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Theatre in context: The play text, its context and the ideas presented

Choosing a text:
I had considerable difficulty choosing a script to explore for the directors notebook. I was looking for a very specific kind of piece. I wanted something with a powerful message but a loose and whimsical style and setting that would allow me to explore it creatively. When I read *Ondine* for the first time, I knew immediately that I would be using it. I loved the play’s ability to balance humor with tragedy. I also enjoyed the more magical qualities of this play and knew that they would allow for interesting exploration.

Giraudoux’s style:
One thing that attracted me to *Ondine* was the style in which it was written. Giraudoux, the playwright has a unique style that I found immediately appealing. His style is perfectly described here:

“In his plays Giraudoux tries to resolve the conflict between opposites by bringing them into contact. By this means he explores such fundamental dualities as war and peace, life and death, man and woman, and finally the meaning of human destiny. He treats these serious themes, however, not through the realistic depiction of psychological conflict but rather through a process of investigation, discussion, and reflection that is communicated to the audience through his characters’ recitatives and badinage. Giraudoux’s language is lyrical, poetic, and rich with metaphors, paradoxes, and allusions. The sense of humour so evident in his plays is marked by brilliant wit and a devastating sense of the absurd”.

*Ondine* is no exception to this style of communication. This technique of placing opposites together is central to the play. Ondine’s connection with Hans reveals a great deal about human nature and truth. Initially they are both set on their relationship lasting and being successful, but because their backgrounds are so different they cannot remain together and their story falls apart. Giraudoux used this technique of meshing contrasts to discuss love’s power over human behavior. It is this method that makes this play identifiable as a Giraudoux.

Though *Ondine* is a tragedy, humor does carry a significant presence. Frequent moments of amusement keep the play from being constantly weighed down by tragedy. Humor is one of the ways Giraudoux creates levels in this story making it both an enjoyable and powerful piece.

As this excerpt suggests, Giraudoux liked for the dialogue of his works to be appealing. His fluid style of writing communicates its own sort of beauty. The dialogue in *Ondine* comes off as very flowery and rich. This adds well to the mystical, fairy tale aspect of this performance. Words certainly play an important role in the production and Giraudoux clearly chose them with care.

These concepts of tragedy, humour and beauty, all carry a strong presence in *Ondine* and well represent Giraudoux’s personal style. Together they allow for powerful and entertaining productions that communicate well with audience members.

Context:
*Ondine* was written during a very difficult time in France’s history. Like the rest of the world, the nation had recently been hit hard by the depression. The country, which had once been a glittering center for tourism, was experiencing a decline in visitors. The world was poor, and unable to afford France’s luxurious exports. Agriculture in the country was also experiencing a difficult time. These industries which the country had grown accustomed to supporting itself on were no

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longer the thriving, successful hubs they had once been. Many were faced with unemployment or they were struggling. The economic attitude of the country was bleak.  

The depression was not the only hardship France had been given at this time either. Under the heavy threat of the Nazis, the country was preparing itself for a second world war. A year after Ondine was published, Germany invaded the country and France plunged into the dark days of World War Two.  

These difficult times were perhaps the reason Ondine received the success it did. The play was first performed in 1939 in the midst of all of this gloom. The conditions the country was faced with were unlikely to inspire happiness. A romantic fairy tale like Ondine was likely to provide a respite from the harsh realities of the real world. It was welcomed for its story and characters, but a part of that welcome could easily be attributed to the desperation of the people to have something good in their lives.

**Germany:**

The play is set in a mythical Germany which is significant because that was where the original story Undine was written and set. However beyond that, there is no reason for the story to be set in Germany. The location does not support the story, Ondine can be set anywhere- that is one of the things that I found appealing about the play. I think it is important for me to acknowledge Germany as the story’s origin here, but I do not think it necessary for me to keep it as the setting of the story.

**India:**

Some parallels can be drawn between life in France during Giraudoux’s time, and life in India during British imperialism where I have chosen to set my production. Like in France, India was struggling economically. England held monopolies over the economy in India and many Indians had to work in industries that benefited the British with little gain for themselves. Without financial opportunity, many experienced poverty. England provided a threat to the Indians way of life and freedom of culture. This is similar to the way the Germans posed a threat to the French and their culture.

**Themes:**

For what might initially present itself as just a fairy tale, Ondine carries many timeless themes that a large population can connect to. Because of this, people of different ages and demographics have been able to enjoy productions Ondine. This ability to appeal to a large audience was one of the reasons I selected Ondine; I wanted to create something accessible and stimulating to many different people. A major idea of this story can be posed as a question: Can love between two different worlds triumph in permanence? Ondine is a sea nymph. She comes from a mystical background and is attached to a culture that lives freely; not weighed down by complex etiquette or complicated human behavior. Though she has magic in her past, she lives very straightforwardly and

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2 The Great Depression: Alternative Country Responses and French Peasant Fascism : Henry Dorgeres' Greenshirts and the Crises of French Agriculture, 1929-1939.)
has an idealistic view of the world around her. Hans, in contrast, comes from the human world, more specifically the royal court. He has been raised to take on a specific kind of behavior. Like many humans, he values rank and how he is perceived by those around him. He is arguably a good man, but he is a very human character and in possession of many flaws. These two lovers not only come from two entirely different worlds, but they are also entirely different individuals. However they both have faith in each other and in their relationship at the beginning of the play. They are united by their love and for a brief point in the piece, it seems that their love will allow them to remain together for the duration of their lives. However Hans soon realizes that his original fiance, Bertha, has been better bred to be his husband than Ondine. Han’s and Ondine’s relationship soon crumbles. It is clear that Hans loves Ondine, but she is not suited for his world and he cannot be with her. His betrayal of Ondine ends in his death and her forgetting who he is. In most fairy tales, lovers end up happily together, but love does not triumph in this story. Giraudoux raises the idea that when faced with opposing worlds that partners are unwilling to abandon, love does not have the epic power depicted in so many other stories. This more negative view of love is unusual and thus far more powerful because it is so unexpected. 7

These themes of love are seen throughout Hindu mythology. Love is a central theme in the story of Rama and Sita, Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, an important Hindu text, is driven by his love for Sita. Their story however, like Ondine and Hans’s, does not end happily. After Sita has been rescued from her kidnap, and proven her “purity”, Rama is still unable to trust that she has been faithful to him. He banishes her where she births and raises his two children. When Rama meets his children years later, Sita surrenders to the earth that swallows up. 8 Like in Ondine, one of these lovers is forced to give up the other. There are issues with trust and connection. For both stories, betrayal ends in destruction. These are not happy love stories

The role of classes also plays an important part of this story. Because Ondine is from a different world, classes do not seem to be important to her. She even treats kings as her equals. Her behavior shocks the court, but to her class distinctions are non-existent. Hans however does care about class. He treats Kings with greater respect than a peasant. He cares about where his ranking places him at a table and he is bothered that Ondine does not have the traits people of his class have. 9 Their relationship fails because they are from different worlds, but also because they are from different social classes. Because Ondine does not really understand classes, she does not feel a need to elevate herself to the same one as Hans. In Ondine’s idealistic world, this should not be a problem; however in the real world, Ondine will never be accepted as Hans’ bride unless she is of an equal class. The class separation is one of the things that makes this story more relatable. Most people cannot relate to a love story doomed because one of the characters is from a magical world. People can however relate to a love story doomed because one of the characters is unable to jump social classes. Classes have separated people throughout history. Today, they form less of a barrier and social mobility is more obtainable. However when a prince marries a commoner it is still a major story. People are still very much controlled but what class they were born into and because of that, the story of Ondine can relate to many people.

This separation of people by classes was common in India during imperialism. In some regions, the caste system, which separated people into different roles in society, was hard to overcome. People were committed to their caste and mobility was almost impossible.

Ondine is very much a coming of age story. In the opening of the play, Ondine has a very pure conception of the world. She puts complete faith in Hans and believes that he will love and support her for all time. When her expectations are not met, she begins to realize that the world is a

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very flawed place. She still fights for Hans’s well-being, even when they are no longer together. She has a more complete understanding of the world and though that understanding is painful to her, she does acknowledge it.

Another theme of this story is the desire to have what one cannot. A common human failing is desiring the unattainable. To the observer’s eye, nothing about Ondine’s relationship with Hans should work. It is doomed from the very beginning. Ondine’s naive impression of the human world should prevent her from knowing this. However Hans should know that he cannot be with Ondine. One can assume that deep down he probably does know this. Because he is human and largely led by this trait of wanting what he cannot have however, he pursues a relationship with Ondine. It is very possible that part of her appeal to him is her impossibility.

Undines:
The story of Ondine is in a large sense, a fairy tale. German fairy tales and fables discuss the Undine, essentially a water nymph. The novel, Undine by German writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouque, tells the story of a nymph so desperate to become human that she marries a man. It was this work that inspired Giraudoux’s Ondine, as well as Hans Christian Andersen's The Little Mermaid.  

There are many different opinions about Undines and an Undine can cover a wide range of creatures. An Undine can appear as an animal, a human, or a combination of the two, like a mermaid. Undines are nature spirits and can be from any body of water. They are invisible to the human eye adding to their quality of mystery. Many tales follow the pattern of Ondine and tell the story of an Undine coming to live with humans for a time, before being pulled back to their own world. They are described as being kind and generous beings, ready to help humans. Giraudoux clearly molded his play’s namesake based off of these qualities for she fits the description of an Undine very closely.

Theatre processes: Artistic responses and live theatre experiences

Why I chose Ondine:
I grew up loving fairy tales. As a child, one of my favorite stories was Hans Christian Anderson’s The Little Mermaid. I loved mermaids and they were a big part of my childhood. I was very invested in a fantasy world and characters like fairies or mermaids were very real and important to me. When I first learned about Ondine I was excited about working with something that inspired my favorite fairy tale. The story portrayed in this play had such a big impact on me and my childhood. This play influenced my childhood without my even knowing it.

I was considerably drawn to this story by its magical qualities, I liked that this “magic” would provide me with room for exploration. I also really was attracted to the way Giraudoux portrays relationships. I think that relationships between people are fascinating and one of the reasons I like theatre is because of its ability to portray relationships so well. There are multiple relationships in Ondine of considerable depth and complexity. This is a fairy tale that can be enjoyed by children, but the themes of these relationships can be carried far into adulthood. I also found this play appealing because it had such a loose setting. I really wanted to experiment with setting a story in a different culture and location. When I read Ondine, I saw that it would be possible to do that because its timelessness and lack of great connection to setting, would allow for mobility.

Initial Responses:
When I first read Ondine, I had many different images of the kind of show I could direct. Here are some of the ideas I had for my production that I wrote in my journal during my first read:

- Make music a big part of this production
- Something with candles
- Real water for rain? Fabric? Wind chimes? Bells?
- Live drums for thunder
- Stage this in an enchanted forest
- Blue wash
- Netting, rope, nautical elements
- Use Bhangra? Or another non-western style of music...
- I don’t want the set to portray an obvious setting. Just a few simple, maybe metal, structures
- Set this in an Urban mythical India
- Hans is not Indian- White British maybe?

Some of these ideas were not used at all, but many of these brainstorming notes served as the base of my final concept. When I had finished reading the play, I looked at my brainstorming notes and saw a few patterns. It was clear that I was interested in exploring a set with more minimal and representational pieces. I also had many ideas about things to use for sound. I knew after this first read that music was something that I wanted to heavily involve. I also wanted to connect this story more closely to water. Many of my ideas came from the scenes where rain and bodies of water are prevalent.

Because Ondine is not strongly tied to its setting or time period, I was excited by the possibility of moving it to an entirely different place and time. One idea that I kept coming back to was to set the play in India. India has a very rich culture of mythology that a story like Ondine could easily fit itself into. I think that the story of Ondine is timeless and its setting does not change its meaning. However I think that telling this story from an entirely different place can actually promote greater thought and cause greater stimulation in the audience. From my experiences of watching live theatre, I have found that the most powerful productions I have seen are those that were told in an untraditional way, through either an unexpected setting or an unusual style.

The more I considered it, the more I realized how many parallels I could draw between the world of Ondine and imperialistic India. Both cultures have tight connections to the mythical world. Like in Ondine, the Indian culture places a great deal of value on nature and much of the mythology comes from stories of nature spirits, not unlike Ondine. Both cultures have societies where there are deep divisions caused by class. I decided that setting Ondine in India would provide an unexpected perspective but still allow for Giraudoux’s original message to shine through unchanged.

When I visualized how I wanted my production to look, I did not really see a very detailed or complex set. The plays that I have seen that have really connected with me (described below) have had very minimalistic, simple sets. Stages that have minimal structures that can be used for many different purposes often allow for plays that are more creative and stimulating. I have always found simplicity very appealing in theatre because I think it allows for the mind to be much more open to imagination. In a fairy tale especially, imagination is crucial and I think would be much more effective at creating this magical world than a very flushed out set.

When I was reading Ondine, I found that there was a lot of flexibility. As previously mentioned, the location is not incredibly important and can be changed with reasonable ease. I also found that the stage directions were not very specific which gave me a lot of ideas of things I could
do with movement. I was attracted to doing something dancing because I thought that would give the production a very unique and rich quality. Because I decided to set this production in India, I thought that it would be a good idea to perhaps utilize a type of Indian dance. There is an enormous range of dance styles in India, but I knew that I wanted to choose a style that was very rhythmic and reliant on beats.

**Influential productions:**

In 2013, I had the opportunity to see the musical *Once* at the Phoenix Theatre in London. This was one of the best performances that I have ever seen and it definitely made an impact on me. One thing that was really interesting about this musical was its simplicity. The entire play was staged in a pub. There were no set changes; the stage remained as it was for the whole play. Location was differentiated just through lighting, sound and at times the movement of a few chairs and tables. I had never seen a space used like that in a performance so it was very striking to me. What was so interesting about this was that as the performance went on, it became very easy to see the pub as other things. The set just melted away when it needed to. The focus was truly on the story. The continual use of the pub actually helped to promote this focus. It showed how, if acting is strong, a play does not need to rely on its set. Less set allows for more imagination and also less distraction. That is not to say that I want the stage for *Ondine* to be bare. I am very excited about what I could do with the performance space. However I like the idea of not having any major set changes. I would like to design for the space in a way that can be adapted to every scene. I think that because *Ondine* is not set in the real world, the set does not need to be something as concrete as a pub. It can be something a little looser and more whimsical, and still get the story of *Ondine* across.

I was definitely inspired by the way this production set a story in a different way. In the film *Once*, where reality is more closely mimicked, the characters really do go all over Dublin. In the play they still go all over Dublin, but their visual location remains the same. I think the way this different setting was accomplished was very interesting and something I would like to emulate in my production.

This production impacted me significantly. By the end of the performance I realized that I was emotionally very invested in this piece. The simplicity of it allowed for complete honesty in the music, movement and acting. This production felt very truthful and its truth is what gave it power. For me, honesty in theatre is perhaps the most important thing. This production reminded me that a performance can be immensely powerful if the focus is on the things that really matter. The means of communication in this performance, through acting and music where subtle, but very meaningful. This subtlety is something that I had not previously considered as having so much value.

Last year I saw a touring production of Kneehigh Theatre’s *Tristan & Yseult* at the Alley Theatre. This was probably the best play I have ever seen. It was immensely creative and powerful. I was so struck by it that, because student tickets were cheap, I ended up seeing it three times. There were so many interesting aspects of this production that I found really inspiring. I would not consider *Tristan & Yseult* to be a musical exactly. However music was a large part of this production. There was a live band on stage for the whole performance. The music they played added a lot of depth to the performance and helped to create moods of joy, humour, and pure tragedy. I would love to use this idea of incorporating live music into the production. Because I am setting my play in India, I think it would be really interesting to have the style of music be Indian. I think that this could add to the performance and help to create the setting of India.

Like *Ondine*, *Tristan & Yseult* is not closely tied to a time or setting. The set was composed primarily of simple metal structures with a unit in the center that allowed for minor acrobatics. Like in *Once*, the set never changed, and was able to serve as many different places. I found the vagueness of the set interesting because it allowed for the whimsical and otherworldly style of the play. This is something that I would like to emulate in my production as well.
I was completely absorbed and invested in this play. Like in *Once* the subtlety of this performance was quite impactful. The presentation of great honesty was delivered with a kind of creativity I had never really seen before. The play’s balance of ensemble work, humor, tragedy, music, movement and acting allowed for the play to strike me in a way I had never been before. This was a play that I could not stop thinking about. I kept re-examining everything that I had seen. It was a play that really made me consider themes of love and jealousy at deeper levels. I think that a good piece of theatre should have this effect of people. It should provoke thought and discovery with each examination.

Both plays had minimalistic sets, however they used minimalism differently and in ways that supported their particular production. I really enjoyed the way both spaces were used. I think that it is important for me to find this simplistic style to support my production of *Ondine*.

Presenting theatre: the director’s vision and the intended impact

**My intended impact:**

*Ondine* is a drama, and because of this audience members should not leave happy. The outcome of this play should provoke thought and a sense of seriousness. That said, audience members should leave satisfied with experiencing a rich theatre performance. The acting in this performance must be powerful and affect those watching. The actors needed to be completely immersed in their world. These are given with hopefully any performance, but I do feel the need to say that the acting is the most important part of the performance.

Like with me and *Tristan and Yseult*, I want this to be a performance that audience members will think about long after it is over. The themes and ideas of *Ondine* that I previously discussed are very multi-leveled and can be examined from many different perspectives. I want audience members to re-examine and reconsider the things that they see long after they see them. It is very important to me that this play provokes thought. I want to create images and moments that stay in people’s minds. I think by approaching this play with a creative mindset, this will be possible.

**Intended audience:**

This show is not limited to a particular demographic. Its timeless quality allows it to communicate across generations and cultures. A child might not grasp the more complex themes of love and sacrifice in the story, however children in general are quite imaginative and would certainly appreciate and enjoy the beautiful fairy tale that is this story. Adults would also be able to enjoy the fantastical element of this story but absorb the more complicated themes of the story as well. This is a show that a family could go see and every member could take something from the performance.

It said, I think this production will have the greatest impact on young adults. While those that are younger could easily enjoy this production, they might not grasp all of the ideas it offers. Young adults will be more mature and able to interpret the material this production presents. The subject matter in this performance will also relate to this age group. Young adults are experiencing relationships and love for the first time, rather like Ondine. They should be able to understand her character and the things that she experiences.

**India:**

When I first read *Ondine*, I knew that I wanted to set the story somewhere completely different. I think that by doing this, greater interest is created. I also think that setting it somewhere new helps to prove that this story stands alone and can be powerful in the context of any culture. Growing up in a half Indian household, the Indian culture has become a significant part of my life. It is something that I have grown to be very proud of, and after visiting the country a few times, I think that I have a fairly strong understanding of it. I want to incorporate aspects of the Indian culture into
my performance for multiple reasons. Though I am certain that they exist, I have never seen a play set in India or centered around the culture. I think it is actually a very colorful and theatrical culture that, if given exposure in this play, can make *Ondine* new and exciting. There are multiple aspects of life and religion in India that can be tied to this play making the culture an integral part of the performance.

**Lobby:**

The Indian culture will be projected before the play begins. I think this can be accomplished in multiple ways. The bhangra band on stage (further described below) will start playing when people begin entering the house. Rangoli is another aspect of Indian culture that I will incorporate. Rangoli is the designs typically made out of flower petals. These can be highly intricate and beautiful. Rangoli will be in multiple places in the lobby. I think this is a nice way to great people and begin their play experience before the curtain goes up.

*To the right is an image of Rangoli.*

**Set:**

This is the view of the stage from an audience perspective. These lotuses will be large, but will take up all the space on the stage. By placing them at different levels this can be accomplished.

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13 Drawing by Chameli Belk-Gupta
This is an aerial view of the stage. I have shown how the lotuses will be staggered in relation to everything else on stage. They will add interest to the scene but will not get in the way of anything.

I do not want the set to be obviously depicted a specific location. By keeping it looser and more general, I think there is more room for imagination. Lotuses are an important part of Hinduism. Ganga, the goddess of the Ganges who I will model Ondine after, is often depicted sitting on a giant lotuses. I will have three large lotuses on the stage as a reference to this. I will make these out of a metal mesh material. I want the stage to have an industrial quality. By doing this, I think the audience gets the sense that the time period is not largely important, this set helps to get across the timeless quality of this story. The lotuses will be interacted with throughout the performance for different things. For example in the opening, they can serve as the backdrop of Auguste and Eugenie’s house and later they can serve as the fountain where Bertha and Hans reunite. On stage left, there will be a large elevated platform. The Bhangra band will be placed beneath it. Various scenes will take place on top of it.

Scene transitions:

One of the things that I really liked about the musical Once, was how fluid it was. This quality really kept the story moving and kept the audience engaged and I want to capture that element in this production. I will avoid as many blackouts between scenes as possible. In Once, music and dancing were largely involved in transitions and I will do something similar here as well. There are not any large set pieces that will need to be moved, the stage should appear the same for most of the performance. During changes I will have the Bharatanatyam dancers to dance, using as much of the stage as possible, music will be used to help develop their movement. Characters that need to move, enter, or exit the stage should be involved in these dances, even if it’s just slightly.

Social group distinction:

I really want to emphasis the divide between the aristocracy Hans comes from, and the commoners and magical beings Ondine comes from. For many years in India, the British had control. There are many stories of them looking down upon the Indians and viewing them as their inferiors. I think that this relationship is very similar to the relationship of the two social classes described in

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Drawing by Chameli Belk-Gupta
Ondine. I think it would be really interesting then to have the aristocracy take after the British and the others to take after the Indians. I think that doing so could make the divide between the two visible and demonstrate how difficult mobility from one group to another is.

Indian group (commoners):
The following characters are part of the common populace in Ondine. Because they share a similar background I would like them to be tied together.

Commoners:
Auguste
Eugenie
A servant
First Fisherman
Second Fisherman
Kitchen Maid

These characters will be dressed like the people in this picture. They all lead fairly simple lives and their clothing will reflect that. I do not want any of them to wear excessive jewelry or have any shine on their clothing. What they wear will be cotton or another matte, opaque material. They are from the common populace so they need to dress in a way that does not suggest wealth or high ranking. At the same time, they will not necessarily look like they have lived a life of poverty. Their clothing will be in good condition and they will carry themselves with dignity. In this society they are considered to be beneath the aristocracy. However I want them to appear to be just as intelligent and considerate (perhaps even more so) as those in the royal court. I want to make the point that the division between these groups is unnecessary and that they are not divided by behavior but rather by birth and in this production, race and nationality.

Indian group (magical):
This group is all connected to the magical world and their characters will be tied together as well.

Ondine- see Ganga below
The Ondines - The Ondines will be Bharatanatyam dancers and dressed in the style below. Like the dancer here, they will have bells on their feet. I think this could add an interesting auditory aspect to their characters and help promote the idea that they are magical characters. They should be dressed identically so as to better confuse Hans and irritate Ondine. Like the rest of the magical characters they should be clothed in blue. Though there are only a few Ondines in the script that speak, there will be a whole ensemble of Ondines. Their first scene is short but I a dance will be inserted at the beginning of it to help establish them as a magical and rather intimidating group.

Old One
Venus - Venus is not supposed to be fully clothed in her short scene. To work around this, she should wear heavy amounts of jewelry so that she is not completely exposed.

Illusionist (the old one)

This is the sort of style these characters will be dressed in. This is actually the clothing a bride and groom would wear, as seen by the red in their clothing. I think if the color is changed however, this style would be appropriate.


Because this group is connected to the magical world, their clothing will need to reflect that. I want what they wear to be brightly colored and glittery. They will wear a great deal of jewelry. What they wear will resemble the clothing of the movie stars of old Bollywood. Everything they wear will be in some shade of blue to reflect the water that they come from as well.

**Ganga:**

Ondine will be modeled after the goddess of the Ganges, Ganga. The characterization of Ganga is very similar to the characterization of Ondine which is why I think this connection is strong. Ganga is described as not just the goddess of the Ganges, but rather the Ganges itself. This is very similar to Ondine's connection with water as Auguste remarks “You understand my lord, it’s not that she’s in the storm. She is the storm”. Though the role the two of them play is very similar, they also have similar behavior. Both are young, and at times rather mischievous girls. With their youth there is a sense of naivety. Even though Ganga is a goddess, she is still a flawed character with a skewed perception of the things around her like Ondine.

To the right is an illustration of Ganga. Ondine will have a similar appearance. She will wear fabrics of this very ethereal quality. Ondine will also have heavy amounts of jewelry like in the picture. Obviously in the image, Ganga’s torso is considerably bare and Ondine cannot appear on stage so exposed. I think with some more scarves and strategically placed jewelry however, this can be worked around very easily.

**English aristocracy:**
This group is quite removed from the two other Indian groups. I want them to be tied together as the stiff British upper class.

**Lord Chamberlain**
**Superintendent of the Theatre**
**Trainer of Seals**

**Bertha**- Bertha will not be clothed in purple like the rest of the characters. Instead she will wear white. In western culture, white is typically associated with brides which is what those in the royal court hope for her to be. However in India, white is the color worn for funerals. Her wearing this color shows how different groups perceive her. To her people she is a bride. To Ondine’s people she is a symbol of death.

**Bertram**
**Violante**
**Angelique**
**Matho**
**Salammbô**
**A lord**
**a lady**
**The king**
**First Judge**
**Second Judge**
**Executioner**

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I will model this group after the English aristocracy that lived in India. They will be clothed like the people in the photo above. The style of their clothing will be very formal and fit with the very formal and uptight characteristics of these characters. Their clothing should be in shades of purple, the color of royalty.

**Summary of Characterization:**

These characters are all largely divided by their class and culture, but behavior will not differ greatly between groups. They are all human and it is very important for me to make the point in this performance that no culture or group has superiority over another. By not giving them any specific mannerism except for accents (described below) they are put at a more even plane.

**Accents:**

Though they are Indian, I do not want them to have Indian accents. If this play were performed in America, the royal group would have British accents and the Indians would have American ones. I think that the accent of a non-native speaker speaking English can be difficult to emulate because these accents defer. I do not want the use of accents here to be distracting. I want it to be a subtle reminder that the two groups are divided. I also feel that by giving the characters accents that stem from the same language they are put at a more equal level. They are both groups of humans (for the most part) living in the same country, but their background separates them. I think that accents can be used here to help get across this idea. Were this play performed in a place where the predominant language was not English, the Indians would take on the accents of those where the play is performed, and the British would take on the accents of those from a different area where the same language is spoken. For example, if this play were produced in Mexico, then the Indian characters would speak with Mexican accents and the British characters would speak with Spanish accents.

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Music:
Music will be a large part of this production. I think that music can create moods and has the power to really elevate a performance. Because I am trying to tie in Indian culture, I think it will be really interesting to use Bhangra, an Indian style of music. I will have a live Bhangra band on stage. I want to use their music as much as possible. For instance during scene transitions or when the Ondines make appearances the band will play. In heavier moments, music will be utilized to create greater drama and draw a stronger reaction from the audience.

Dancing:
Dancing will not be a large part of this production, however the Ondines will dance in their scene. Bharatanatyam is a traditional style of Indian dance tied to Hinduism. Because I want the magical characters to emulate the gods and goddesses of Hinduism I think this will be appropriate.

Presenting theatre: The staging of two moments of the play:

Staged Moment one:
This is the moment when Ondine finds Hans as he is surrounded by the Ondines. As this is in the beginning of the play as well, the characters are at a significant point because they have not developed yet. Below I have included the text used in this moment. There is a great deal of dialogue in this moment, but it will all be spoken quickly and run together allowing for the musical nature of this moment.

FIRST ONDINE. Take me, handsome knight.
HANS. What?
FIRST ONDINE. Kiss me.
HANS. I beg pardon?
SECOND ONDINE. Don’t look at me, handsome knight.
HANS. Why not?
SECOND ONDINE. Don’t come near me. If you touch me I’ll scream.
HANS. Don’t worry.
FIRST ONDINE. Take me. Kiss me.
HANS. What are you talking about?
FIRST ONDINE. Am I being too bold, handsome knight? Do I frighten you?
HANS. Not in the least.
FIRST ONDINE. Would you rather I were clothed? Shall I put on a dress?
HANS. A dress? What for

FIRST ONDINE. Come to me. Take me. I am yours.
SECOND ONDINE. Don’t come close to me! If you touch my hair, if you touch my breasts, if you kiss my lips, I swear, I’ll kiss myself. I will not take off my dress!
HANS. No?
SECOND ONDINE. Don’t come out handsome knight. Don’t come near me. I am not for you, handsome knight.
FIRST ONDINE. Take me.
SECOND ONDINE. Don’t touch me
FIRST ONDINE. I am yours.
SECOND ONDINE. Keep your distance
FIRST ONDINE. I want you.
SECOND ONDINE. You frighten me.
ONDINE. Oh how silly you look. Both of you!

Beginning of moment

**Stage:** There is no need for extremely elaborate effects during this scene. There will be a red wash on the stage to signify that something unusual is happening and causing Hans to be slightly disoriented. Beyond the lighting though, nothing on stage should change dramatically.

**Music:** The Ondines will have bells on their feet, so music will come from that alone. That will be the only sounds at first. This will keep the focus solely on them for at least the beginning of this moment.

**Characters:** Hans will be in the center of the stage for this moment. As this begins, the Ondine will come out from all sides of the stage, one at a time. There are only three Ondines mentioned in the script and only two of them speak, but there should be fifteen of them on stage. The three described in the script will enter first but then the rest will follow soon after. What is happening is strange to Hans, first because these women have come out of nowhere to him and he is surprised by that, but also because they all resemble Ondine.

**Effect on Audience:** The audience should experience some of the same confusion as Hans. The use of a change in lighting will alert the audience that something is about to happen, but they should not be quite sure what. The opening of this moment will fill the audience with curiosity and anticipation. The staging here should make audience members feel as if this is almost a dream sequence.

Middle of moment

**Stage:** As the scene continues the lighting will become more striking. It will change color going back and forth from a red wash to a blue one to the same rhythm as the dancers’ movement. The lighting should add dimension to the scene. It will be backlit which will cause the dancers to turn into silhouettes for the audience members. This will help to make them all appear more connected and as one unit because this lighting will take away any distinguishing facial features.

**Music:** Once the Ondines have settled onto the stage, a drum beat will stay in time with their dancing. I want this scene to be very rhythmic and staccato. The drums will grow in volume as the dancing continues.

**Characters:** The dancers will surround Hans and dance in some sort of synchronization. Though they can have some differentiation in their movement, they will move as one unit. This will add to the confusing quality of this moment. Hans will become more and more confused.

**Effect:** This moment needs to create a pounding sensation for audience members. This moment’s loudness in sound, but also in movement and lighting should bring the audience members directly into this moment. This is an early moment in the show and this is the moment where the audience members need to become completely absorbed in this piece. By making this a fully sensational moment, this will be possible.
End of moment

Stage: The lighting will stop abruptly as Ondine enters the scene. Hans is in a sort of trance during this and when the lighting goes back to the way they were before this moment, it is clear that he has snapped out of it. The audience should almost be startled by how normal the stage looks now.

Music: The music will have swelled to a very loud point and as this scene ends, like the lighting, it will immediately cut off. This will have a similar effect as the lighting in that it signifies the trance has ended.

Characters: Hans will look as if he has just woken up from a very intense dream. He will momentarily not appear to understand his surroundings and situation. Ondine’s appearance will bring him back from this confusion. Ondine is annoyed that the Ondines have been confusing Hans and that will show in her character as she will take on jealous, possessive physicalities and a frustrated tone of voice.

Effect on Audience: Like Hans, the audience should feel startled by this sudden return to reality. They now know that this show has more mystical levels to it and this knowledge will help to develop their perspective of this production. This abrupt return to “reality” will remind the audience that they are watching a show with many different levels. This moment will keep the audience on their toes and make them anticipate further moments like this.

Staged Moment Two:

One of the most powerful moments in this play is in the end when Ondine and Hans reunite for the last time. I would like to specifically stage the moment when the third Ondine calls Ondine’s name and Hans dies. I think it is important to show this moment because it is much darker than the one I previously discussed and I would like to show the contrast. Here is what is written in the script in this moment:

HANS. Look! Look! There she comes!
ONDINE. Who?
HANS. Her face is plain, her nature sour. But oh, her soul is like a flower! (he falls)
ONDINE. Help! Help!
HANS. Ondine-
THE THIRD VOICE. Ondine!
(Hans dies)21

Beginning of Moment

Stage: In the dialogue leading up to this moment Hans and Ondine will become as isolated from everything on stage as possible. There will be a single spotlight and the rest of the stage will be dark. Hans and Ondine will be standing on the platform above the bhangra band so they almost look like they are floating. Candles have significance in the Indian culture through the celebration of Diwali. They are a symbol of return which I think is appropriate as this play is coming full circle and soon Ondine will return to where she was originally. Candles are also a universal symbol of hope which I

think is also appropriate here because in this moment I think many audience members and Hans as well have some hope that things will be righted. The Ondines will come out quietly and begin to light candles. More and more candles will be lit as their dialogue in this scene progresses and intensifies. The candles will be on different levels so it looks almost as if there is a sky full of stars. By the time Hans begins his line “Her face is plain, her nature sour. But oh, her soul is like a flower!” all of the candles on stage will be lit. Once the Ondines have lit their candles they will exit.

Music: Music has been playing for a great deal of this production, but right before Hans dies and Ondine forgets, the stage should be absolutely silent. I want all of the focus to be on the characters and their dialogue. Doing this without music will make this moment more raw and dramatic.

Characters: This moment precedes an incredibly tragic one and I want for the audience to really feel that. They both need to have a sense of desperation, their time is draining too quickly. I think tears in this moment would be very appropriate. Ondine is slightly more resigned to what is about to happen at this moment and should express an aching kind of sadness. Hans is less resigned and should almost seem wild with desolation and heartbreak.

Effect on Audience: This is the moment before the play’s crescendo. In this moment of almost silence the audience will be hyper-focused on Ondine and Hans. The audience will sense that everything is about to change. Like the characters, this is a moment that the audience wants to hold on to so as to avoid the next moment. At this point in the play, the audience is very invested in this relationship and the possibility of its destruction should be a cause of worry for those watching.

Middle of Moment

Stage: The transition will begin once Hans falls to the floor, dead. Rain will start falling in an immediate downpour. Ondine is from the water and its reappearance here is fitting as she is about to return to it. Once this happens, the water will cause all of the candles to go out symbolizing that any hope for their future is gone. In order to make rain fall, I will install four rows of rain bars all the way across the stage. I will use a dark blue gel in this moment too to highlight this moment of rain and water.

Music: Once Hans dies the music should start again. Like the rain, it will not fade in, it will start suddenly and loudly. It should overwhelm the audience and really add to the tragic quality of the scene. The music will completely fill the space. It will not be soft and pretty either; it will be loud and strong. Loud drums will be used here. I want the music to really jar the audience and throw them into the scene.

Characters: Obviously Hans dies in this moment, so there is not much emotion he can express because he will be a dead body. For his last living moment when he calls “Ondine” it should come across sounding defeated and not very loud. It should be clear and audible but still subtle enough so that he does not come across as too melodramatic. This moment will be raw and he will collapse dead immediately after. When Hans falls, Ondine should have a clear moment of desperation that breaks from her more subdued gloom prior to this instant. Her “Help! Help!” will be loud and mid

sob. Her dream is falling apart before her eyes in this moment and that needs to be very clear to the audience. This emotion should continue until the third Ondine calls her name. When that happens she will have a moment of clear pain showing that she knows what is happening to her. She will be filled with fear. This moment will launch her into one of calm confusion. She will act with the naivety her character had at the beginning of the performance to show that the performance has come full circle.

**Effect on Audience:** This needs to be a devastating moment for the audience. Every piece of hope that has been created throughout this performance is destroyed here. This is the moment that I want audience members to replay in their heads after this performance. The combination of acting, the visual of the candles going out, the rain, and the music will allow for this moment to hit multiple senses hard.

**End of Moment**

**Stage:** The rain should slow to a stop leaving everything drenched and wet, representing the sadness that should be filling the theater. Beyond that though, there should be no more major special effects, the moment is over and the spectacle is done. There does not need to be anything extreme to make a statement anymore.

**Music:** The music will continue after Hans has died and Ondine has forgotten. It will not be as loud as it was in the moment but it will still be fairly strong. I want the music to be all that really continues after the moment. The drum beat should stay consistent but not be as loud.

**Characters:** Hans is dead at this point and should lay lifelessly on the stage. Ondine will have no memory of what just happened. She is a child again, any maturity she gained through her relationship with Hans and the humans is gone. Her behavior should be very striking and almost painful to the audience because it signifies the failure of love. She should have no awareness of this intended effect however.

**Effect on audience:** The audience needs to be still processing everything that happened during the transition. So this will be a moment of speechlessness, a moment where they will be deciding what they think about what they just saw. The audience will feel a loss when they realize what has happened to Ondine and Hans. The fading of the previous sensory elements will help for the play to reach its close as the audience fades out of this story.

**General Effect of Staging:** The two moments discussed above show the range the staging will have. The first moment I used was the heaviest most tragic moment in the play and the second was a much lighter scene. I wanted to show a range of tone and style so that the general feeling of my production could be communicated. I want this mystical style to be carried throughout the show.

**Conclusion:** Overall, the Director’s Notebook was a great learning experience for me. I have always approached theatre from the position of an actor so this time I got to explore theatre from a completely different perspective. I have finished this with so much more respect and interest in the other sides of theatre. This project helped me to develop my theatrical mindset creatively. This project made me think about theatre in different ways. This fuller view of theatre will make me a more capable and open theatre student and performer.