

AN EXPERIMENT IN TELEVISION  
SCENE DESIGN FOR THE  
LOCAL STATION

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
Thomas Cecil Meador  
1965





## ABSTRACT

### AN EXPERIMENT IN TELEVISION SCENE DESIGN FOR THE LOCAL STATION

by

Thomas Cecil Meador

This thesis begins with a detailed description of the process of designing a setting for a pilot film produced in a local television station. It develops into an investigation of the practical preparation of potential designers, and the validity of the term "set designer" as defined by Robert Edmond Jones.

The thesis is directed toward all students who are unfamiliar with television production in a local station--students who are interested in design and their future employment.

The thesis is directed toward television producers and directors so that they might better understand the complexity of design and the necessity for appropriate visual elements.

Finally the thesis is directed toward those people who are responsible for the education of designers.

The thesis is divided into an introduction and four

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chapters. The introduction discusses the background of the author and the reasons for his involvement in this production. The first chapter describes the development of the design and the second chapter is devoted to the method of construction. The third chapter is concerned with the actual running of the program.

The final chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is an analysis of the role of the designer in relation to other members of the production company. The second part analyzes the adequacy of the design itself. Both of these parts compare the writings of well-known designers with the author's experience.

The author had learned that the designer should be familiar with all phases of production. Experience indicated that on the local level a designer must apply his knowledge. He may be called upon to act as a carpenter, a painter, a floor director.

The author had expected to play a major role in determining the visual presentation of material. However, he found that in this situation, the producer and director had the most influence and that any decisions he made were based on studio space, technical facilities, time, and money,

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rather than aesthetics. He therefore found himself to be a "filler of space" rather than a set designer.

Finally the author suggests a number of considerations which should not only be of interest to the local producer and director but to the potential designer.

These comments are based on the idea that the author's experience was not uncommon--that there is in fact little call for a trained set designer in local television stations. Local television is plagued by a limited budget, limited talent and limited facilities. These factors often restrict local programs to the news, weather and sports classification.

The author suggests that according to Jones' definition, the true set designer in local television is the director. This person must be a jack-of-all-trades for he must deal with a variety of subjects. This person has complete control over all visual elements because he has the authority to control the lighting, the talent, the cameras, the background. He gives unity to the whole picture which is presented to the audience.



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A THESIS

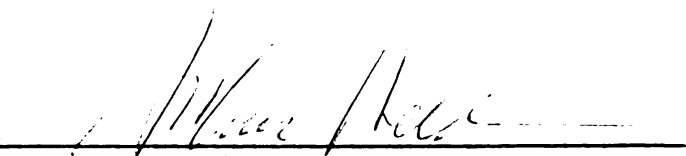
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## INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago scene designing was a sideline for an architect or easel painter. A setting was not integrated with the other elements of the production. It was a background for action which was to be admired for its own sake.

In 1916 Robert Edmond Jones suggested that "the decorator, like the actor, should be translucent, like a medium... He must make his work unobtrusive, in fact invisible while discreetly and tactfully aiding, heightening in all possible ways. It should be lucid, pellucid."<sup>1</sup> He later said "Scenery isn't there to be looked at. It's really there to be forgotten."<sup>2</sup>

Norman Bel Geddes helped to advance the organic theory of production in which all elements would be fused into an artistic whole in accordance with the demands of the script.<sup>3</sup>

Lee Simonson no longer considered the setting a background but rather "a plan of action"<sup>4</sup> which could force the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Edmond Jones, "The Decorator," New York Times, December 10, 1916, Sec II, p.5.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Edmond Jones, "The Future Decorative Art of the Theater," Theater Magazine, Vol 22, May 1916, p.266.

<sup>3</sup>Norris Houghton, "The Designer Sets the Stage," Theater Arts Monthly, October 1936, p.766.

<sup>4</sup>Lee Simonson, The Stage is Set, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932, p.284.

actors into certain patterns of movement.

Mordecai Gorelik advocated the search for a "symbolic metaphor"<sup>5</sup> and probably every other set designer has had his special method of obtaining an appropriate setting. Yet, the foundation for most of today's ideas is still the organic theory.

This theory has affected all the theatrical arts. Harry Horner has won an Academy Award for his work in the movies as has Jo Mielziner; Fredrick Fox designs for the theater, opera and television; Oliver Smith who first designed for ballet is today sought after in all areas; Syrjala is equally acclaimed for his television and stage settings as are William and Jean Eckart.<sup>6</sup>

These are only a few of the people who have made designing a dignified profession in itself. They have written books and articles. They have been quoted and, particularly in the case of Donald Oenslager, they have had a tremendous effect on the education of young people interested in scene design.<sup>7</sup>

In keeping with the organic theory the educators and

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<sup>5</sup> Mordecai Gorelik, "Metaphorically Speaking," Theater Arts, Vol 38, November 1954, p.78.

<sup>6</sup> Orville K. Larson, Scene Design for Stage and Screen, Michigan State University Press, 1961, p.xv.

<sup>7</sup> Oenslager also teaches design at Yale University.

their books insist that a designer must be a dramatist or as Bel Geddes was, a director. A designer must be a spoke in a wheel, or an "aider and abettor"<sup>8</sup> of the director. The student is taught that a designer should be a jack-of-all trades.

"He can make blueprints and murals and patterns and light plots. He can design fireplaces and bodices and bridges and wigs. He understands architecture, but is not an architect; he can paint a portrait, but is not a painter; he creates costumes, but is not a couturier. Although he is able to call upon any or all of these varied gifts at will, he is not concerned with any one of them to the exclusion of others, nor is he interested in any one of them for its own sake. These talents are only tools of his trade. His calling is something quite different. He is an artist of occasions."<sup>9</sup>

I was taught this approach to design. I followed the example set by Norman Bel Geddes and learned all I could about directing (both television and theater) and the aesthetic power of movement. I acted; I designed costumes; I analyzed scripts and attempted to discover their symbolic metaphor. All the while I planned to apply my designer's skill to television.

On May 23, 1964, I was interviewed by Ben McCrea, a

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<sup>8</sup>Jo Mielziner, "Aider and Abbetor," The New Yorker, April, 1948, p.37.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Edmond Jones, The Dramatic Imagination, New York: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1941, p.69.



graduate of the Television and Radio School at Michigan State University. McCrea explained that he was planning to make a pilot film which would present polka music in a variety of ways. McCrea would act as host and do little other than unite the various musical segments.

He stated that various forms of research had indicated a polka program would be accepted by the public at this time.<sup>10</sup>

McCrea eventually hoped to syndicate the program and present it on a national level. He was presently in the process of forming a television production company and said he was interested in my ability as a set designer. I was told of the financial gain which could be made by all within the company and the ease in which I could join the all-powerful union. Finally, he offered me complete freedom. My budget was unlimited, my decisions would be mine alone.

I accepted. The benefits were impressive, yet the choice was based on a desire for an educational experience. I felt that Ben McCrea's pilot film would be a perfect "final examination".

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<sup>10</sup>Research was almost completely based upon the results of the rating services.

## CHAPTER I

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE DESIGN

In the two weeks that followed my hiring, I had a number of discussions with the producer. I learned that he planned to have two polka bands, a dance group, a barber shop quartet and a soloist of some sort. I realized that this group of people would require a large studio. The producer felt that the program could be shot in a rented hotel ballroom. This would be appropriate for an audience participation show. I reminded him that the ballroom floor would have to be perfectly smooth for camera movement and that the hotel would have to have adequate lighting facilities. I also pointed out the expense of obtaining a remote unit.

The producer felt that a particular hotel in Flint might be suitable, but he wanted my opinion.

I went to Flint and found that the hotel's floors were uneven, squeaky or carpeted. The electrical system was antiquated, and the manager insisted that the production company should at least pay for setups if they were to rent the hall.

The producer then suggested the possibility of obtaining studio facilities in either Detroit or Toronto. I asked about his ability to cover the cost of renting studios and paying for union labor. I also inquired about the accessibility of a well equipped workshop. I mainly tried to be discouraging because I was attending classes in East Lansing at the time and could not afford the time or expense of traveling to and from a studio in Detroit or Toronto.

I suggested instead that he might consider the possibility of using the facilities of WMSB in East Lansing. Other than the location factor, WMSB was an Educational Television Station; thus studio rental and wages might be considerably less. The cost of buying material for scenery could also be reduced for these might be obtained through the university owned wholesale warehouse. WMSB's workshop was more than adequate. Most important, I had worked there a number of years and felt that the staff would be completely cooperative.

On our visit to WMSB, I pointed out that the studio facilities were not without fault. The lighting grid was only ten feet high; thus cover shots would have to include much of the floor. The floor of Studio B was approximately 45' x 37', and this would have to house necessary equipment



plus a yet-to-be-determined number of performers. I also mentioned that the switcher could only cut, dissolve and fade. Nevertheless, the producer was convinced that this studio was adequate. He suggested that I should draft a series of floor plans and renderings while he made arrangements with the station's management.

My planning was hindered however by the lack of a script. I therefore could not tell how the action would flow from one area to another. Nor did I know the exact number of men in each band or whether they would stand or sit. I did not know the arrangement of the instruments or if music stands would be used. I did not know if the soloist would move about or stay in one area. I did not know the size of the dance group or their ability. I did not know if costumes would be used. I had not yet been introduced to the director as the producer had not decided definitely who this person would be.

I told the producer of my difficulty. He said he would give me the information I needed as soon as possible. I then told him the setting would cost approximately two hundred dollars.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>I felt that this was asking for more money than necessary; but since McCrea was borrowing money for the production, I wanted to prepare him for the worst.

Sometime later a production meeting was held in the Audio-Visual Building on the Michigan State University campus. I was introduced to Dick Gerrero, the music director, Jane MacRae, costume designer and assistant producer, and Alan Maar, the writer and studio director. The choreographer and director were noticeably absent.

The discussion consisted of plans for the future-- that is, the financial arrangements after the pilot film had been shot and sold. The pilot program was hardly mentioned.

Following the meeting, I asked the producer if he wanted a realistic or abstract setting. He stated, as he had in the past, that he did not wish to have a setting which could be associated with any particular ethnic group.

I asked if the performers would acknowledge the presence of the cameras or would the audience simply be watching a party. Would the action take place in a "ball-room" or a television studio.

A television studio approach was decided upon when I reminded the group that time was growing short. A realistic setting would take much time to construct. The realistic style would also probably cost much more than a suggestive setting.

I then asked Jane if she would tell me what the performers would wear. After some discussion, the producer decided that the dancers would wear costumes dominated by polka dots.

I returned to Flint and inspected the scenery which was being used on a televised polka program featuring the "Michigan Dutchmen". The settings included a series of flats which represented a chateau on camera right. A bandstand ran along the back wall, and on camera left there was a window frame with a huge painting of a mountain scene. The unpainted wood framing and leaded windows reminded me of pictures I had seen in a National Geographics Magazine article on Northern Europe.

The Michigan Dutchmen wore Lederhosen and other articles of clothing one would expect to find in the Alps.

I learned that the Michigan Dutchmen would be our "host" band and that they would wear their costumes for our pilot program. The guest band, led by Claire Witkowski, would wear white shirts and dark slacks. The barber shop quartet would wear polka dotted vests and bow ties. The male dancers would wear white shirts, dark slacks and polka dotted vests. The female dancers would wear polka dotted dresses with full skirts. A female soloist, Alma Santa,

would play the accordian, move about and wear a party dress. The host would wear a dark suit with a polka dotted bow tie. (See Plates I-VII)

### Original Design

I waited for the producer to give me more information; but after about two weeks I began to work seriously on possible settings. I still had not talked with the director; thus I tried to design the type of setting I, as a director, would like to have.

The program would be a staged television show. There would be a number of differently styled costumes which had to be united. The program would be broken into segments and video taped. Therefore, I felt the setting for each area should be self supporting; yet, if seen on a cover shot, the areas must work together.

My main challenge was to fit a still undetermined number of performers and equipment into a studio which measured 45' x 37' yet make that studio appear spacious. The setting must also be cheap and very easy to build.

I began to design the setting by plotting various area arrangements on a floor plan. At this time I was interested in seeing if a series of platforms could be placed in the middle of the studio floor. This type of arrangement could

PLATE I

The Host







PLATE II

Female Soloist



PLATE III

Barber Shop Quartet



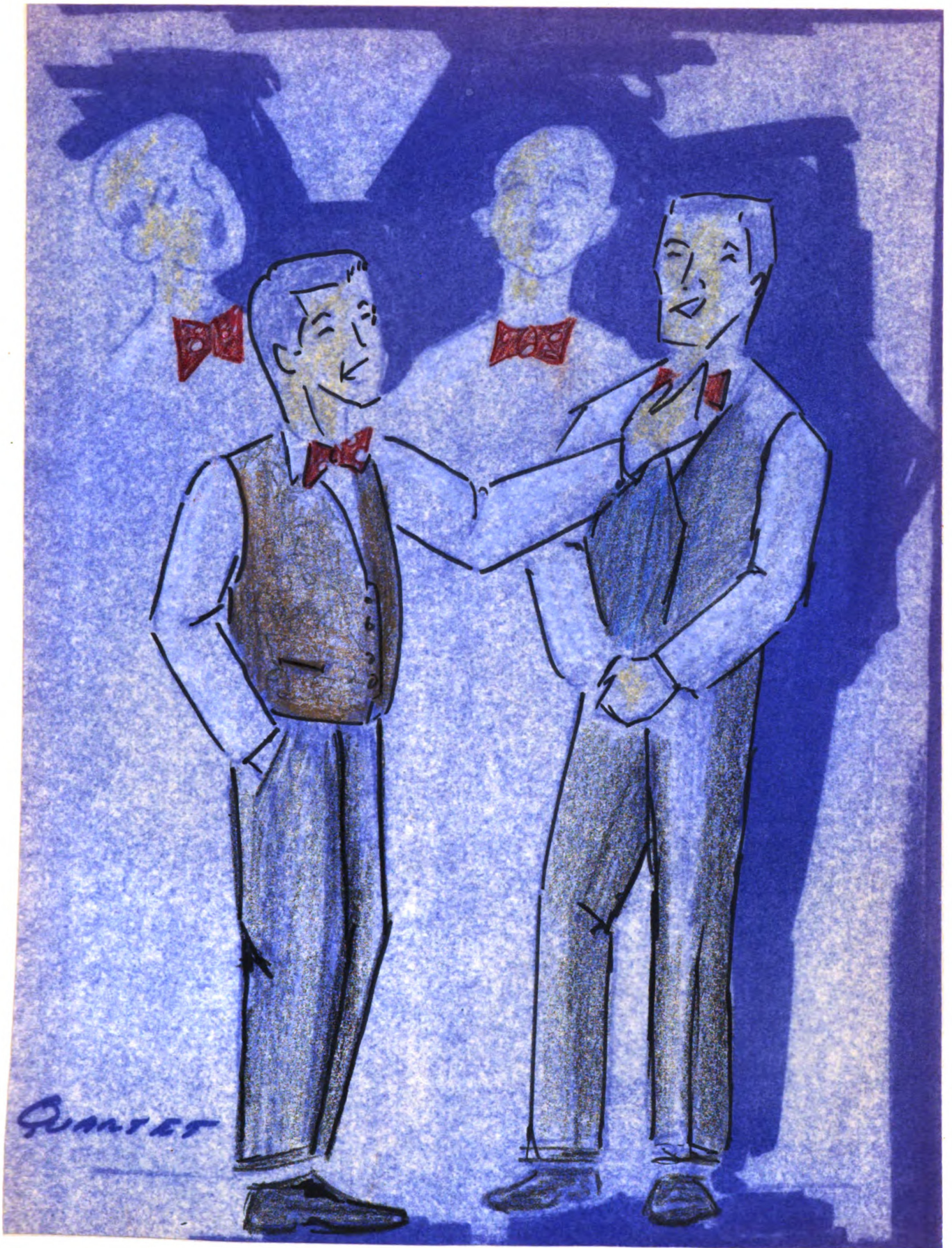


PLATE IV

Girl Dancer





**PLATE V**

**Male Dancer**







PLATE VI

Host Band



PLATE VII

Guest Band





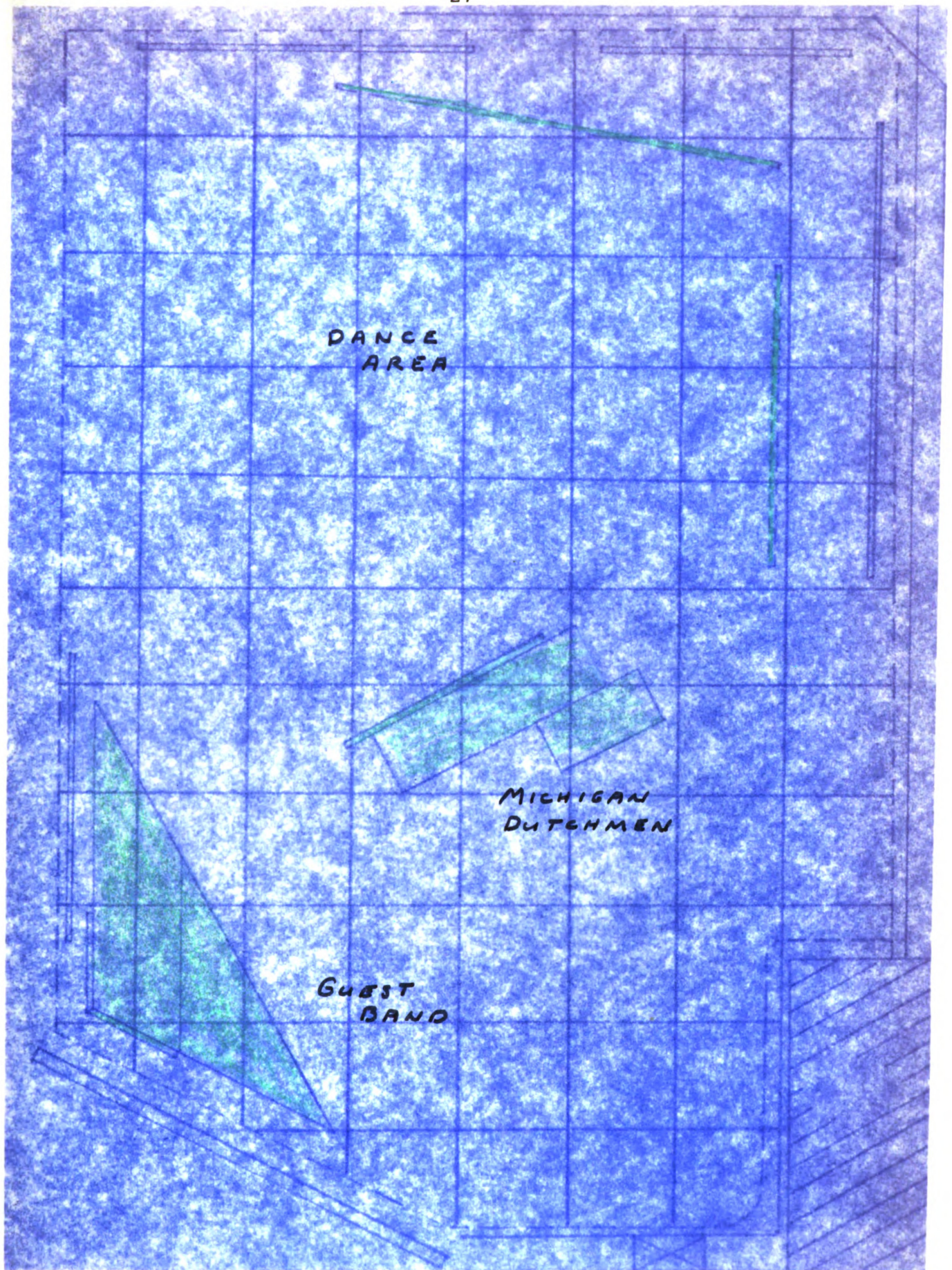
allow the director almost 360° for camera movement.

(Plate VIII) As the Michigan Dutchmen were to be the host band, I felt they should be placed in the middle. I also thought that the program should have at least one standard piece of scenery which the audience would remember. Thus, I returned to the chateau idea. The structure could be a series of connected wooden strips, possibly 1" x 3", which would in effect draw an outline of a building in space. The wall would not be filled. Solidity would be suggested by an abstract window and shutters suspended by wire within the frame. If light were removed from the frame and placed on the cyclorama in back of it, a camera would be able to shoot through the structure at dancers or the quartet or soloist. This "skeletal" technique can be seen frequently in television today. The idea carried through to other pieces of scenery. Two frames which were built to distort perspective were placed along the north and west walls. I felt these frames would make the studio appear to be larger when viewed on a cover shot. Claire Witkowski's guest band was then placed in a corner relatively close to the Michigan Dutchmen in order to make audio pick-up less complicated. Because of their modern dress, a plainer framework was placed in back of them. A camera mounted on a large pedestal

PLATE VIII

Floor Plan of Original Design











could easily pan from one area to the other. The platform in the middle could revolve thus adding even more flexibility to the setting. (Plate IX)

This original idea was planned for nearly continuous shooting rather than the stop and go technique used in film. The setting depended upon a number of lighting changes which would be seen by the audience.

Instead of submitting a rendering, I built a scale model of the design and left it with the producer as he wanted to show it to Tom Hall, the director.

Another week passed before the next production meeting was held. At this meeting I was presented with the complete script and the director's arrangement of the studio. He preferred placing the settings against the north wall as this would keep the middle of the studio open for cameras and other equipment.

I attempted to defend my setting to those present by drawing a floor plan and plotting all the shots required by the script. The producer then said that the director liked my ideas but was afraid the director could not use them as he was not familiar with the crew and facilities.



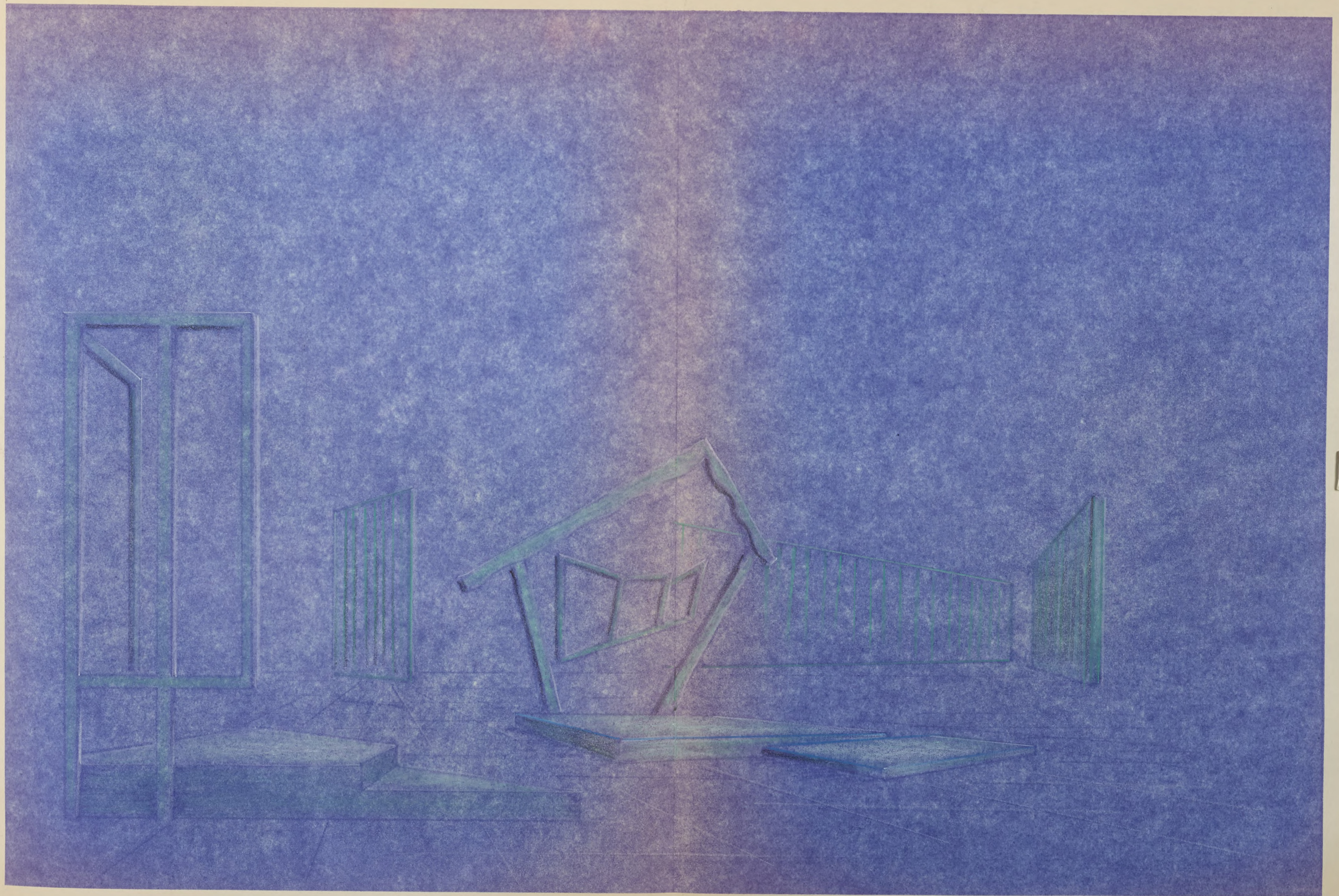




PLATE IX

Rendering of Original Design

Final Design

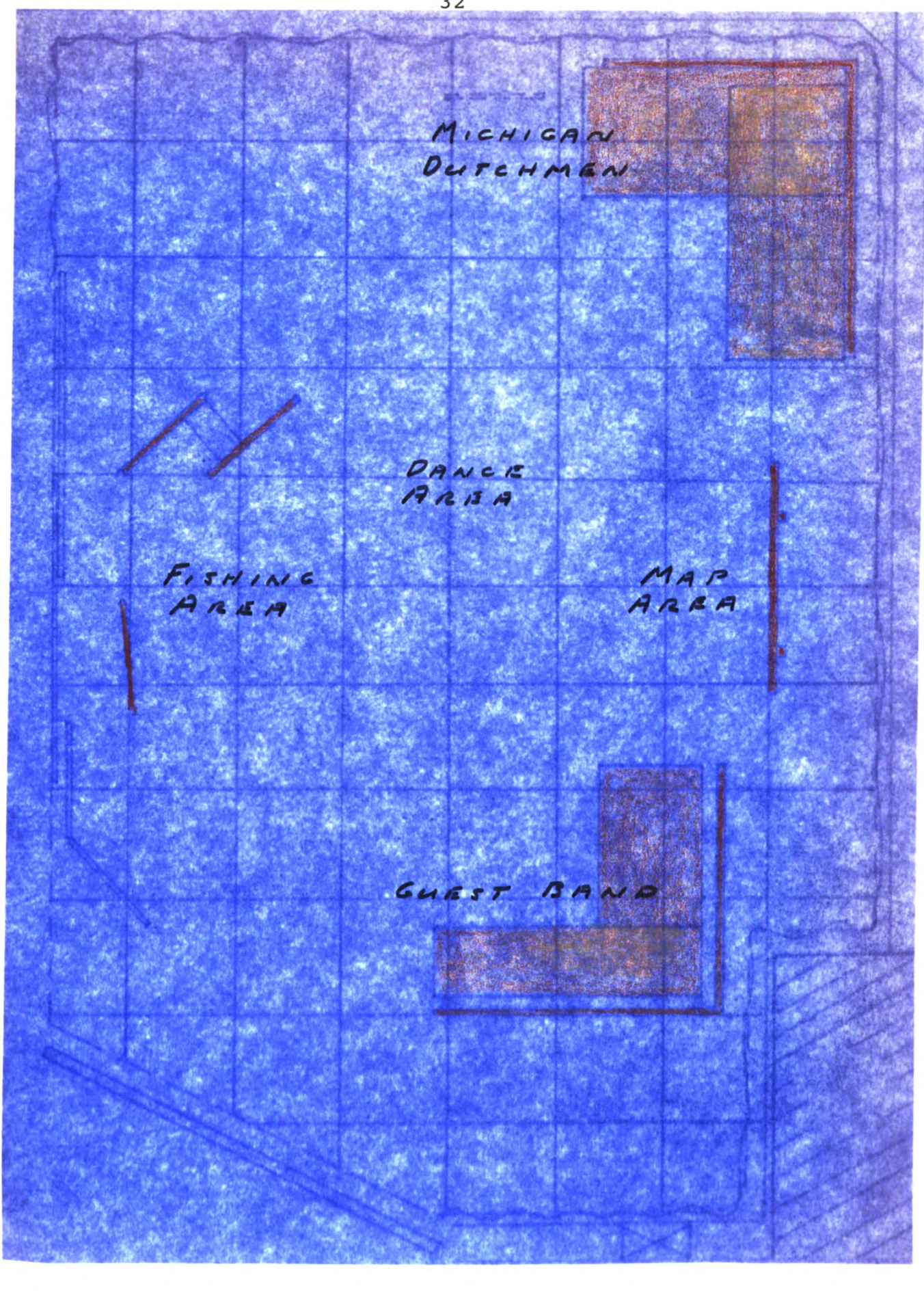
Monday I went to WMSB and received a list of all available risers. I then built a scale model of each riser and drew up a floor plan on the same scale. I presented these to the producer explaining that since the first rehearsal was to take place the coming Saturday there would not be enough time to build any risers. I further suggested that he, the music director, and the director could use the model platforms in determining a workable arrangement.

Saturday the platforms were arranged (Plate X) and while the rehearsal went on I drew a quick series of sketches which resembled Mondrian paintings. The flats would simply be rectangles with rectangles within the outer frame. As in the first design, the frames would not be filled. Before the reason had been aesthetic. This time, however, it was practical. The revised arrangement placed the performers so close to the frames that normal backlighting would have been impossible. The light would have to pass through the frames rather than over them as is usually the case. To further complicate the lighting the platforms were pushed to within one foot of the cyc in some places. Therefore, the cyc became very obvious. To block the view and add visual interest, I planned to fill some of the rectangles

**PLATE X**

**Floor Plan of Final Design**





A hand-drawn map on blue grid paper. The map features several labeled areas and structures. In the top right, there is a large rectangular structure with a smaller rectangle attached to its right side, both filled with brownish-orange color. In the center, the words "DANCE AREA" are written. To the left of the center, the words "FISHING AREA" are written. To the right of the center, the words "MAP AREA" are written. At the bottom center, the words "GUEST BAND" are written. There are also some diagonal lines in the bottom left corner and a vertical line on the right side. The entire map is drawn on a blue grid background.

MICHIGAN  
DUTCHMEN

DANCE  
AREA

FISHING  
AREA

MAP  
AREA

GUEST BAND

with white sash cord. This would reflect light and thus make the cyc less apparent. I chose a diamond pattern as this is closely associated with leaded windows. While I lost the flexibility of the original design, I retained much of the style. (Plates XI and XII)

PLATE XI

Sketch of Background for Guest Band



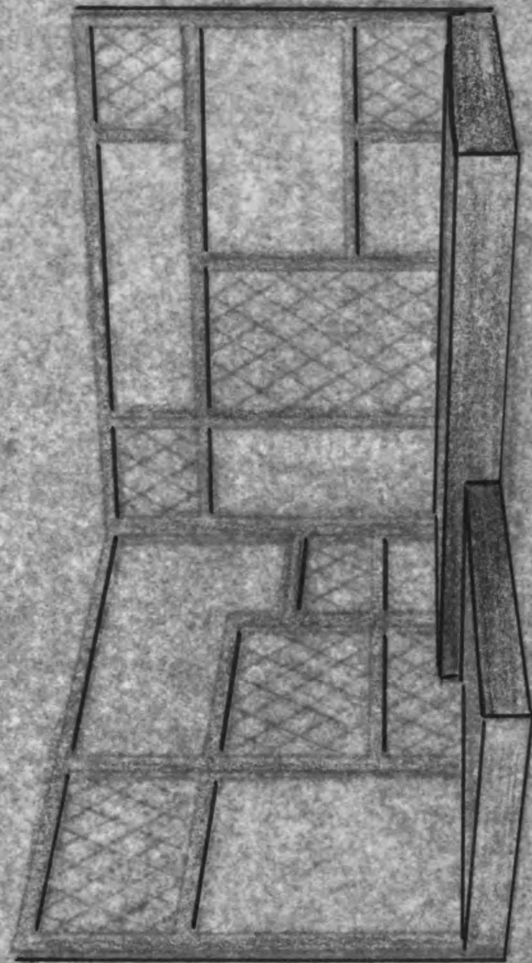
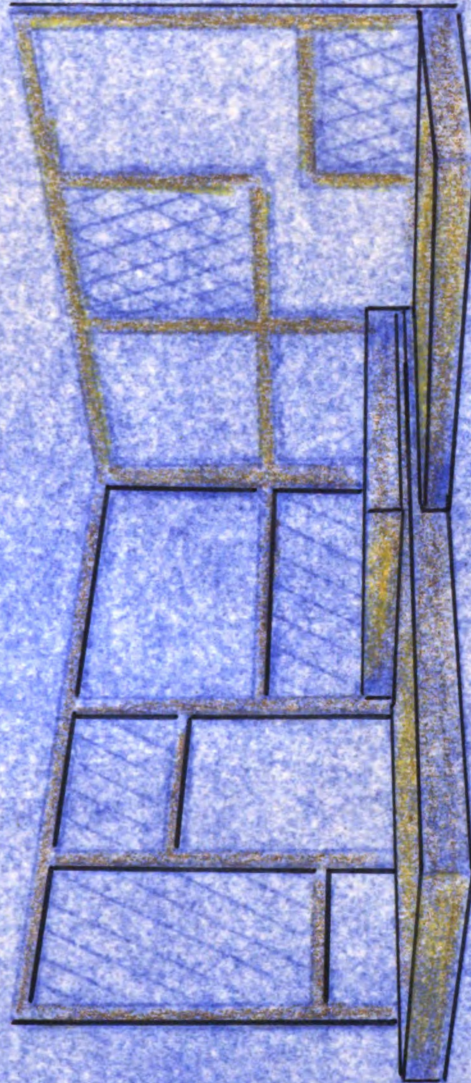


PLATE XII

Sketch of Background for Host Band





## CHAPTER TWO

### CONSTRUCTION OF THE SETTING

As was mentioned previously, the station's platforms would be used; thus almost all of my efforts would be devoted to building an appropriate background.

I decided which materials would be used while I developed the design. The frames would be of wood and the rigging would be rope. The question then was what type of rope and lumber. Fir was half as expensive as white pine but it had a tendency to warp. Fir also had many knots and tended to be brittle. I felt that it was important to maintain the straight lines of the design and feared that if the production was delayed for any period of time warping would take place and these lines could be lost. Even one crooked piece would be very obvious to the viewer simply because of contrast. The stress upon the structure would be increased by the rigging as this had to be pulled tight in order to maintain a straight line. Therefore, white pine was chosen.

Plastic cord was ruled out because of its tendency to stretch and sag. I also feared that its smooth surface would



reflect so much light that the cameras would be affected by the sharp contrast. Plastic cord was also more expensive than plain sash cord. Both white pine and sash cord could be obtained from the university wholesale warehouse.

From the sketches an estimate of 92 board feet was made. I planned on 600 feet of #5 sash cord to begin with. These materials were purchased Monday afternoon along with five pounds of roofing nails.

Tuesday afternoon the lumber was ripped to 1" x 4" thickness and Wednesday afternoon construction began.

So that the reader might better understand the events which occurred during the final four days, I will describe my activities on a day-to-day basis.

### Wednesday

The height of the frames was my primary concern, for the length would be determined by the platforms.

Claire Witkowski's band had not been at the rehearsal; therefore, I had to make an approximation as to the height of the frame. I had to make sure that the horizontal piece would not cut through the performers' heads at any time for this tends to attract the viewers' attention. I planned on a man 6'5" standing on a 12" riser and then raised the horizontal piece one foot. I also constructed the frame so that

it could be raised and hung from the grid by wire if necessary. I then built rectangles within this frame much as an artist would draw lines. I did not have time to make an accurate draft. It was simply a question of judgment which was based upon a very rough sketch. (Plate XIII)

The background for the Michigan Dutchmen was less complicated as they would all be seated, yet there could be a noticeable difference in frame height. Again, as each frame was completed rectangles were added within. (Plate XIV)

Before the pieces were connected, they were turned upside down and reversed. Keystones were then cut from scrap 1/4" plywood found in the shop. These pieces of plywood formed the bond between the strips of 1" x 4".

I wanted to make the bond only temporary as I did not know how many times the setting would be used. If the program was successfully sold, this scenery would have to be transported to another studio. To make this transportation less difficult, all large frames had to be easy to take apart and put together again. Therefore, the method of construction which is commonly found in most theaters or television stations, cleat nails or glue and screws, was not used. Screws alone would have been suitable had they cost the same as roofing nails and had been as easy to put

PLATE XIII

Photograph of Guest Band Area

1





PLATE XIV

Photograph of Host Band Area



into the wood.

The main frames were completed by 3 a.m. Thursday.

#### Thursday

At 9 a.m. Thursday I began painting the frames. The paint was a bit darker than the cyclorama. I was afraid that if the frames were lighter they would compete with the performers. All paint used was rubber base so as to dry rapidly.

The painting was completed by 12 noon. At 1 p.m. I received a telephone call from the producer. He had mentioned earlier the necessity for having a grandfather clock and a large map of the North American continent. The phone call made it definite. He also wanted a special area for the barber shop quartet.

This area for the quartet would be placed against the south wall of the studio. The setting had to be light so that it could be easily moved into an area which was normally occupied by the cameras.

The quartet would be involved in a skit in which people would appear from behind a screen. Actually the screen would be a pair of overlapping frames with one frame placed 24 inches in front of the other. A camera with a head-on shot would not disclose the fact that the gap between the



screen was large enough for a person to pass through.

The quartet would stand to one side of these screens and fish. They would "catch" people and these performers would then pass through the gap.

Rather than abandon the over-all design of the setting, the frame and rope pattern was used again.

Two frames were made and attached to each other. Upon board was then cut to the exact size of these frames and attached temporarily to the back. The board extended beyond the top of each frame and was cut to suggest waves. In order to give the quartet an interesting background a third frame was built to be hung on wire directly behind them.

(Plate XV) While the paint was drying on the main scenery pieces, these screens were built.

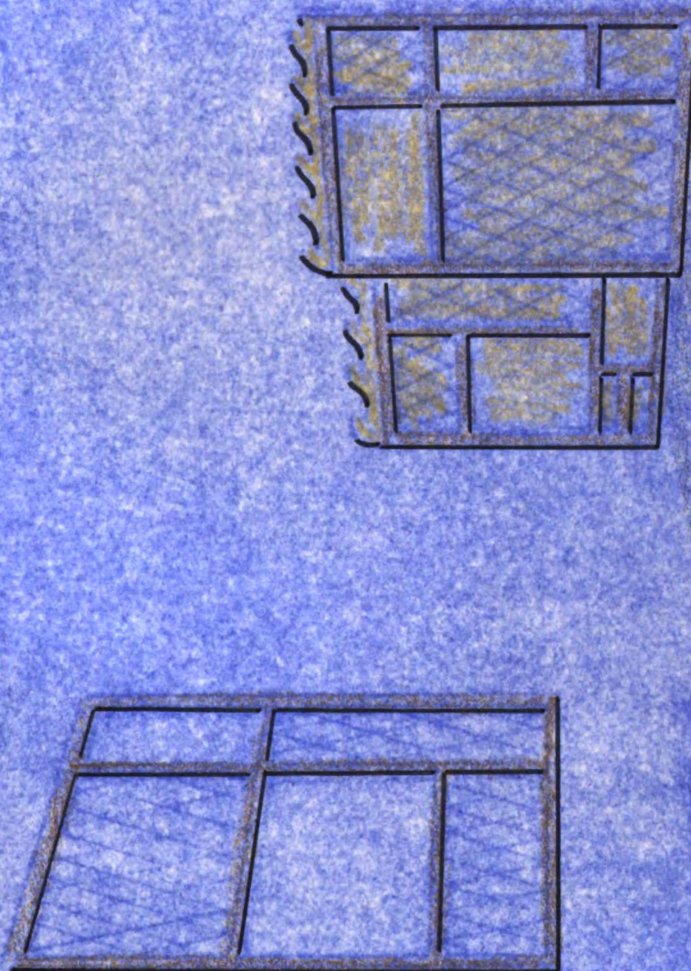
When the fishing skit scenery was built, it was painted. While this was drying, I began to work on the clock and the map of the North American continent.

The clock was to be used in the "Grand Father Clock Polka". As the polka progressed the clock would tick away the time. At the close of the song the clock was to explode in a puff of smoke.

John Weaver, my assistant, suggested that the face could be mounted on a hinge. At the end of the song the face

PLATE XV

Sketch of Screen Arrangement for Fishing Skit





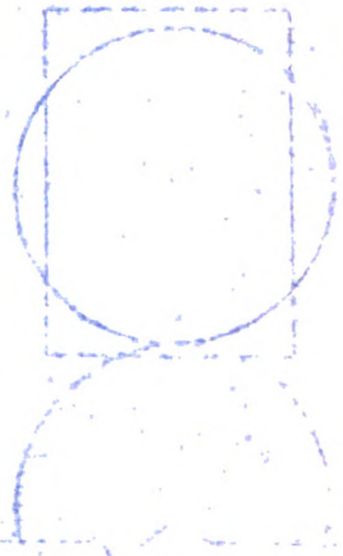
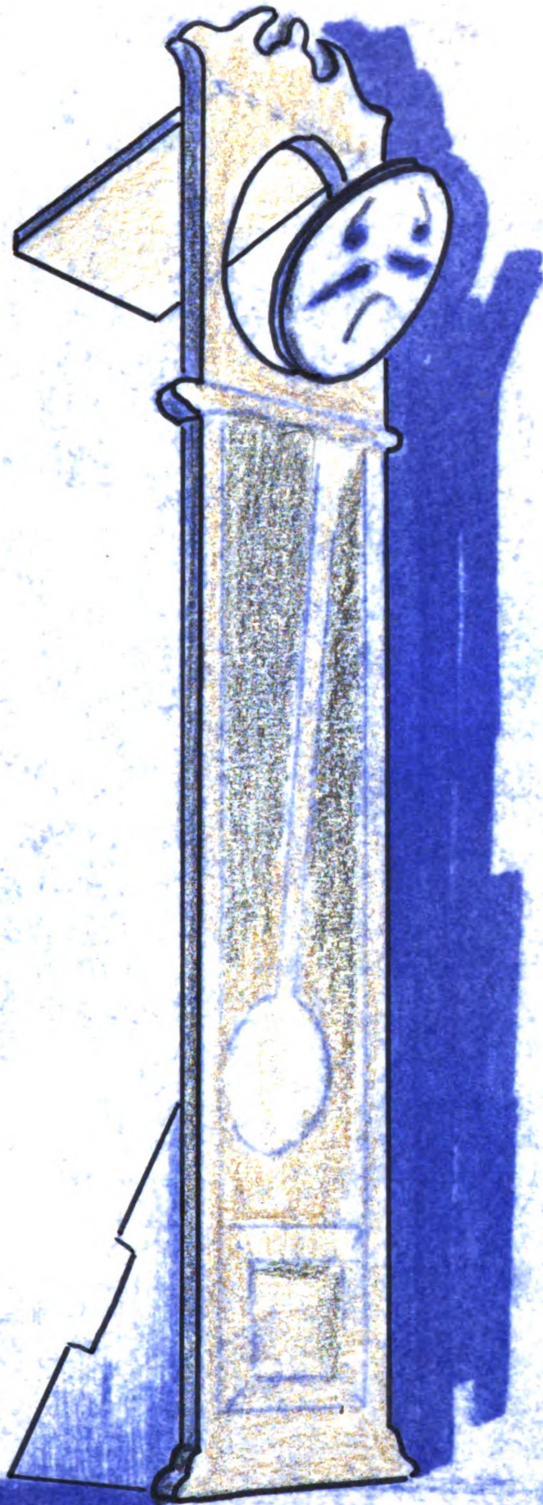
would fall forward and be replaced by a board with junk attached to it. The junk turned out to be a scrub brush, a tin can, a chain and some bent nails. To make these three dimensional objects seem even more dramatic, I decided to make the clock an obvious two dimensional object with painted detail. The clock would have to be strong enough to stand the stress which would be put on the hinges. It would also have to be heavy enough to stand sturdily once it had been moved into place. When the face fell forward the noise had to be loud enough to be heard over the music. Thus, 3/4" plywood was used.

The design of the clock was fairly simple. First of all it must look like a grandfather clock. This meant it must have a face, a pendulum, and a wooden cabinet with decorations at the top. There was not time for careful research on the type of decor which was appropriate. I created a cartoon-like object with exaggerated characteristics. The face was placed at what I thought was a convenient camera level. (Plate XVI) I drew the outline on the plywood and while Weaver cut it out I began stringing the sash cord on the frames for the paint was now dry. The only thing worth knowing about the stringing process is that I tried to keep from cutting the cord unless absolutely necessary.



**PLATE XVI**

**Sketch of Clock**



This was done to preserve it for use in the future. (Plate XVII)

I was told that the map should be large, that Michigan was to be exaggerated, and that it would be in almost every shot. I checked again with the producer and found that a girl had to stick a pin into the state of Michigan and in that way the Polka Parade would salute the state. He suggested the map could be hung on the wall somewhere between the two bands. We then found a distorted map of the continent which was blown up and transferred to a piece of four by eight 1/2" plywood by the use of an opaque projector. I felt that the map would be a dominating object yet by itself it seemed bare and out of place. I then designed a frame which would unite the map with the rest of the setting. This frame would also make the map appear larger than it actually was.

(Plate XVIII)

Before the clock was completely cut out, I began to paint it. When I was finished, the face was bare. I then added hands. By chance they resembled a mustache; thus, instead of adding numbers, I painted a pair of eyes and a mouth.

Again I returned to stringing the rope.

### Friday

My assistant finished cutting out the clock on Friday. He then attached a weighted base, cut out the face, joined



PLATE XVII

Detail of Frame Construction

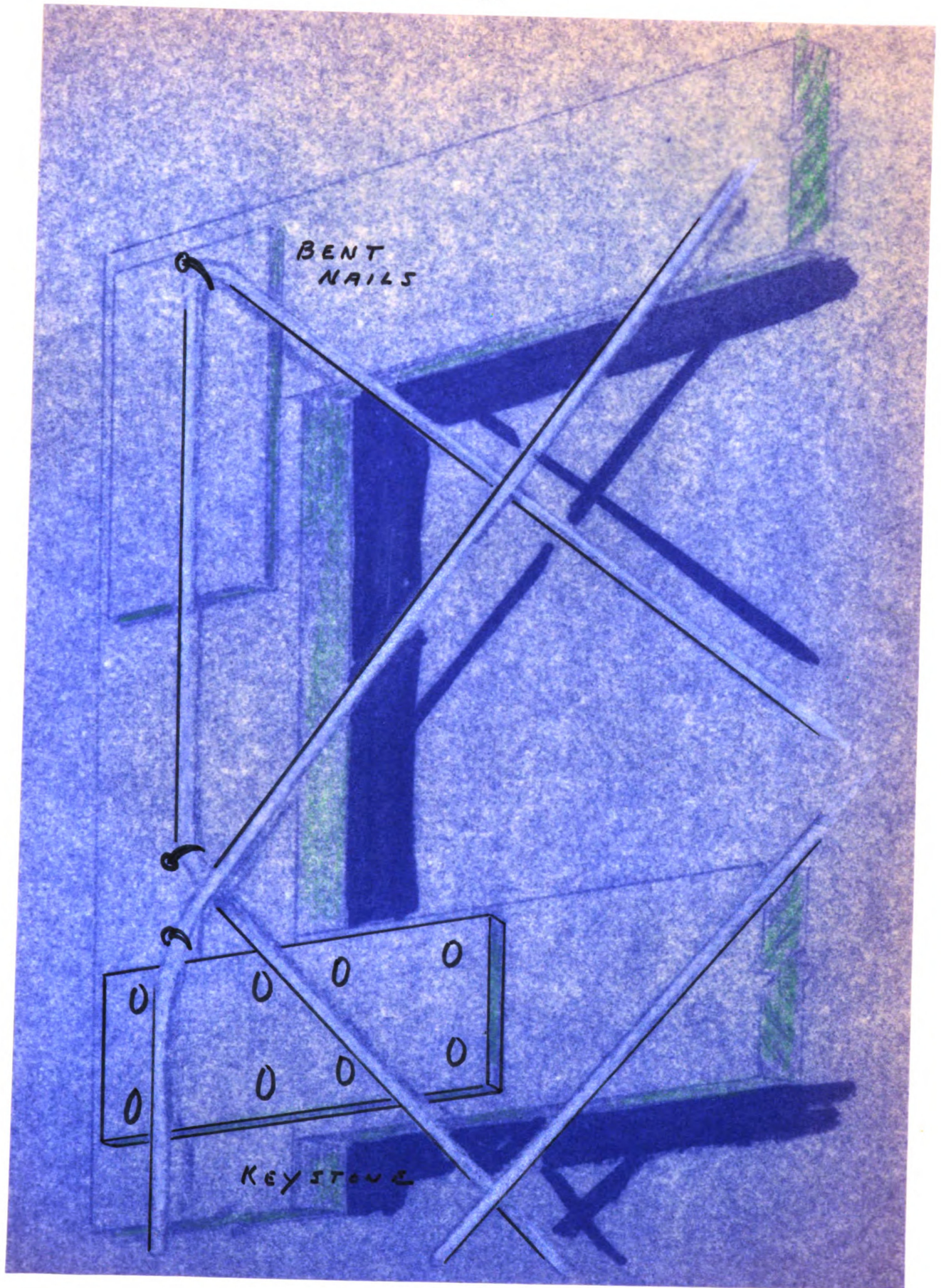


PLATE XVIII

Sketch of Map







face to the clock with a hinge, and attached the board which was to replace the face.

The chains, cans and other items were added to the board. When we found the clock achieved the desired effect, touch-up paint was added. The clock was finished.

The upson board used in the fishing skit was light in color; therefore, the areas in back of the rope were darkened so as to make the diamonds more obvious. (Plate XIX)

I then cut out the map, exaggerating the Great Lakes area and mounted it to the front of the frame. I painted the map making the edges lighter thus making its thickness more obvious.

The rest of the day was spent stringing the sash cord in the proper squares. By the time this chore was finished, our original 600 feet was almost doubled.<sup>12</sup>

### Saturday

When the frames were finally completed Saturday, they seemed too stiff and sterile. They lacked a certain amount of roughness. To correct this, I added a wood grain effect with a dry brush. Saturday evening the platforms were put

---

<sup>12</sup>An accurate estimate was impossible as effective spacing for the diagonals could not be planned until the frames were built.

PLATE XIX

Photograph of Fishing Skit Area





in place. The frames were attached and Weaver began to light the set.

While my original setting had required a rather intricate series of light changes, the final design did not. Babies (500 watt Fresnels) were used as back lights for the Michigan Dutchmen. This area was then cross keyed with juniors (1000 watt Fresnels) and a scoop was shot down the middle with care so as not to place more light than necessary on the cyc. The quartet's fishing set was handled in a similar manner.

Claire Witkowski's band was farther away from the cyc; therefore, juniors were used for back lights and were cross keyed.

The middle of the studio would be used by the dance group and the female soloist. Six juniors were placed in a circle and directed toward the middle of the floor. Scoops were then shot from directly overhead. The lighting had to be general, for the exact movements of the performers could not be plotted until the day of the production.

As my assistant was busy lighting the studio, I decided to soften the sharp angles of the setting and create a more appropriate atmosphere for a party. I was afraid that crepe paper would sag by morning. Therefore, balloons were chosen.

Their roundness would also relate to the polka dots on the costumes. Although the color would not be seen, the audience would recognize the shape and texture and the various intensities of the balloons would in effect "brighten" the setting. Great care was taken in placing the balloons so that they would not be confused with the performers' heads. Those which were left over were placed at random on the floor to give the setting a more casual atmosphere.

When finished the studio looked large enough; but with twenty performers, three cameras and one boom mic platform, I realized that wide angle shots would be difficult to get. I therefore tried to distort the perspective. I knew that since camera shots would come from three different directions, this would probably be impossible; yet I felt it was worth the effort.

To give the illusion of more space, I made lines on the floor radiate out from the map toward the north wall. I then crossed these lines with parallels which increased in distance proportionally as they neared the cameras. For the lines I used masking tape 1/2" wide. This was easier to put down and take up than paint. As the floor was black, the edges of the platforms were also painted black in an attempt to make them blend into the floor. The tops of the

platforms were then painted a light gray to further draw attention from the actual point where the platforms met the floor. At 5 a.m. Sunday the setting and lighting were complete. (Plate XX)



PLATE XX

Photograph of Completed Setting  
Illuminated by Backlighting



### CHAPTER III

#### THE PRODUCTION

I arrived at the station Sunday morning about 9 a.m. The producer was memorizing his lines, greeting the talent, putting on face powder and talking with the director. At the same time, the director was telling the cameramen what positions they would take, figuring shot angles on Claire Witkowski's band and talking with the music director. The music director was arranging the Michigan Dutchmen on the bandstand for the director to see; but before the director could get to that area, the studio director had moved the Dutchmen, the quartet and the dance group out into the middle of the studio to rehearse the opening. In the meantime, the costumer was trying to decide which dress the soloist would wear and getting the dancers to put on their costumes. (PLATE XXI)

I found that a few of the balloons had gone flat over night so I simply replaced them with the extras which had been lying on the floor.

The director felt he needed more backing for the fishing area. I had planned to pull the cyc around but he

PLATE XXI

Photograph of Studio Taken From  
Within the Control Booth





suggested that a threefold would be adequate. The producer wanted to accentuate Michigan even more, so my assistant hung an ellipsoidal spotlight so that an oval of light was placed on the Great Lakes area. I then marked a spot on the floor where the clock was to be placed. (Plate XXII) The crawl was then moved into a corner and illuminated. The taping began at 10 a.m. and finished at 4:30 p.m. The following is a script of the finished product.<sup>13</sup>

The script includes the audio and visual portions of the program. I have also added photographs and small diagrams of the studio so that the reader might better visualize the portion of the setting which was included in each shot.

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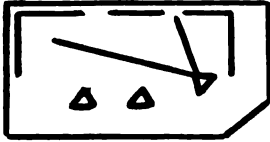
<sup>13</sup>Due to engineering difficulties, three segments had to be retaped one month later. The script was changed slightly but everything else remained the same. Luckily the settings were kept intact and no warping occurred. Only the balloons were replaced.

PLATE XXII

Photograph of Clock in Place





Script for the North American Polka ParadeVIDEO

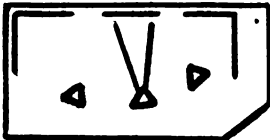
FADE UP ON A SHOT OF A  
CLARINET BARREL.

PAN DANCERS WITH GAME GOING  
ON IN THE BACKGROUND.

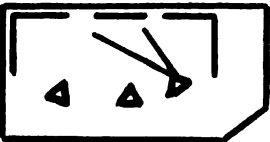
KEEP PANNING AND DOLLY IN ON  
THE HOST JUST FINISHING TIE-  
ING A BLINDFOLD ON A GIRL.

CUT TO A MS OF THE HOST  
SPINNING THE GIRL AROUND ONCE  
AND POINTING HER IN THE DIREC-  
TION OF A LARGE MAP OF NORTH  
AMERICA. SOME DOTS ALREADY  
THERE.

SUPER TITLE: THE NORTH  
AMERICAN POLKA CLUB POLKA  
PARADE PRESENTS



MS OF GIRL PINNING POLKA DOT  
TO MAP WITHIN OUTLINE OF  
MICHIGAN



HOST WALKS TO GIRL AND TAKE  
OFF HER BLINDFOLD

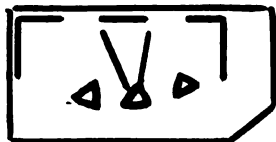
AUDIO

(FADE UP THEME MUSIC ALONG  
WITH VIDEO)

ANNCR: Once again it's a  
happy hello and hearty welcome  
from your friends at the North  
American Polka Club Polka  
Parade.

And tonight our salute is  
aimed at the great state of  
Michigan. (APPLAUSE & LAUGHTER)

SHARE SHOT WITH GIRL, HOST  
AND OUTLINE OF MICHIGAN IN  
BACKGROUND



HOST TURNS TO GIRL

And here's your host...

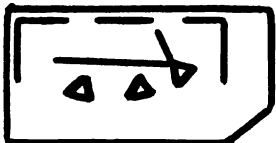
Ben McCrea.

HOST: Well, a good evening  
to you. You're just in time  
to congratulate our little  
polka dot lady for really  
spotting the grand old  
Michigan mitten. How's it  
feel to be a winner, Anita?

ANITA: Well, you know what  
they say, (with a sly smile).

HOST: What's that?

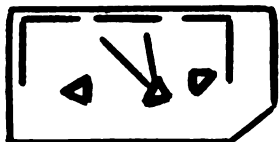
COVER SHOT OF EVERYONE OR  
SIDE SHOT INCLUDING  
EVERYONE



ANITA: It isn't whether you  
win or lose, it's...

EVERYONE: How you play the  
game.

TWO SHOT: MCU OF HOST  
AND ANITA



HOST: I guess I asked for that!  
and Anita, as winner of that  
game we are going to put you  
to work.

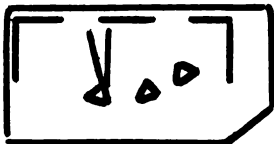
DOLLY BACK TO INCLUDE STAND  
AND CARDS

PAN TO FOLLOW MC AND ANITA  
TO DUTCHMEN

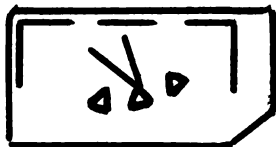
(PICKS UP CARDS AND HANDS THEM  
TO HER) Our next game on  
this evening's program will  
involve all the talent on the  
show (MOTIONS FOR THE CAMERA  
TO FOLLOW) So follow me and  
we'll meet this evening's  
performers.

...This is Johnny Check and  
the Michigan Dutchmen...the  
German style music on the  
program. John, your orchestra  
just released an album a  
short while ago?

CU OF JOHN



CUT TO TWO SHOT AND DOLLY  
BACK TO INCLUDE ALMA'S  
WALK ON



JOHN: Yes, last month...etc.

HOST: Johnny, you're one  
person short...how would you  
feel if our lovely solo  
accordionist Alma Santa were  
to help out? (BECKONS TO ALMA)

PLATE XXIII

"This is Johnny Check and  
the Michigan Dutchmen"





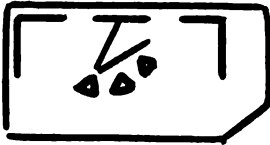
JOHN: I'd like that.

PAN FOR TWO SHOT

HOST: Alma, gee you look lovely tonight. I hear you'll be leaving shortly for Texas.

ALMA: Yes, I'll be at the Texas State Fair from the 10th thru the 19th.

CUT TO GROUP SHOT WITH  
HOST WALK ON



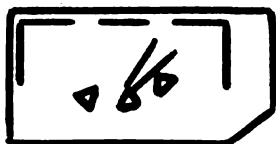
HOST: Now, from Michigan State University, our dancers for the evening...the Promenaders. Grace Woodman, we're glad to have your group on the program this evening.

GRACE: Thank you, etc.

PAN TO FOLLOW HOST TO  
GROUP SHOT OF THE BAND

HOST: And now our Polish style music...Claire Witkowski and his orchestra.

CUT TO TWO SHOT



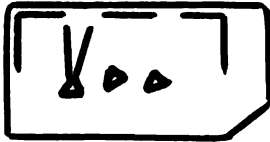
...Claire, when is your next album coming out?

CLAIRE: The first of next  
year...etc.

CAMERA PANS TO FOLLOW  
HOST

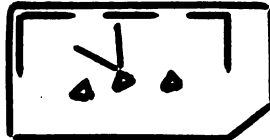
HOST: And now, but surely  
not the least, four great  
guys who'll always be guilty  
of livening up any party...  
The Merri-Men...

SIDE SHOT



I'm sure all of you will  
insist on being the spokesman  
for the group...but seriously,  
who shall I give these letters  
to?

FULL GROUP SHOT



MERRI-MEN: (ALL TOGETHER)

Me!!! (POINTING THEIR THUMBS  
TOWARD THEMSELVES)

DOLLY BACK

HOST: (LAUGHINGLY) Okay,  
but don't fight over 'em!  
(TURNING TO ANITA) And you've  
been such a lovely winner  
Anita, we thank you. HOST  
HOLDS HER HANDS

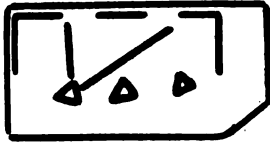
FAST DOLLY BACK

HOST: And now is everyone ready?

EVERYONE: Yes!

HOST: Now everyone will be working against the clock... John and Alma, your group is first. The words are THE NORTH...Ready...Go...

DISSOLVE TO STOP WATCH  
SECOND HAND AND BACK TO  
SIDE SHOT  
MUSIC UP WHILE LETTERS  
ARE BEING LAID  
MUSIC DOWN AS GROUP FINISHES



HOST: Okay, the Promenaders are next...their word is AMERICAN...Ready...Go...

HOST: Claire, your group is next, and your word is POLKA. Ready...Go

MUSIC UP  
AND DOWN

HOST: And now the Merri-Men are up...now remember you'll be working against the clock... (MERRI-MEN WHEN HEARING THEY ARE WORKING AGAINST THE CLOCK DASH OVER AND START...HOST REPRIMANDS THEM WITH A LAUGH...



MUSIC UP AND DOWN

(THEY START OVER)

Ready...Go...

MERRI-MEN...TWO OF THEM LAY

DOWN LETTERS "L" AND "U"

RIGHT... AND "B" AND "C"

LEFT (LUCB) TWO ARGUE AND

CHANGE LETTERS "C" AND "B".

THEN ONE GOES BACK TO THE

GROUP. REMAINING PERSON CHANGES

TO SPELL "BLUC...)

FOLLOW HOST TO WHERE  
LETTERS ARE ON FLOOR  
NEAR MERRI-MEN

HOST: Now come on fellows...

ha ha... (HOST TURNS TO CAMERA

AND SAYS) The winner is...

HOST: Not the Merrimen.

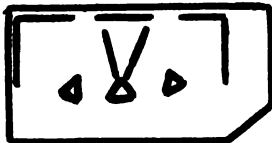
(HOST GOES BACK TO LETTERS AND

CHANGES TO SPELL "CLUB"...

GETS TWO MERRI-MEN BACK TO

SEE WORD SPELLED CORRECTLY...

ALL LAUGH)



CU OF HOST

FADE TO BLACK

We'll be right back with the

winner of this game in just a

moment but first this word.

PLATE XXIV

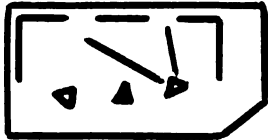
Correct Arrangement of Cards



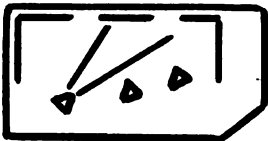
ALLOW AT LEAST FIVE SECONDS FOR INSERTION OF COMMERCIAL

FADE UP ON PROMENADERS  
ALMA, HOST AND MERRI-MEN

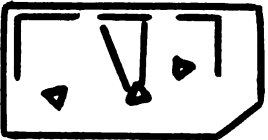
COVER SHOT OF GROUP  
DOLLY IN



CUT TO GROUP SHOT



MLS OF HOST AND ALMA



MUSIC UP

QUICK SHOTS OF DANCERS IN  
FOREGROUND

AS MUSIC ENDS DANCERS DIVE  
FOR CHAIRS  
ALMA AND HOST ARE LEFT  
STANDING

CUT TO TWO SHOT OF ALMA  
AND HOST

HOST: The winners of our  
last game were the Promenaders  
from Michigan State University.  
Okay gang...what's your choice  
for the next game?

PROMENADERS: (IN UNISON)  
Musical Chairs!!!

ALMA: (COMING IN FROM THE  
SIDE) Ben, the Dutchmen said  
they would play the "Let's  
Go and Play Polka" for us.

HOST: Fine...then what are  
we waiting for...John...  
Let's go and play in Michigan.

(MUSIC ENDS, DANCERS APPLAUD,  
LAUGH AND POINT)

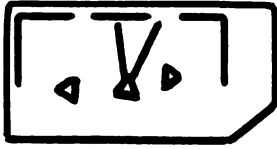
HOST: Looks like we lost the  
game.



PLATE XXV

"Let's Go and Play" Polka





SPLICE IN TAPE.  
 ACCORDION APPEARS "AS  
 IF BY MAGIC"

ALMA: I guess we did.

HOST: Looks like we're it.

ALMA: Looks like we are...

What'll we do?

HOST: Well as long as you  
 are standing you might as  
 well play.

ALMA: (DOES A TAKE) Might  
 as well. What'll I play?

HOST: (INNOCENTLY) The  
 accordion?

ALMA: Good idea. Any special  
 tune?

HOST: Ah, Ah, ahhy...  
 Medley'll do.

ALMA: A medley?

HOST: Sure, why not?

ALMA: What are you going to do?

PLATE XXVI

"A Medley '11 Do"





HOST: Find you a chair.

ALMA: (POSSIBLY LAUGHS HERE)

You've got yourself a deal.

DOLLY IN FOR A MS OF ALMA  
AS SHE STARTS TO PLAY

(MUSIC...MEDLEY)

KEY LIGHTS ON MICHIGAN  
DUTCHMEN ARE DIMMED  
BACKLIGHTS LEFT UP

START DOLLY BACK

(MUSIC ENDS WITH APPLAUSE)

CUT TO HOST ROLLING ONTO  
SET IN CHAIR. PAN WITH  
HOST AND CHAIR TO INCLUDE  
ALMA

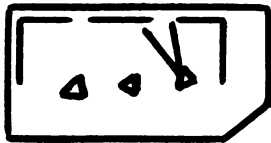
HOST: Love that accordion!

Well, I certainly think you  
deserve a chair.

ALMA: Did you find one?

HOST: (STILL SEATED) One  
what? Ohhh. You mean the  
chair. (GRACIOUSLY STANDS  
AND OFFERS HER THE CHAIR IN  
A CHIVALROUS MANNER) Here,  
my'lady.

ALMA: You mean I finally get  
to sit down? (LAUGHINGLY)



START TO DOLLY IN FOR  
TWO SHOT

HOST: (HELPING HER OFF WITH  
ACCORDION) Not only sit  
down but enjoy your polka  
parade prize.

ALMA: A prize? What is it?

HOST: (AS IF THE GREATEST  
THING IN THE WORLD) It's a  
polka dot lollipop! (HE  
EXTRACTS FROM COAT.

ALMA: What I always wanted!

START TO DOLLY IN FOR A  
CLOSE UP OF ALMA AS SHE  
LEANS BACK AND RELAXES

HOST: (AS HE HELPS HER BE  
SEATED) So now, just sit  
back and relax to the sweet  
and swinging music of our  
special guests, Claire  
Witkowski and his orchestra  
playing his Michigan Polka  
Parade version of "This Old  
Man".

(MUSIC STARTS)

DISSOLVE TO BAND

RAPID CUTS FROM ONE INSTRU-  
MENT TO ANOTHER

PLATE XXVII

"This Old Man" Polka





FA  
DU

F  
I  
O

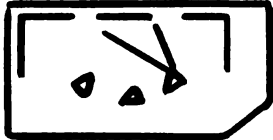
C  
A  
I  
M

FADE TO BLACK FOR COMMERCIAL  
DURING APPLAUSE

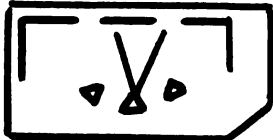
(MUSIC ENDS WITH APPLAUSE)

ALLOW AT LEAST FIVE SECONDS FOR THE PLACE WHERE  
COMMERCIAL WOULD BE

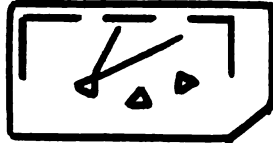
FADE UP ON MS OF HOST WHO IS  
IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANTOMIME  
OF A TROMBONE--SIMON SAYS GAME



CUT TO SHARED SHOT OF HOST  
AND SOME DANCERS AS  
DANCERS IMITATE THE HOST'S  
MOTION



REVERSE SHOT ON HOST AND  
DANCERS



PAN TO FEATURE DANCERS AS  
THEY IMITATE MOTION

TROMBONE PLAYER: (PLAY A  
SLIDE ON THE TROMBONE IN TIME  
WITH THE HOST)

TROMBONE PLAYER: (AGAIN  
PLAYS A SLIDE ON THE TROMBONE.)

HOST: Simon says, do this.  
HOST IMITATES MOTIONS OF  
DRUMMER DRUMMING AS SOUND OF  
INSTRUMENT BEING PLAYED OFF  
CAMERA IS HEARD.

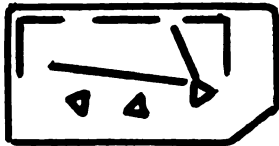
DRUMMER: (GIVE A FLARE ON  
THE DRUMS IN TIME WITH  
DANCER'S MOTION)

HOST: Simon says, do this.

PAN TO FEATURE HOST WITH  
DANCERS IN EDGE OF PICTURE.

(HOST MIMICS MOTIONS OF  
CLARINET PLAYER...AS  
CLARINET PLAYER GIVES  
APPROPRIATE SOLO IN CLARINET)

CUT TO SIDE ANGLE SHOT OF  
DANCERS WITHOUT HOST WHO  
IMITATE HOST'S MOTIONS.  
DANCERS SHOW RECOGNITION  
OF CLARINET THEME AND GET  
INTO FORMATION



CAMERA TRUCKS BEHIND  
SCREEN AND INTO A BALLOON

CLARINET PLAYER: (STRIKES  
MAJOR THEME OF CLARINET  
POLKA)

(MUSIC--CLARINET POLKA)

(MUSIC ENDS WITH APPLAUSE)

FADE TO BLACK FOR COMMERCIAL

ALLOW AT LEAST FIVE SECONDS WHERE COMMERCIAL  
WOULD BE

FADE UP ON GIRLS SEATED ON  
STOOLS, POLES IN HAND WITH  
LINE HUNG DOWN BEHIND  
SCREEN.

GIRLS LAUGHING

HOST WALKS INTO PICTURE



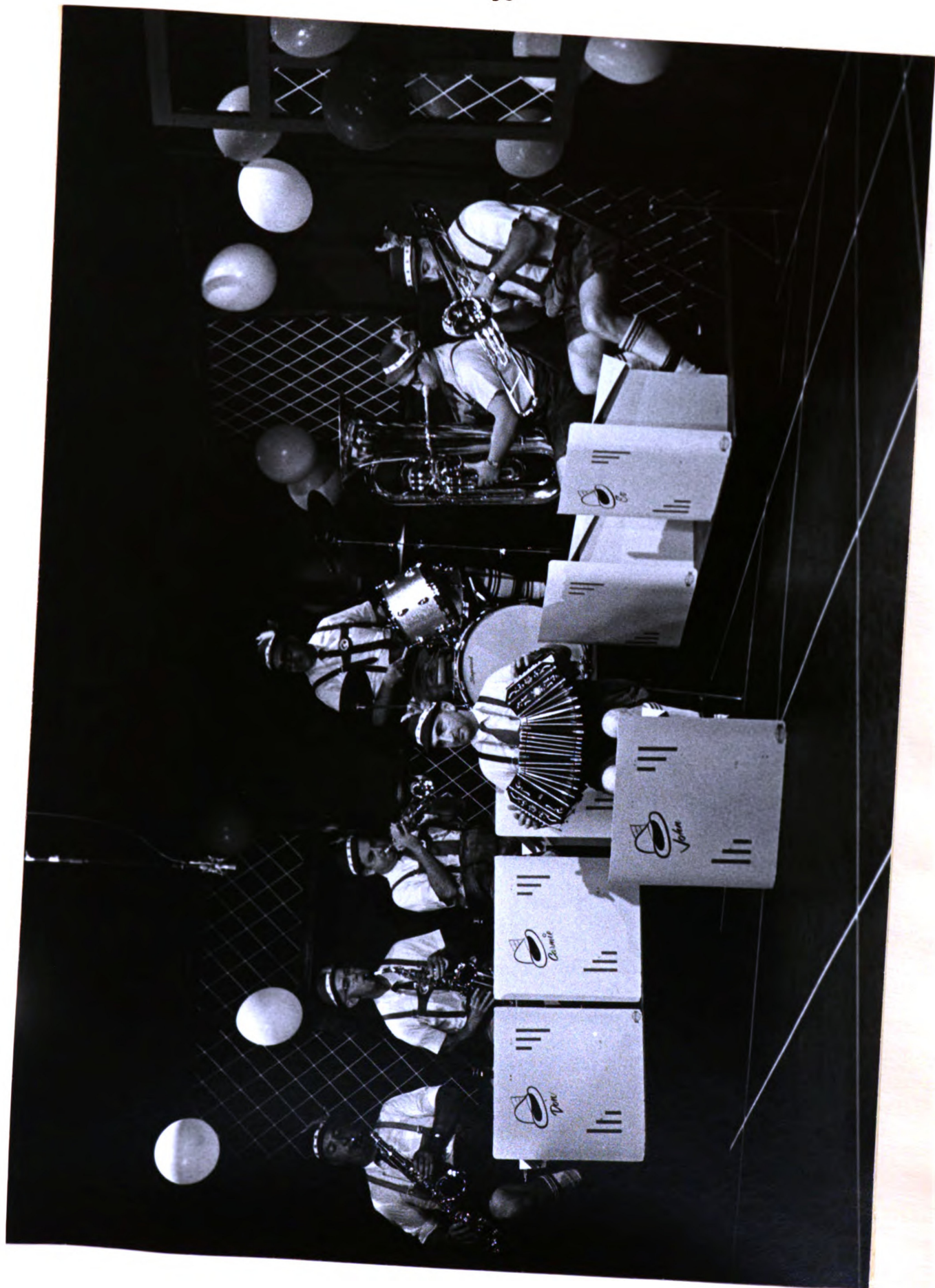
DOLLY IN AND PAN TO  
INCLUDE JUST GIRLS AND  
HOST

HOST: How's the game coming  
ladies? Any bites?

GIRL ONE: Just can't hook  
anything. Are there any  
fish there?

PLATE XXVIII

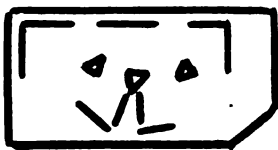
"Clarinet" Polka



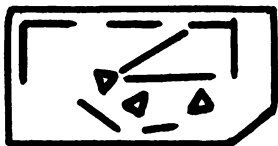


CAMERA FOLLOWS HOST TO  
SCREEN AND PEDESTALS UP  
TO INCLUDE TOP OF SCREEN  
JUST AS HANDS FROM BEHIND  
SCREEN POP OVER WITH FISH  
FLOPPING IN EACH HAND.

CUT BACK TO MEDIUM SHOT  
OF GIRLS FISHING.  
DOLLY BACK IMMEDIATELY TO  
INCLUDE FRONT OF SCREEN



DOLLY IN AND PAN WITH  
HOST AND MAN AS THEY GO  
TO ANITA



CUT TO A TWO SHOT OF ANITA  
AND DANCE PARTNER AS THEY  
START TO DANCE.  
CUT TO ORCHESTRA AS DANCERS  
DANCE IN FRONT WITH BAND IN  
BACKGROUND

HOST: (GOING TO SCREEN)

We'll see. Heh, any fish  
in there?

ANITA: Wait! I've got a  
nibble!

GIRL ONE: Easy now!

GIRL TWO: Pull 'em in!

GIRL THREE: Steady girl!

GIRL ONE: Easy now!

ANITA: Don't worry. (SHE  
PULLS MAN OUT FROM BACK OF  
SCREEN)

HOST: You were caught just  
in time to join our little  
polka dot lady in a dance.

(HE ESCORTS MAN TO ANITA) Are  
you ready Claire? (MUSIC  
STARTS)

PLATE XXIX

Anita and Partner



AS MUSIC AND APPLAUSE END  
CUT TO MS OF ALMA



DOLLY BACK TO INCLUDE STOOLS  
AND SCREEN AS MERRI-MEN WALK  
ON WITH FISH POLES. PAN  
WITH THEM AS THEY TAKE STOOLS  
AND DROP LINES OVER SCREEN.  
START DOLLY OR TRUCK  
IMMEDIATELY TO INCLUDE JUST  
1st and 2nd MERRI-MEN LOOSELY  
FRAMED SCREEN IS IN BACK-  
GROUND

(MUSIC ENDS WITH APPLAUSE)

ALMA: Gather 'round boys.

It's your turn.

1st MERRI-MEN: What-do-ya  
think I'll catch?

2nd MERRI-MEN: Help me, I've  
hooked something! (1st  
MERRI MEN DROPS LINE TO HELP  
2nd)

3rd MERRI-MEN: What-have-you  
got...a whale? (FIRST TWO  
MEN ARE BEING PULLED TOWARD  
SCREEN)

1st-MERRI-MEN: Don't know,  
but grab-a-hold. (1st MAN  
GRABS ONTO POLE TOO. THEY  
STILL STRUGGLE)

DOLLY WITH THEM AS THEY  
PULL HOST DRESSED AS FAT  
WOMAN FROM BEHIND  
SCREEN OR, SCREEN FALLS  
TO DISCLOSE HOST BEHIND

4th MERRI-MEN: (JOINING OTHER  
THREE) Here let me help.

ALL FOUR: (AD-LIB EASY,  
STEADY, ETC.

HOST: (FLIRTS)

MERRI-MEN: (PASSING THE POLE..  
SHOVING IT TO THE NEXT MAN  
AS A HOT POTATO) She's yours,  
she's yours, etc.

ALMA: (WALKING ON CAMERA)  
Well who's the lucky winner.

MERRI-MEN: (POINTING TO EACH  
OTHER) He is!

ALMA: (HELPING FAT HOST ON  
STOOL) Gentlemen, where are  
your manners. This lovely  
lady loves to polka. Come  
on now, who's the winner?

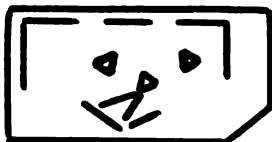
PAN OVER TO INCLUDE JUST  
MERRI-MEN

MERRI-MEN: Well...(START SONG)



PAN WITH MERRI-MEN AT END  
OF SONG AS THEY FLEE BEHIND  
SCREEN

CUT TO TWO SHOT OF ALMA  
AND HOST



CUT TO CU OF CLOCK FACE

(SONG ENDS WITH APPLAUSE)

ALMA: Guess you just don't  
have what it takes. Better  
go back to being yourself.

HOST: Guess you're right.  
(SHEDS BARB) How do you  
like my wig?

ALMA: I think it needs  
styling. Maybe it would be  
better as a beard. (PULLS  
HOST'S BEARD AROUND TO BOTTOM  
OF HIS CHIN) How about that  
Grandpa?

HOST: (STROKING BEARD, FEIGNS  
BEING OLD) Guess it's later  
than I think. Why, when I  
was a lad...

ALMA: (INTERRUPTING HIM)...  
Come on Grandpa, time's  
running out, let's dance.  
(THEY WALK PAST CLOCK)

PLATE XXX

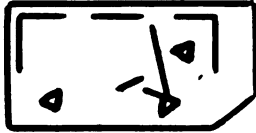
"She's Too Fat For Me"



(MUSIC STARTS)

(CLOCK IS MOVED INTO PLACE

CAMERA DOLLIES TOWARD  
CLOCK AS NUMBER ENDS  
CLOCK EXPLODES



NEAR END OF SONG)

SOUND EFFECTS OF SPRINGS,

CHAINS, ETC., SHOWING CLOCK

WITH SPRINGS.

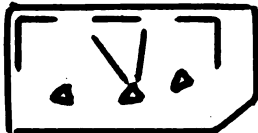
FADE TO BLACK FOR COMMERCIAL

ALLOW AT LEAST FIVE SECONDS WHERE COMMERCIAL  
WOULD BE

OPEN ON COVER SHOT OF  
DANCERS, BANDS, ETC.

MUSIC HOT

HOST DANCES TOWARD COVER  
CAMERA AS HE EXTENDS  
INVITATION FOR NEXT WEEK  
OVER MUSIC POTTED DOWN



HOST: (OVER MUSIC) Well,  
that just about winds up our  
party for tonight. Thank  
you for being with us and be  
sure to join us next week  
when the North American Polka  
Club salutes another great  
state or providence. 'Until  
then, so long from all your  
friends in the Polka Parade.

DOLLY BACK, PAN PEOPLE AND  
BANDS AS CREDITS ARE  
SUPERED

(MUSIC UP FULL)

FADE TO BLACK



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSIONS

#### An Evaluation of the Role of this Designer

"A setting is the organic outgrowth of the action of the play."<sup>14</sup>

Immediately after I told the producer I was interested in designing his scenery, I asked him for a script. But this had not yet been written. I then asked for the elements within the program. I was told that there would probably be two polka bands, some singers, a soloist and a dance group. The producer was not sure how many singers, dancers or band members would be included. I was forced to work without a script or the other important information until a week before the program was to be video taped.

Since a script was not available, I felt that I should at least know what the writer was going to say. The producer was just as indefinite on this matter. He only knew that polka music was going to be presented to a television audience in a variety of ways and that he would be the host.

I learned later that the program would be built around a series of games commonly played at parties. More

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<sup>14</sup> Houghton, op. cit., p. 781.

important it was decided that the program would be presentational in style. That is, performers would acknowledge the existence of the television cameras and there would be no attempt to hide the fact that the program was being acted out in a television studio. Again, one week before the scheduled taping I learned exactly which songs and games would be presented.

"A designer is a spoke in the wheel of which the director is the hub."<sup>15</sup>

If the director is important in the theater, he is even more so in television simply because he has complete control over the eyes of the audience. I therefore felt that it was necessary to learn all I could about this person's approach to directing and in particular his ideas on the presentation of this program.

I met the director one week before the program was to be taped. He wanted to wait until he saw the facilities, the talent, and the setting. When I did submit a set design, the director rejected it. There was no conference, no discussion, no compromise.

"If his visual sense and yours don't agree, your job is still to give him all you can."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Louchheim, Aline, "Script to Stage: Case History of a Set," New York Times Magazine, Dec. 9, 1951, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

I decided to put the pressure on the producer and director by giving them a complete three dimensional scale model of the studio and all available platforms. I told them that once a floor arrangement had been decided upon, I would fill in the background.

"Even costumes should be the handiwork of the scenic artist. Yes, and if possible, he should build the very furniture."<sup>17</sup>

I attempted to discuss the design of the costumes and properties; but since I was not considered an authority in these fields, my suggestions were not accepted by the producer.

Norman Bel Geddes and Robert Edmond Jones have been praised for their dramatic use of color and light. But how can color be dramatic when it is transmitted in shades of gray? I find that lighting is most dramatic when it can change before the eyes of the audience; and this rarely occurs on local programs.

Robert Edmond Jones suggested that a designer should know many things. I suggest that the designer should of necessity be able to "do" many things. Unlike the designer in a large theater or at a major network station, I not

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Edmond Jones, "The Future Decorative Art of the Theater," Theater Magazine, Vol. 22, May 1917, p. 266.

only designed the setting, I built it. I painted it. I lighted it. When I finished, I applied powder to the actors' faces and zipped up dresses. I even floor directed part of the program.

Ideally the script and a director's interpretation should be the major influences upon a designer's setting. I found that my design was influenced by time, space, technical facilities and most of all, money. The design demanded by the script and the director would take time to build. I was allowed one week. The design would have to fit in the studio we had selected. The design could not call for the use of fancy technical facilities for none were available. Unlike the Broadway designers Eugene Bergman and Howard Bay who complain when they are asked to work with- in a \$50,000 budget, I simply had to fill space as cheaply as possible.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Following are expenses incurred in set construction for the North American Polka Party:

64 sq.ft. Upson board	@.09 sq.ft.	\$5.76
1100 ft. #5 sash cord	@.40 per hund	4.40
2 lbs. roofing nails	@.18 lb.	.38
92 bd.ft.white pine	@.42 bd.ft.	38.64
32 sq.ft. 1/2" plywood	@.17 sq.ft.	5.44
32 sq.ft. 3/4" plywood	@.22 sq.ft.	7.04
1 gal black water base paint		5.75
4 saber saw blades	@.30 ea.	<u>1.20</u>
TOTAL.....		\$68.61

Ideally the designer should control all visual elements in a program. If my experience was more the rule than the exception, a designer does not even have complete control over his setting. If a designer is an "aider and abettor" to the director as much as I was, he in fact is no designer. He is just a decorator, a filler of space. The music director chose the size of the platforms and the director placed them. The producer made the major decisions concerning the appearance of the props, the design of the costumes, the placement of the map, the method of constructing the opaque screens used in the fishing skit.

#### Analysis of the Setting

Both the producer and director found the scenery attractive, but I feel they would have been happy with anything completed in four days.<sup>19</sup>

The secret to rapid construction lies not only in the selection of materials and their availability but also in their workability. Thus the white pine, rope, and latex paint could not be matched.

The producer was naturally delighted with the total cost of the setting, but this could have been reduced even

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<sup>19</sup>Immediately following the production, McCrea told me he did not think I could design and build a set in one week.



further had I ignored durability completely. Masking tape could have been used in place of the rope, and the map and clock could have been built of upson board rather than plywood.

The actual design of the set pieces was developed with as much care as the method of construction. The producer specifically requested a setting which could not be related directly to a particular country in western Europe. Thus the design was based on my general knowledge of western European architecture rather than careful research.

I sought to suggest half-timbered buildings and leaded windows. The rectangular frames were based on the angular forms found in this area.

I hoped that the diamond pattern formed by the rope would suggest leaded windows. I also felt that diagonal lines would give life to the rather static arrangement of horizontal and vertical strips of wood.

I did not want to build a cluttered structure that would dominate the performers. Still the set seemed sterile and "modern". The straight lines were too serious. I therefore added a rough wood grain effect to the frames and attached balloons so that the straight lines would be broken. The design was a complete success if one stood

in the studio and just looked. It reeked of a high degree of calculation. It was a complete failure.

The flood of lights requested by the director before the taping accentuated the frames and rope, and virtually eliminated the effect of the balloons and wood grain. The cyclorama became all too obvious. The platforms became sharply defined and the tape on the floor had a dizzying effect when viewed from the side.

The Michigan Dutchmen arrived with white music stands which did not fit the over-all design.

The flats in back of the quartet looked like flats from another program which were thrown in at the last minute.

The frames for the fishing skit were built so that they could be moved. I felt that cameras could truck around and shoot through these frames; thus the set would be more than just a background. This happened only once.

The set did form a background which tied the various costumes together; but the design almost completely ignored the style of the script. With the exception of the clock, the design was subtle...sophisticated. The delivery of the script was raucous.

The performers were uncomfortable yet pretended to be

having fun at a party. They were unreal. They lacked depth. The clock lacked depth.

The clock was an obviously painted flat piece of wood. The set should have been done in the same "Walt Disney Gothic" style.

If this pilot film had been sold...If I could design the setting again, I would replace the three dimensional frames with two dimensional painted beams. I would replace the tape on the floor with painted boards. I would replace the delicate rope diagonals with huge painted windows. I would seat the bands on wooden beer kegs and rustic stools. I would replace the screens used in the fishing skit with a huge obviously painted wooden wash tub which would fall forward when the fat lady was hooked. I would draw an outline of the North American continent on a piece of paper and pin it so that it would obviously be a piece of paper. I would place the balloons in huge clusters and hang crepe paper ribbons with reckless abandon.

Another solution would be to return to the producer's original idea of shooting the program on location. Rather than staging a party in a hotel ballroom, I would record a real polka party which is held each June in Frankenmuth, Michigan. Specifically, I would make arrangements to record

the hundreds of people who flock to a huge parking lot to drink German beer, eat Bratwurst and dance. These people are not acting. They really are having fun.

### Considerations for the Potential Designer

Scene design is presently recognized by Broadway and network television as a legitimate profession. My experiences indicate that television scene design on the local level is merely a sideline or extra job for the station graphic artist. Those people who are responsible for the visual element of local television probably have never heard of the organic theory nor do they care about the symbolic metaphor. Still television on every level should be dependent upon proper visual presentation of the subject.

Rather than proposing an earth shaking theory on aesthetics, I suggest that an appropriate setting can be created by anyone with talent enough to direct.

First of all, the person who is to design the setting for a local television program must realize that his budget will be approximately 1/1000 that of a network designer. In fact he should consider himself lucky if he is allowed \$50. In most cases he will have to make a new arrangement of flats and properties which are already on hand. It is therefore necessary to make all permanent set pieces as

flexible as possible in design.

Should he be allowed to build a new setting, the designer must know how often the program is to be presented. If it is to be seen only once, a temporary arrangement could be made with fragile materials such as bulk tone, masking tape, wrapping paper and chalk. Construction could also be of a temporary nature. Staples and nails could replace glue and screws. Furniture and other properties could be borrowed rather than built or purchased. If the program is to run on a regular basis, standard methods of scenery construction should be used.

The designer must also estimate the time needed for building the setting. Unlike the network designer who has weeks or months to prepare, the local designer has days or hours. He must therefore know exactly what materials are easily obtainable and in fact the drying time of paint.

The designer must know where the program is to be placed in the broadcast schedule so as to permit enough time for the staging crew to set it up, to light it, and for the director to go through necessary rehearsals.

A local station does not have a number of large studios. A designer is fortunate to have two studios of any size; thus the setting must be designed and built so that



it can be stored conveniently.

A set design is affected by the quality of the performers. Richard Burton or Agnes Moorehead can seek out a lighted area as if by instinct; but talent found on the local level may fall off risers, trip over mic cables, or wander into "silhouette country" while proclaiming the value of seat belts. For this reason a setting should be "over lighted" and the background should extend farther than otherwise would be necessary. Altering the level of the studio floor should be avoided unless the talent is seated--and even then many a director has wished these chairs had been equipped by the National Safety Council. In essence, the inexperienced talent should not be treated to a completely unfamiliar experience.

With the above in mind, the designer must usually forget about analyzing the script. The director and producer have already decided the location of the show, and the time of day the lighting will indicate. They know the number of performers required by the script and how the performers will move. The producer and director have decided that the background should be a weather map, a textured flat, a light slash across a taut cyclorama, or a black void.

Scholarly designers and technicians never mention the problems created by a small studio, a low rigid light grid, or the lack of a Fearless Dolly. They suggest the use of a Zoomar lens, a rear projector, a prism, yet never consider the many stations that cannot afford this equipment. Scholars list the characteristics a designer must possess. I suggest that above all he must be a "scrounge". He must be friendly with the local florist, the furniture and hardware store managers, the photographer, the undertaker, the wrecking company. The designer for a local station cannot afford to buy. He must borrow.

Since the work of Appia, Craig and Robert Edmond Jones, designers have expounded on the mystical qualities a designer must possess. They state that a designer should learn how to direct like Norman Bel Geddes. But local television stations cannot afford to hire a person who does nothing but design settings, let alone a person as talented as Bel Geddes. Local stations can afford to hire directors. Therefore, I suggest that these people be taught how to design. Directors are the people who must artistically present the chair, the desk, the flat. Directors are the people who move the audience as well as the talent. Directors, not designers, determine how a scene is to be placed within a 21 inch proscenium.

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