**MICHAEL JORDAN**

**SCENE DESIGN**

**SCRIPT ANALYSIS 1**

In *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* the author did an excellent job of building an increasingly complex storyline throughout the course of the production, using very small and subtle things to connect into larger meanings later on. He also did well in creating twists and adding needed information to the story from a previous time and place.

The beginning scene very suddenly sets a stasis for the play to start from. You learn quickly what will be occurring (an audition), and you are also introduced to several questions upon the first murder, such as: “Who killed her?”, “Why did they kill her?”, “Will the other people find out?”. As the “stage is set”, the characters start to appear and we begin learn about them, some apprehension builds as we await the discovery of the body hidden in the closet.

During this time, we are introduced to the characters of the show, with a little information about each of them, but not enough to fully understand who they are, or how exactly they fall into play in the overall picture. One of the first comical/tense moments is when Eddie, in an attempt to stow away his snowy coat, hat, and shoes, opens the closet concealing the dead body of the maid. Because of the clever timing and staging, neither of the characters in the room notice her there, giving the audience a short moment of suspense, which then leaves a yet unfulfilled answer to the question of whether the corpse will be discovered. This also makes the audience anticipate *how* the corpse will be discovered, since it was clearly not in a conventional way.

As the play progresses, things continue to get more interesting, as the script lays out a set full of surprises, leaving a sense of uncertainty with the audience, who now knows that things are definitely going to be different than they appear. The phrase that places the viewers in this stasis is made by Elsa, in response to a query of where the secret passage leads to: “To other passages. The house is laced with them.” Soon after the discovery of the first passageway, more information is learned about a few characters that will later be used in the twists in the plot.

Earlier in the play, when Nikki and Eddie are alone for the first time, an important bit of background information is given, informing us of the crisis that occurred long before the play actually began. More details are then added to that after the discovery of the hidden passageways. The details are continually added upon, building a story that is the base cause of the entire current situation. The “Stage Door Slasher” then becomes a point of curiosity and tension; curiosity, because the entire story of the Slasher takes time to be revealed; tension, because of the fear displayed by the characters, as well as the declaration that it could be happening again.

The plot thickens as we learn of the phony audition staged to lure in the Slasher. Again, more details are given of some characters, and more of the story of the Slasher. The pace starts to quicken when Marjorie is killed, and when, but a few moments later, Helsa is discovered in the closet at the end of Act One. Questions that were posed in the viewer’s mind from the start have been answered, while more have been raised, and still more have yet been answered.

The second act picks up the tempo, bringing a lot of physical comedy, as well as a handful of puns and situational comic moments. More and more characters disappear, reappear, and during the rising chaos, more of each character’s story becomes clear. Some of the major twists are when we learn, in turn, of each of the undercover people in the play. As each one is unveiled, the audience is compelled to question what they know of the characters. During the frantic running and searching, tension builds with the chaos, with moments of realization as more dramatic sequences occur, such as more passageways, life-or-death struggles, and revealed details of the characters.

The plot winds down rather quickly after the revealing of the murderer(s). The characters find answers to why’s and how’s and who’s (as well as the audience), and the ending of the play spikes with yet another surprise as the cousin of the maid barges into the library, leaving the true ending of the plot up for question.

Each of the characters in *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* have unique and differing personalities, making each one play a different role and place in the plot. I felt that the most prominent and focused upon character of the play was Eddie. One of the first to be introduced, and also one of those most onstage, Eddie displays many different facets that make him an important part of the story.

Eddie comes off at first—and throughout the production, to be honest—as a low-level comedian. Not exceptionally brilliant in his field, and definitely not brilliant in any other fields. He projects a sense of confidence (concerning the audition) that goes deeper than just an actor; he believes in himself and has goals he’s working for in his life. A couple of references to later appointments and responsibilities support the theory of his goal-driven personality. He also shows a level of comprehension and logic, rather quick and cunning, that many comic-type characters possess. One example of this intellect is when he is the first to piece together the fact that many of the characters present were involved in the earlier murders, which then brings up the possibility that the tragedy could continue at any time. Also little things such as the notice of Patrick O’ Reilly’s false accent and claim to Irish heritage display Eddie’s ability to cognitively observe and connect things.

Eddie repeatedly shows his natural comedian as he constantly throws out puns, short jokes, and wise-acre comments. His instinctive and bluntly practical reactions and decisions help the viewer to see how he might act in an everyday typical situation. He also shows a serious side, mainly in his interactions with Nikki. Even though jokes are not scarce, Eddie carries several serious discussions throughout the play that help us to see his integrity. Things that he claims earlier in the plot are exactly what he does later on, such as his statement that comedians are always scared and the heroes are the brave ones, a fact that he doesn’t fail to bring up again at the end of the production. His actions match his words, and he turns out to be a great guy when all is said and done. His ability to do what was needed, what was right, turned him unknowingly into the hero, although he would probably never admit it.

The story brings a mix of emotions and reactions from the audience, from tension to mystery, all the while throwing in a comic undertone of which the characters seem unaware. The plot contains a very well-written, building mystery, which thickens around every corner. The audience consciously has to figure who, why, and how as the play progresses, and many of the dramatic moments are part of the mysterious storyline. The gradual disclosure of the plot’s details keep the audience engaged as more and more details to consider are introduced. The seriousness of the situation is punctuated periodically with comic moments to create an atmosphere of situational comedy during a horrific scene of bloodshed. The effect is different than for a normal script; I personally didn’t know whether to chuckle or gasp at certain points in the story. Overall, I feel that the success of the play hinges on the mysterious storyline rather than the comical portion. However, the humorous parts added into the mixture help *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* set itself apart as a unique play with great potential.