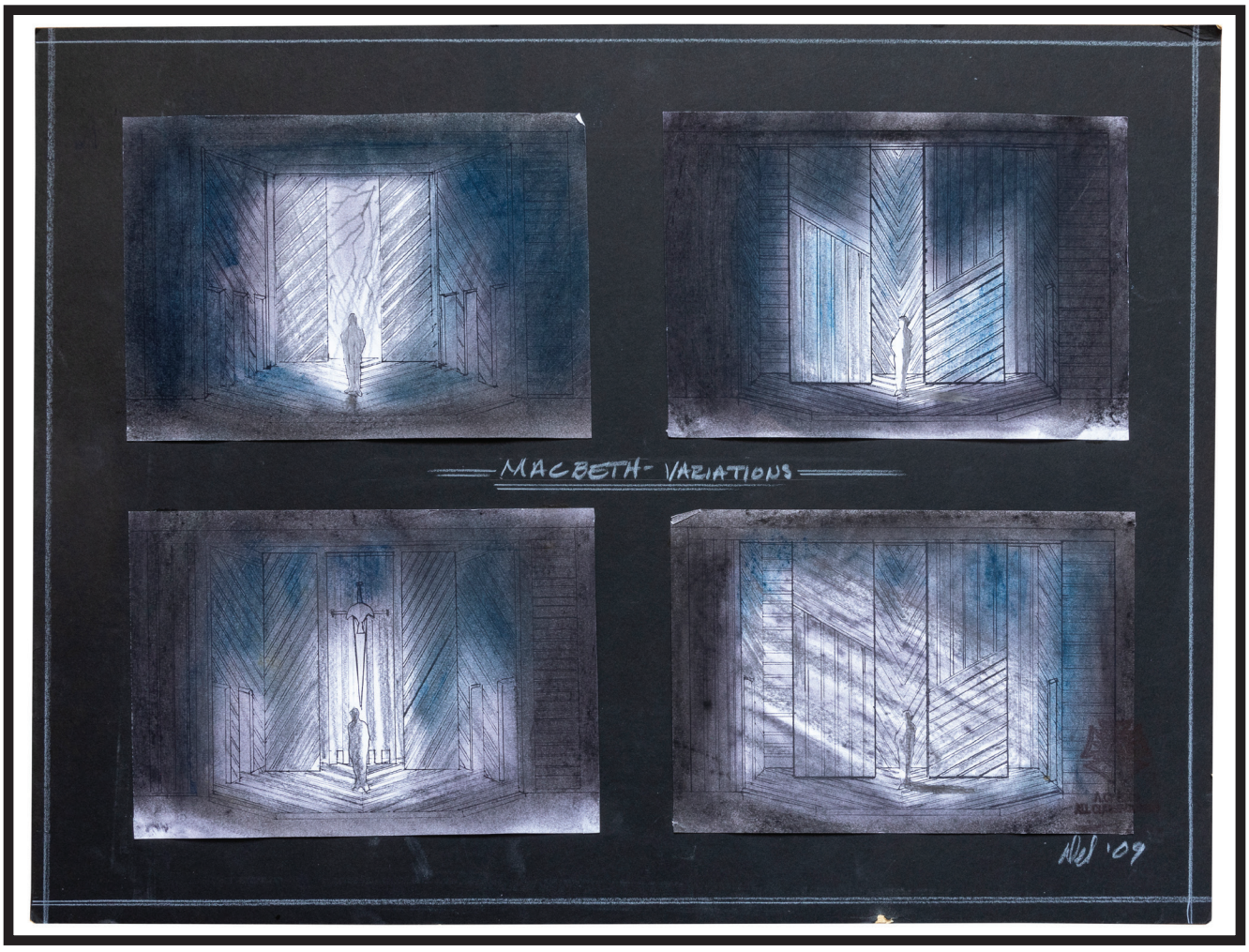
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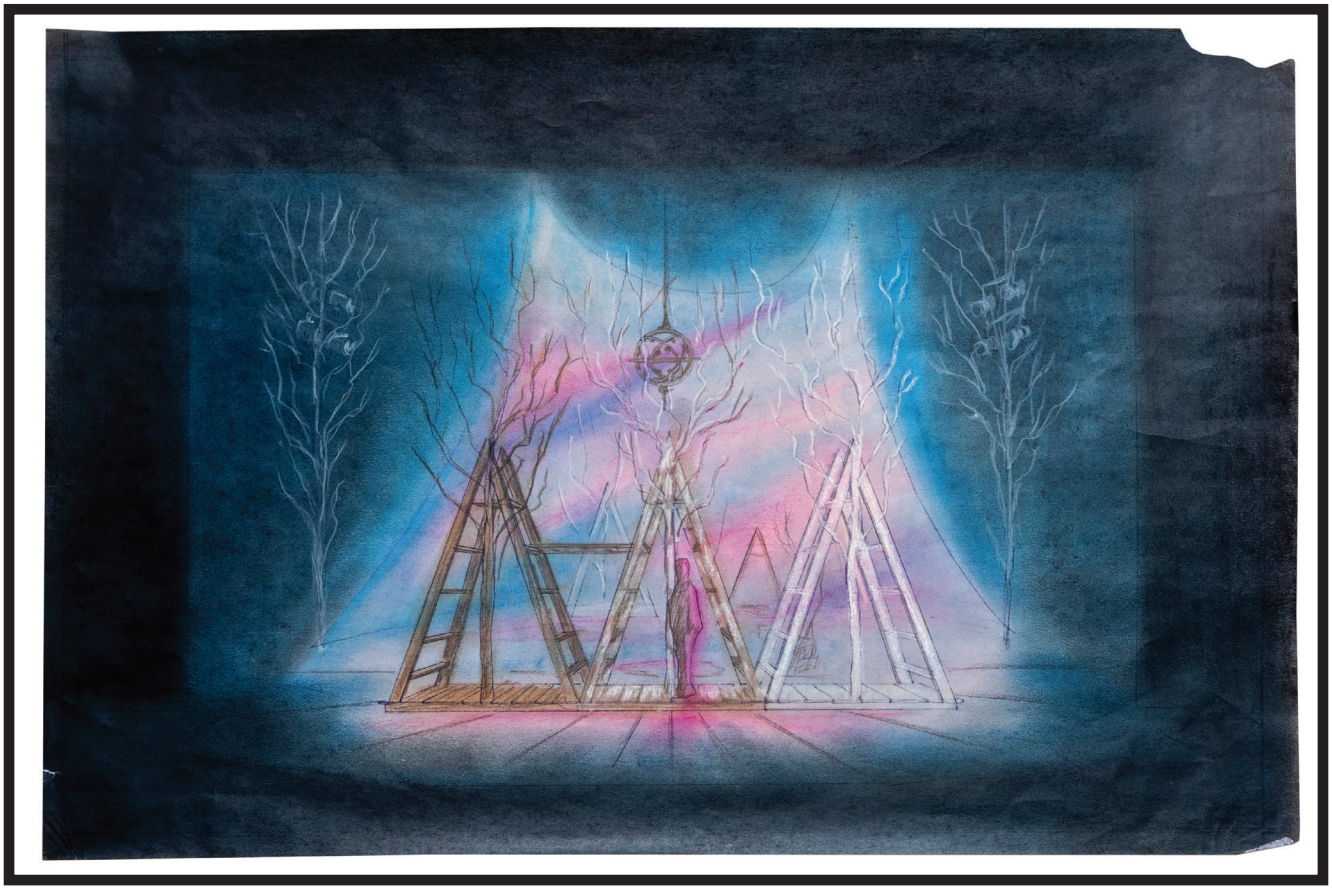


A Legacy of Theatrical Knowledge Advancement

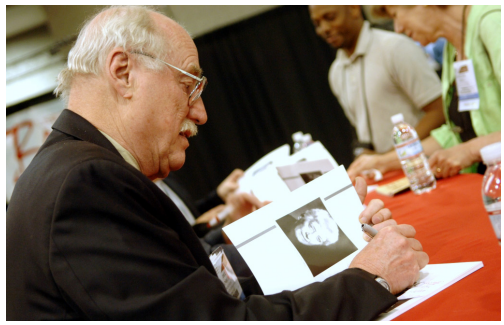
Remembering Delbert Unruh

USITT is saddened to mark the passing of a USITT Member who was instrumental in the ongoing content development of *TD&T*. Delbert Unruh was a prolific contributor to *TD&T*, to the USITT *Designs of* series, and to the dissemination of theatrical knowledge to the theatre profession. He served a long stint as contributing editor to *TD&T*, and he was working on longer pieces for the journal when he passed in May 2024.

On the following pages, we include some final words of wisdom from Unruh, along with some observations from his decades of work in theatre via excerpts from the pieces he was working on at the time of his passing. Some of his design renderings are also included in this celebration of his work. These are accompanied by a brief memorial by his long-time colleague Mark Reaney.

A long-time Member of USITT, Unruh died on May 8. An exemplar of the artist/scholar, he was a prolific contributor to USITT publications. In addition to his landmark book *Towards a New Theatre: the Lectures of Robert Edmund Jones,* he authored *Forgotten Designers: Costume Designers of American Broadway Revues and Musicals From 1900-1930* with his wife, Ione. He contributed four volumes in the Institute's *Designs Of* series: Tharon Musser, Ming Cho Lee, Tony Walton, and Jules Fisher. For *TD&T*, he also wrote 23 articles on a variety of subjects, exploring the philosophies and ethics of American scenography, reporting on the design movement in the Czech theatre, and writing a five-part series on "Action Design."

The Institute awarded Unruh for his writings and granted him a fellowship to pursue his research. He served as a contributing editor of *TD&T* and as an overall jurist for the U.S.



Delbert Unruh signing his *Designs of Tharon Musser* in 2007. | USITT/ Richard Finkelstein.

Left top: *Macbeth* at University of Kansas; scenic design by Delbert Unruh and lighting design by Liz Banks. Banks received the Barbizon National Lighting Award in 2010 for this design.

Left bottom: Unruh's scenic and lighting design for *The Tempest*. Unruh described the desired effect: "When the audience enters the theatre, they see a bare stage with ropes hanging down to piles of muslin on the stage. The stage turntable, painted with a medieval map of the world, is rotating beneath a hanging astrolabe. A harpsichord with a glass of red wine, a sheet of Mozart's music, a Bust of Beethoven and paintings by Picasso are leaning against the harpsichord. It is a complete "art pile" if you wish. The show starts with the storm, lightning and thunder and the crew yelling as the orchestra pit elevates an A-Frame "ship" into position while the ropes raise and manipulate its "sail"above. The other "ships" move into positions upstage, and the backdrop raises into position. The show continues with the "ships", (only Prospero's cell is detailed,) being moved into various positions, and the lights changing, all on a bare—no masking—stage." | Courtesy of Delbert Unruh.

entry to the Prague Quadrennial. He was proud of USITT and its many, widely various contributions to the field. *–By Mark Reaney*

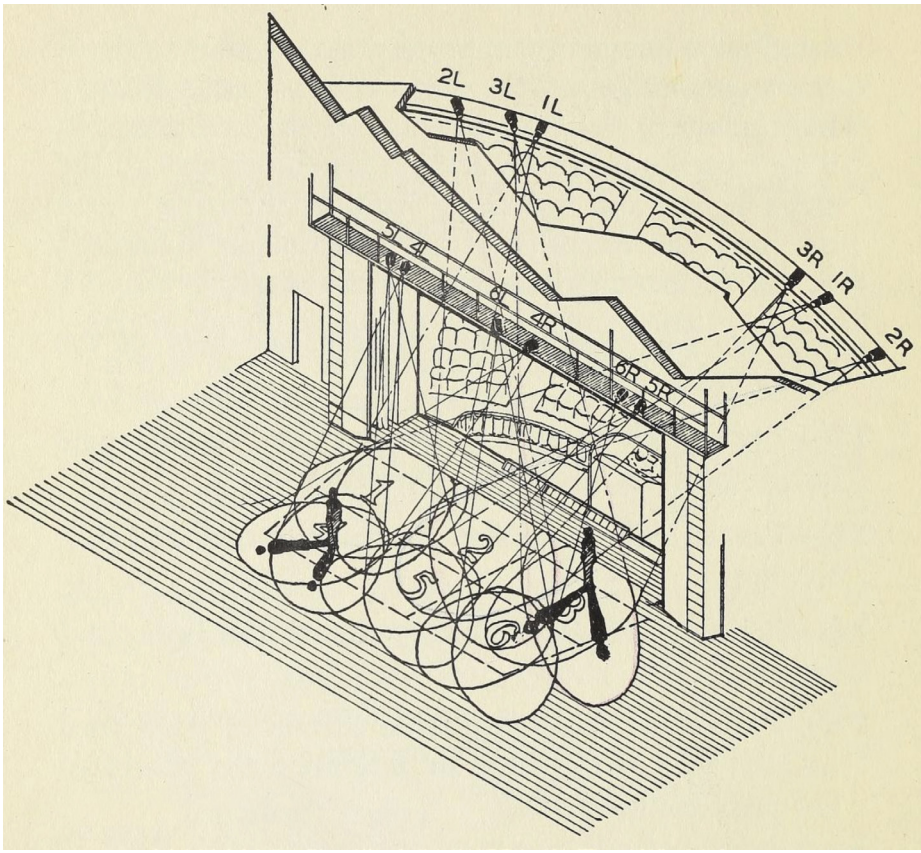
In Unruh's Own Words

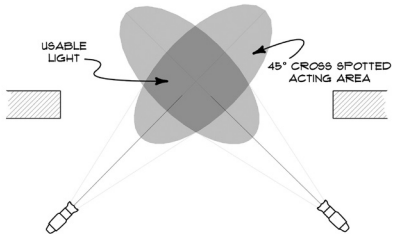
Among the goals of Unruh's writing was to remind us about the history of lighting, told with a touch point of McCandless's "Acting Area Method" of lighting. He urges us to recall that this approach was based in a time and place with equipment and needs from that era, and that it was always flawed. His text speaks of concern that this 45-degree mixed blue and amber approach is ubiquitous—certainly it can still be found in generalized introduction to theatre course textbooks and was often conveyed, historically, as a shorthand for non-specialists to briefly cover lighting for other non-specialists. And yet the McCandless approach makes little sense with contemporary lighting equipment, positions, and needs, all of which our lighting colleagues most certainly understand. His discussion of this approach and why it is no longer appropriate is peppered with his memories of how lighting was and has changed over the last 90 years, wonderful nuggets of wisdom and experience that ring out in his style, and he asks us to engage differently with lighting history.

We are grateful to Unruh's family and colleagues who assisted him with the drafts and enabled TD&T *to excerpt some of his wisdom here. While we cannot run a completed piece as we were still in the review and revision stages, we are honored to include a few excerpts, which touch on the broader story Unruh was working toward telling and to share his style and observations on the pages of* TD&T *one last time.* —TD&T

From Unruh: Stanley McCandless's "Acting Area Method" was invented as a way to get maximum results from minimum materials, and minimum materials were all that were available in 1932. Even so, while the arrangement of the instruments that light these six vital areas in the McCandless method did not provide the hoped-for smooth field of light, the idea was very new, became very popular, and everyone adopted it!

Let us try to remember what the lighting equipment for a typical stage, with no ceiling port, was in 1932. At least three or four full-stage lights, three-color border lights, one full stage three-color footlight unit, a balcony rail position with a limited number of circuits, and only plano-convex spotlights were available.





Top: McCandless's areas. Bottom: A top-view of the spotted front areas as rendered by Mark Reaney. | Images courtesy of Delbert Unruh and Mark Reaney.

Very few theatres anywhere had ceiling ports in 1932 and those that did were compromised contraptions. There were none on Broadway and there was a spatially challenged homemade version made by Ted Fuchs at Northwestern University, where I went for my graduate degree in theatre in 1964. There, the three down-stage and three mid-stage acting areas were painted with Roman numerals in reflective paint on the stage floor by Fuchs. He had adopted the acting area method; the numerals were "holy writ," and he was in his office downstairs if you had problems with the system. Yet, in the 1947 version of McCandless' book there is, strangely, no discussion of side-light, back-light, or top-light. He does discuss "blending lighting," which he defines as a combination of full-stage border lights and footlights. These were necessary to smooth out the pools of the acting area method, and every description of "the method" included "blending lighting." At Northwestern in 1964, the stage was equipped with a homemade full-stage border light with 60-watt, hand-dipped lamps that provided the "blending lighting." Footlights had been thrown away by that time.

Unruh notes throughout that the method has many flaws, and he expands on the focus challenges of the approach, in particular.

From Unruh: The original idea behind the acting area method specified that two colors should be used in the two spotlights that were focused in each area—one warm and one cool. Theoretically, this would allow you to create a daylight or an evening light effect by dimming one set against the other. But

that was only a crude approximation of natural light, and it didn't work. The spotlights in the auditorium beam position did not provide the smooth even wash of light across all six of the acting areas without any dark spots (see illustration on page 8).

This illustration of the beams that result from two cross-focused spotlights shows the resulting usable beam pattern that results from two cross-focused instruments. It is limited. We all know that this is true—especially if we have ever tried to focus McCandless' three downstage areas and the three mid-stage areas into a smooth, evenly lit stage with no dark spots and smooth color—say, for a comedy. It can't be done.

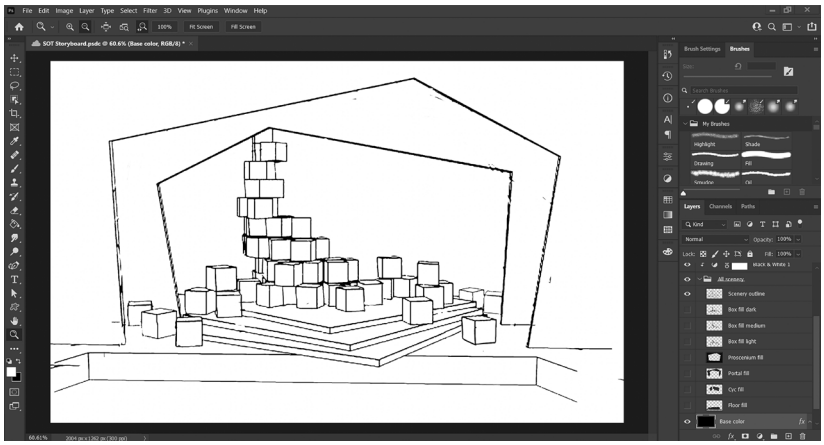
Some may say that this critique of the acting area method is too harsh, yet McCandless anticipated that just such would happen. On page 21 in the Procedure section of the 4th Edition of his 1932 book, when speaking about the future of lighting design, he says, "Probably by that time this whole method of lighting, conceived to give the best results with equipment and practice as they are today (1932), will be superseded by a simpler and better formula." So it is and has been.

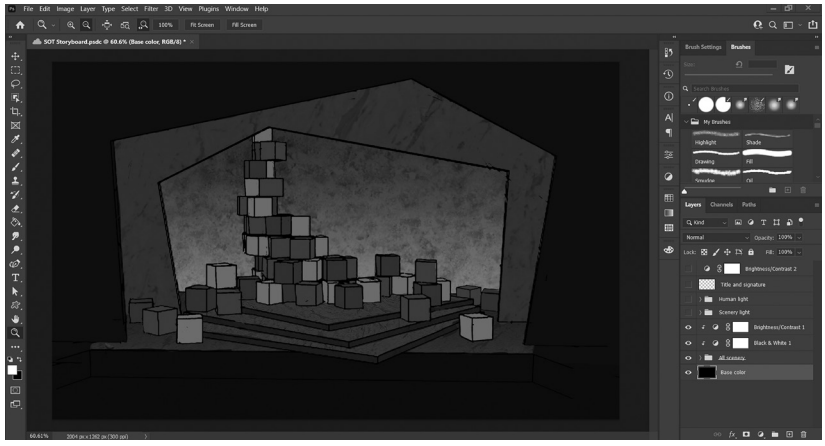
Next, Unruh moves on to discuss approaches to addressing the dark spaces in this approach:

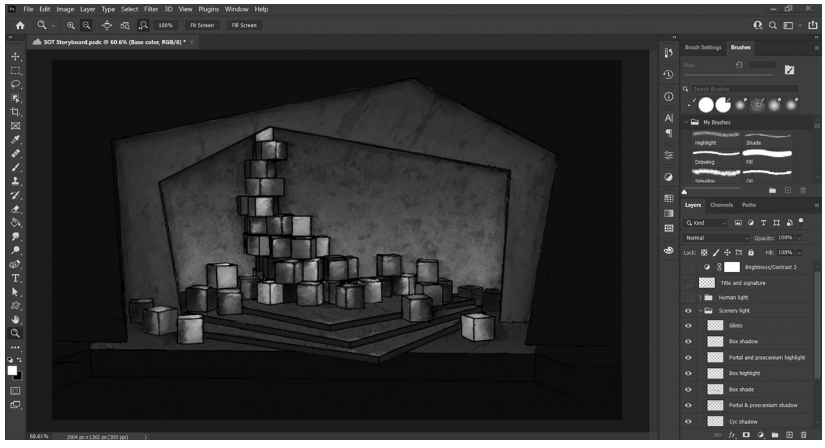
From Unruh: Fixing this flaw in the system was accomplished in the past in at least three ways: First, hanging a three- or four-color strip light over the acting areas and using its diffused light to blend the acting areas together. ("Blending lighting" is one of the kinds of lighting called for in all descriptions of the acting area method.)

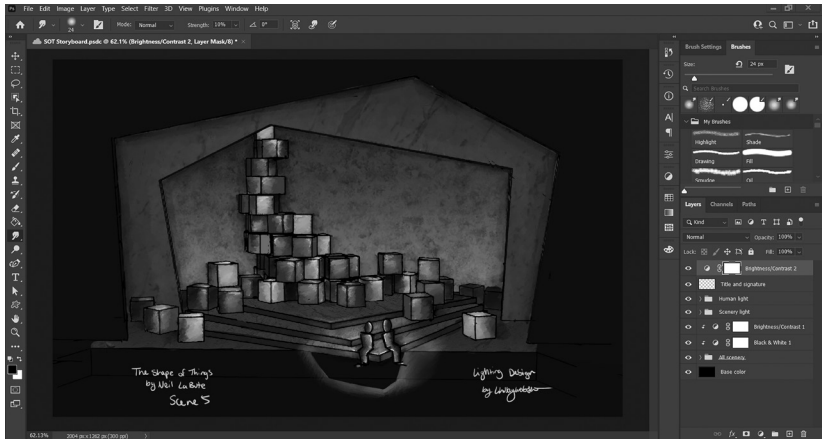
The stage in Annie May Swift Hall at Northwestern had a three-color strip light, designed and built by Ted Fuchs, hanging below the first electric with 60-watt general service lamps in it, colored with lamp dip. It served as "blending lighting."

The second way the acting area method solved this problem was by hanging an additional lighting unit between the two cross-spotted units to fill in the gap. This unit was usually designated as the "blending unit," and it was usually hung perpendicular to the curtain line.

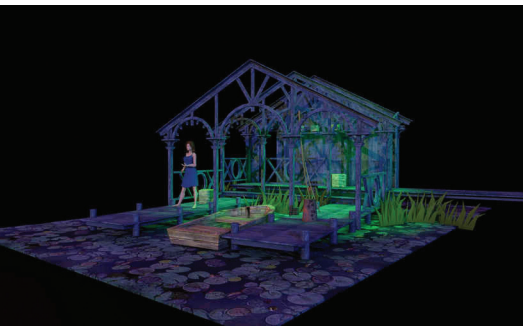








Unruh interviewed Lindsay Webster about her storyboarding process for this lighting design for *The Shape of Things*. | Images courtesy of Lindsay Webster.



Computer-aided design renderings by Mark Reaney for *Talley's Folley* offer a different approach to the storyboarding process | Courtesy of Mark Reaney.

Third, the method would widen the coverage of the two acting area lights. If Fresnel spots are used, running them at flood focus would widen the area lighted. This explains why the large theatre I worked in during the '60s and '70s had 8" Fresnel spots in the ceiling port position—a most unfortunate solution, because the whole proscenium arch was lit and its shadow was always visible on any background.

Unruh was working towards connecting the early solutions noted here—in particular, the use of instruments hung perpendicular to the curtain line—as a contemporary solution for the all-important visibility of actors' faces, a solution that did not use McCandless' method and which is notably more successful in achieving the same goal.

Continuing to trace the historical developments, Unruh also wrote about Jean Rosenthal and side-light as part of the shift away from McCandless' method.

From Unruh: After front light, side light, is the equally important light! Side lighting, in depth, was invented by Jean Rosenthal in the '40s when she was working with the Martha Graham Dance Company. In her book, *The Magic of Light,* she said that "Dancers move in light like fish move in water." Light on stage, for Rosenthal, filled a three-dimensional volume. It was a revolutionary idea—it had never been done before. When she transferred it to Broadway, she became the premier lighting designer for the shows in the '50s and '60s. It was adopted by everyone and is now, arguably, the most important light in any stage picture. It moved lighting design far, far away from the minimalism of the McCandless method.

We had been in discussions to possibly convert a portion of the original text that explored lighting storyboards as a useful tool into a second standalone piece. This section again connected back to McCandless and an observation made in his 1932 book outlining his method.

From Unruh: Today, lighting storyboards have finally made it into the teaching and practice of lighting design. Storyboards were originally developed as teaching and design explanation tools by Sam Ball and myself around 1966 at Northwestern University. They were usually small sketches, about 3"x 5", in black and white, usually at 1/8" scale showing the setting as lighted in a gray scale. The individual sketches showed important moments in the production with small scale figures of the actors in position. Later, scene designers and other lighting designers began to get involved in this process, and now you will find storyboards in color, at larger scales, or on a computer, photoshopped from a sketch, photographed from a lighted model, or done on film. You may even find storyboards for avant-garde theatre pieces that combine pictures and plots in the same drawing.

All of this can now be seen as partially fulfilling a wish articulated by McCandless in his 1932 book, when on page 20, he notes, "If it were possible, in advance of rehearsals to visualize the fitting together of all the elements of a production, no doubt a great deal of time and expense could be saved trying to make them coordinate." A lighting storyboard is one small step in that direction.

We could not conclude these excerpts without sharing some of Unruh's exhortations to readers (and his students)

From Unruh: To the lighting designers who say, "But I can't draw!" The answer is: RELAX! You have the scene designer's preliminary sketch! You can at least indicate the direction and the quality of the light and its shadows with a soft pencil and tracing paper! Or, use your computer programs! Or the templates! Find some photographic or a collage way to show your idea! A number 2 pencil, tracing paper, and a copy of the designer's sketch is the most familiar method, and easiest way. Similarly, the same Xerox copy of the set designer's sketch and pastel chalk will allow you to work in color.

Unruh also envisioned sharing multiple other approaches to storyboarding, offering ideas shared with him for the piece by colleagues and former students.

From Unruh: Contemporary technology has made it possible for newer techniques to be used to develop lighting storyboards. One such technique, involving Photoshop, has been developed by Lindsay Webster, an MFA graduate of the University of Kansas. She says: "I start with a simple outline of the set on a white background (see page 9). Next, I fill in the scenery with the appropriate tones. Once those are complete, the highlight layers are added. I use the same methodology as with my shade and shadow layers. For a finishing touch, I add a final 'glints' layer to hold special glimmers of light. To complete this whole process, I focus on some human figures. I start by drawing and filling them in. Then I add a shadow layer, a shade layer, a highlight layer, and a glints layer. The lighting layers should be sandwiched between the human fill and human outline layers to retain the lines of my figures. When all that is done, I add a layer for my title and signature, as well as any extra adjustment layers to make the storyboard pop. In this case, I used a brightness/contrast layer to increase both my brightness and my contrast. The added contrast brings out the nuances I've painted in my lower layers."

It is also possible to execute lighting storyboards by using a computer, of course. Mark Reaney, professor of design in the University of Kansas (KU) MFA in scenography program, is nationally recognized as an expert authority on computer-aided design techniques. His two computer renderings are from

Hand-drawn renderings of Unruh's set and lighting designs for *I'm Not Rappaport*. As Unruh wrote: "The play gave me a chance to deal with a semi-realistic exterior setting and lighting that suggested daylight, dusk, and evening. The technique employed is the simplest one—a xerox copy of the preliminary set sketch, and transparent watercolor." | Courtesy of Delbert Unruh.

the KU production of *Talley's Folly* produced at KU with sets and lights designed by Reaney (see page 10). Reaney writes, "3D lighting sims can be shared directly or online in a variety of ways. Renderings, animations, or interactive models can be sent as email attachments or viewed with a web browser. Collaborators can, when convenient and with their own devices, look at the proposed lighting solutions and view from the audience's perspective."

Also, we would like to share some of Unruh's design work, intended for inclusion in the storyboard piece and described by him below.

From Unruh: An example of a lighting storyboard is for the contemporary play *I'm Not Rappaport* by Herb Gardner with set and lights by myself. The play concerns two old codgers who meet daily in a secluded area of Central Park. Nat Moyer, a feisty Jew and Midge Carter, a cantankerous African American, spend their days sitting on a bench. They both mask the realities of aging by sharing tall tales that Nat spins, and kvetch about the world, the failure of Communism, the younger generation, and society's treatment of the aging, etc. The play gave me a chance to deal with a semi-realistic exterior setting and lighting that suggested daylight, dusk, and evening. The storyboard technique employed is the simplest one—a Xerox copy of the preliminary set sketch and transparent watercolor.

We invite readers who are interested in exploring more of Delbert Unruh's work to consider his contributions to the USITT *Designs of* series, with volumes on Ming Cho Lee, Tharon Musser, Jules Fisher, and Tony Walton or to visit the Willard F. Bellman archive of *TD&T* at www.usitt.org/tdt. Please be sure to log into your USITT membership account, and then you can search a variety of Unruh's award-winning work as well as reviews of his many monographs.

Many thanks to Ione Unruh, Julia Kracke, Mark Reaney, and Lindsay Webster for their assistance throughout the writing and editing processes.

Del's formal obituary can be found at https://warrenmcelwain.com/obituary/delbert-leroy-unruh/