finding a lot of comedy and drama in Willie because I give him free reign. The actors do what they want, and I tell them after the scene whether I liked it or not. Frequently, however, Mark has been pushing his character and has made several discoveries.

The production meeting on Tuesday was a shambles. No one had done any work, Pat was still looking for the props, Jen didn't do any sound work, and Marnell was too busy to attend the meeting. I also missed Dr. Heady at 11:30. I was there, but he was busy and when he arrived, I was rather late for class.

March 9-13: On the first day in the Cave, we readjusted the blocking for the Space, and committed to all the blocking the actors had added. My AD wrote down all of the additional blocking, and we remind the actors when they don't follow it. There were instances when the actors or the crew felt the blocking needed to be changed, and it was rectified. On the first day, a full run showed us that the end
of the play was quite strong. The beginning, however, needed much work. The actors couldn't get into character. My Tuesday meeting with Dr. Heady centered around this problem. He suggested several acting exercises to me, an one that worked particularly well was one I call the machine exercise. In this exercise, I suggest a machine, and the actors, in turn, become a part of that machine. One was a record player, which mark became the turntable by lying on his back and turning an imaginary record. Chris was the stylus, and bent over to read music while hissing, and Warren was the record, bumping to be the conical felt and magnet. Afterwards, I explained that the play is like the machine. You can look at each piece separately, but it isn't the play until they come together and work together. One part doesn't work for itself. It works to get another part to work, which is what they do. The beginning was never better.

Try as we might, I could never get the actors to recapture what happened Tuesday evening.

The production meeting was missed again, so I set another one for Thursday. I was quite upset, so I put my foot down, and set deadlines. Apparently, this worked. The crew started work.

From this point on, the rest of rehearsal time was spent working on developing character fully. Several things were added by all the actors, just as I had done earlier with Mark, except that Chris never really did change his portrayal of Hally very much. I did, however, get the emotions that I wanted. We did, however, make the character grow once. This is the one step I took with Chris of which I am very proud. The phone conversation problem came up several times, and the last discussion we had I used the word tantrum. It hit him like a bolt, and reprimanded me for not saying it sooner. I didn't care about the attitude, as long as we learned. He was also doing well on the beginning and ending monologues I had written for the show. The research I did made me feel that the fact that this did happen was where the true drama came from. The tragic irony in Sam's death also makes a poignant ending, and Chris did wonderfully with these monologues.

March 16-20: Most of my worries stemmed from the technical side. My poster designer, Eric Shriner, wouldn't be able to work on my posters until the next week, the week of the show. I had to accept it because it was too late to get another designer. Pat started to get the props from Muncie Civic Theatre, specifically the chairs we needed. Unfortunately, Jen avoided me, and I couldn't find her all week. My main upset was with Marnell. He said that he could get the jukebox pulled from the department warehouse, but I found out later that he was doing this without the Stage Manager's permission. When he found out that "Dance '92" was using the jukebox, I had to talk to the Manager, who was quite upset. After a lecture, we were allowed to use the prop if we returned it after we were done, since the performance dates of their show and my show did not conflict. On Thursday, I was quite upset to find he still had not done much work. I talked to him, and ended doing much of the menial labor, such as pulling out the props from storage he said he would get. Finally, on
Friday evening, Marnell, my AD, and myself repainted all the tables that needed it, mounted the door in a proper frame, as well as built and painted the bar. One pain down, only props/costume/makeup and sound to go.

March 23-25: I get on the telephone and yell at Pat and Jen, who promise me that on Monday they will be ready. On Monday, Wes and I bring the props we are responsible, and Pat comes through. Together, we have all props and costumes needed between us and the costume shop. The only props we don't have are the perishables, which I will not buy until Wednesday. Unfortunately, we still do not have the music. We do not get that until Wednesday, the day of the review.

The actors become quiet bored while Pat, Wes, and I work out all the sound and light cues. Pat has some special lighting changes at the beginning and end, which he found confusing, but once he understood, there was no problem. Wes ran the sound, which consisted of two dual cassette radios. One was placed in the jukebox, to give the audience the perspective of the ending song coming from there, and was operated by plugging and unplugging the extension cord that fed it. The other was kept by Wes at the back of the theatre to run the introduction music and sound effects, including the rain for the door openings and at the end. The rain was used only at the live shows. He couldn't understand the playing order, so he took the tapes home and taped them on several tapes. He and Pat performed quite well for the entire run.

My Tcom Assistant Director, Mickie, attended the rehearsals for Monday through Wednesday. She and I worked out the camera blocking and the changes we would have to make in blocking once we moved into the studio.

The first full dress went as I expected. The beginning was still a little slow, and the actors knew it. Warren and Mark picked up the pace for a while until Hally entered. It slowed down once more until he entered his character as well.

Wednesday, our review day. Chris was happy and distressed to learn that he would eat real Twinkes and ice cream, and not the mashed potatoes he feared. I was concerned that the ice cream would melt and look terrible as the float, which it did. One discovery we made was quite accidental. I forgot to buy pea soup, so Pat got the idea to use melted ice cream, along with chocolate (which we bought for the chocolate soda) and green food coloring to make pea soup. It worked like a charm.

We waited 45 minutes for the reviewer to show up, which he finally did. The actors were quite tense to be performing for the review, but were doing quite well...until the fire alarm went off 10 minutes into the performance. After a 25 minute wait in the rain to return to the set, the actors were wet, cold, and quite thrown out of character. They still managed to give a decent performance.

March 26-28: The review railed on the performance. Rob Plummer claimed that Chris Raleigh overacted (which he did, but not terribly) and was quite upset that the actors didn't use accents. That was my choice, and I take full responsibility. I chose not to try the accents because most of the actors had never done accents,
and they are hard to do, let alone continue to use throughout the entire show. My concern with his criticism with his review is that he criticized the ambiguity of the set, saying the play could take place anywhere, even Atlanta in 1969. That was the entire point of not using accents and keeping the set in black curtain. The theme of Apartheid, which is nothing more than racism, is a specific political circumstance. If I specified it, people would not identify because they do not live in that specific circumstance. However, if I generalized the principle to racism, it brought the play much closer to everyone, which draws the audience in and gives the play strength. Most of all, I was upset that he didn’t mention the fire alarm. A show cannot go through a scare like that and remain sharp.

The performances went well. Turnout was much better than expected, and I seldom saw a person who didn’t completely enjoy the play.

Sun., March 29: Jen brought down her brothers and several friends for the weekend, all of whom help me move the set to the studio before they go home. We move it all except the jukebox (cannot move that until Saturday, and we must return it that night) and the bar. We couldn’t find a way for the bar to fit into the studio.

Mon., March 30: Before rehearsal, Wes and I get a cart from University shop and found a different way to move the bar into the studio. Thank heaven for small miracles.

I am quite upset when Warren is 45 minutes late for rehearsal. Once he arrives, Mickie and I begin to explain the differences in acting for the stage and the camera. The big sweeping movements, the vocal changes, and facial distortions necessary for the stage were completely unusable in the studio. Acting for the camera must be more like real life, less dramatic and more toned down. Another problem is the fact that the camera is only two dimensional. However, I compensated quite a bit for that fact in the stage blocking, and this did not become a problem. Mostly we worked on perfecting the style needed.

Tues., March 31: Everyone arrived on time, and we continued the work we started on Monday.

Wed., April 1: April Fool’s! My cameramen were suppose to show up to get their shot list, but never showed up. The actors and my crew waited for an hour, when we left. This can be a serious problem, because the cameramen will not have time to get used to getting their shots, or even know what they are suppose to get. They also will now see the show one less time than possible, which makes them less familiar.

Thurs., April 2: The cameramen have to leave at 8:30. One and one half hour to get all their shots! Mickie and I rack our brains and pray that they will be ready tomorrow. We hurriedly run through their shot list, and pray that they understand the descriptions of what we give them.

Fri., April 3: Our big rehearsal in the studio with full set and cameramen. After nearly 4
hours, we are only half way through the script. The cameramen cannot handle their shots. Mickie keeps me from going completely insane, so we take a break and brainstorm. We slowly go over our options. First of all, all three cameras are going to be isolated. What this means is that our three cameras are going to be taped individually, or three VCR's are taping constantly what each camera is doing. Second, a fourth VCR is taping the switcher, or the sequence of signals that are routed through the studio board. We come to the conclusion that, first and foremost, we must make sure that we have shots of everything we need. Even if the order is not what we wanted, with the isolated tapes, we can edit together whatever we want. What we do is throw out the shot sheets and designate zones, or areas for each of the cameramen to cover. When not on the air, these cameras will pick up special shots, or improve the composition of their own current shot. Mickie will follow the general listing of shots we have, making sure that they are there, and I will work with my technical director, taking the signals in the order that seems right at the time.

Sat., April 4: We began preparations at 9 am and finished shooting at 5:30. Several people ordered lunch and pizza. At first, we were all a little uptight, but the work seemed very natural. Mickie nudged the cameramen, who worked off their old shot list, and I composed the visuals that seemed appropriate. If something didn’t work, we went back and reshot. Amazingly, we only stopped 9 times for a 104 minute shoot. Frequently, the scene would fall apart. We would stop, Mickie would give directions to the cameramen and a zoned shot list, generally about 5 minutes worth. We would rehearse and go from there. Even after we passed the instructions Mickie gave the cameramen, we had fine shots and the sequence carried over.

Now, the hard part begins.

I spent approximately 40 hours editing the eight tapes of footage into what I have now. The first step was editing the switcher part together, for it was composed of several lengthy periods. My main concern was keeping the audio consistent. The video that I wanted would come later when I added the isolated cameras. In fact, the switcher was the basis for the extra video to come later. Editing the switcher took 8 hours spread over 5 days because of limited access to the editors.

Dr. Pacino helped make more editors available by getting the key to the faculty development room. Thankfully, I began adding the extra video. Because I didn’t have time codes on my first generation tapes, the only way I could add video was to match up the audio first to be sure the video would match the existing audio. This was the most tedious part of the entire process. After an additional 6 hours, I had 40 minutes of polished play done. Then I hit an obstacle.

For some unknown reason, the control track on my switched version broke. This was the same tape I just spent 6 hours polishing the first 40 minutes. This also meant that I could loose the rest of the edited version of the switcher. To those who do not understand how a control track break could do this, please let me explain. Imaging the tape is a large sheet of rubber on a flat, wet surface. Now, suppose a bubble gets
under the rubber. The only way to get it out is to lay new tape, starting before the bubble, to push it all the way to the end. Unfortunately, the control track holds the sound and video together, and the break in the tape had to be pushed to the end. To do that meant laying down tape again just before the break, and give up nearly 4 hours of work that went into editing the switched portion that fell after the break.

Not willing to abandon my work, I taped everything after the break, relaid a little portion of video, and then relaid the material that I taped after the break. Unfortunately the quality was so terrible, I couldn’t stand to use it. I was forced to re-edit the switcher together, and the whole problem wasted another 8 hours.

The remaining hours were spent correcting shots that changed in the middle of a person’s dialogue, shots of static characters while the drama was taking place elsewhere.

Completed, I made several copies. Two for myself, one for the Eagles Auxiliary #3760 (they donated $50 to my budget), one for the library, and one to enjoy.

I can easily say this has been the most important project in my entire college career. It taught me much more than information needed for my future career. It taught me what I can do, how far my ambition can push me, and what can hold me back. The project showed me the limits of my abilities, which were much farther than I dreamed.