

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: SCENIC DESIGN OF JAMES AND THE  
GIANT PEACH ADVENTURE THEATRE  
MTC  
7300 MACARTHUR BLVD, GLEN ECHO,  
MD 20812  
FEBRUARY 14<sup>TH</sup> - APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2016  
Katherine Rose Sullivan, Master of Fine Arts,  
2016

Thesis Directed By: Professor, Daniel Conway, School of Theatre,  
Dance, and Performance Studies

The purpose of this thesis is to provide research, supporting paperwork, production photographs, and other materials that document the scenic design process for *James and the Giant Peach* at Adventure Theatre MTC. This thesis contains the following: concept statement, scenic research images collected to express location, and the emotional/ intellectual/ psychological landscapes for the production, preliminary sketches, photographs of the 1/4" scale model, drafting plates and supporting paint elevations to communicate the design, prop list and accompanying research, archival production photographs to document the completed design, and finally periodical reviews of the show.

SCENIC DESIGN OF JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH

ADVENTURE THEATRE MTC

7300 MACARTHUR BLVD, GLEN ECHO, MD 20812  
FEBRUARY 14<sup>TH</sup> - APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2016

by

Katherine Rose Sullivan

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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2016

Advisory Committee:

Professor Daniel Conway, Chair

Professor Helen Q. Huang

Associate Professor and Head of MFA in Design Mikhail Kachman

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## Dedication

To my parents, who teach by example that dedication, enthusiasm, and kindness is key in a successful and fulfilled life.

To my siblings, you are my constant source of inspiration and strength, all my love.

To all my fellow MFA designers, it is an honor to create and discover with you now and in the future.

A special thanks to Theresa, you were always there and supported me in every way possible. Go Nats!

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the talented group of artists, craftsmen, and specialists whose collaboration and passion help make this production possible.

### Creative Team:

Michael Baron, Director  
Michael Windsor, Assistant Director  
Rachel Leigh Dolan, Choreographer  
Jeffrey Meek, Costume Designer  
Rob Siler, Lighting Designer  
Matt Otto, Sound Designer  
Dre Moore, Puppet/ Prop Designer

### Production Staff:

Michael Bobbitt, Producing Artistic Director  
Martita Slayden-Robinson, Director of Production  
Dustin Shattuck, Technical Director  
Ryan Love, Master Carpenter  
Ellison Roberts, Stage Manager

I also wish to acknowledge the talented group of individuals who created and molded my education at the University of Maryland. I feel enriched by their wisdom, experience, and passion. Thank you.

Aaron Posner  
Brian MacDevitt  
Cary Gillett  
Daniel Conway  
Helen Q. Huang  
Jared Mezzocchi  
Mark Rapach  
Misha Kachman

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## CONCEPT STATEMENT

Finding where you belong and the group of individuals that you can call “family” is the true core of Pasek and Paul’s adaptation of Roald Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach*. Dahl’s quirky and dark adventure comes to life through a mysterious magical narrator, Ladahlord, and takes place in a world that is purposefully theatrical and flexible. The musical requires you to take all the creative aspects from Dahl’s work and highlight the imaginative and fantastical narrative of his story. The play follows orphan protagonist, James, as he searches for the family he never had. When his horrific and greedy aunts take him in, James finds an unlikely group of friends that turn out to be insects living inside a magically giant peach. Great obstacles bring people (or insects for that matter) together, and despite our different backgrounds, there is always the capability for acceptance and love.

As the scenic designer, I wanted to create a playground that could hold the story and was influenced by traditional British curiosity shops mixed with Jean Marzollo’s “I Spy” books. Dahl’s theme of family continually asks the audience to alter their preconception of what they think a “normal” family is. I wanted to create an environment that the actors morphed and manipulated to serve the needs of the storytelling. Designing a world where things change: scale, medium, and purpose demonstrated the varying elasticity of the characters’ lives. The power of love and acceptance by an “unconventional” family, in a world that is not what it seems, was the concept that the creative team pursued on this production.

## **Chapter 1: THE PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS**

### *1.1 RESEARCH IMAGES*

The initial research for the production needed to include location and emotional response as well as knowledge of the Dahl legacy. I started by looking at Nancy Ekholm Burkert's original illustrations to key into the roots of Roald Dahl's world. I then did research focusing on the emotional landscape and mood of the play. Figures 1 through 13 show a selection from the research, specific collages display examples of: shadow play, mechanical world, and color inspiration.

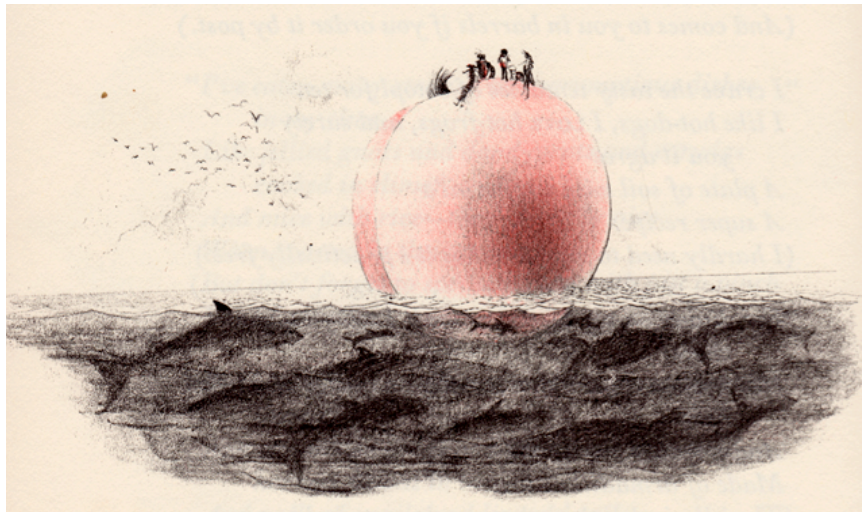


Figure 1

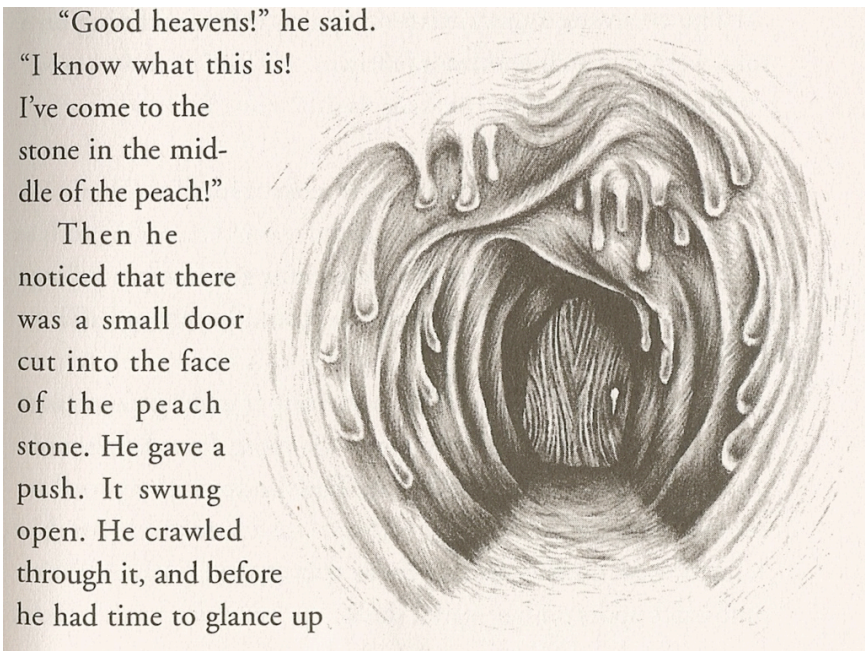


Figure 2

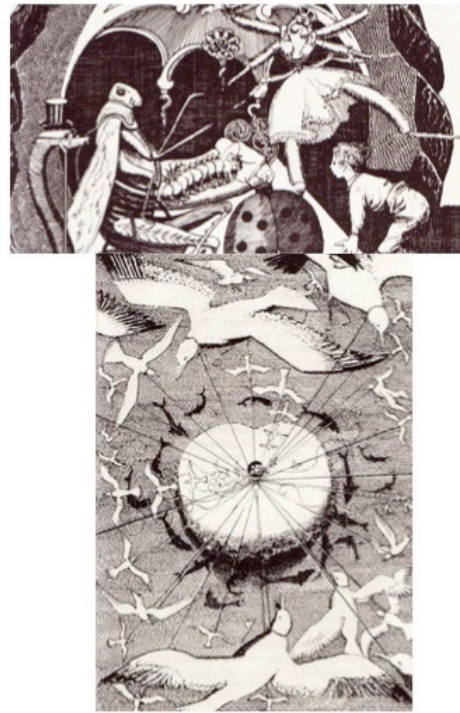


Figure 3

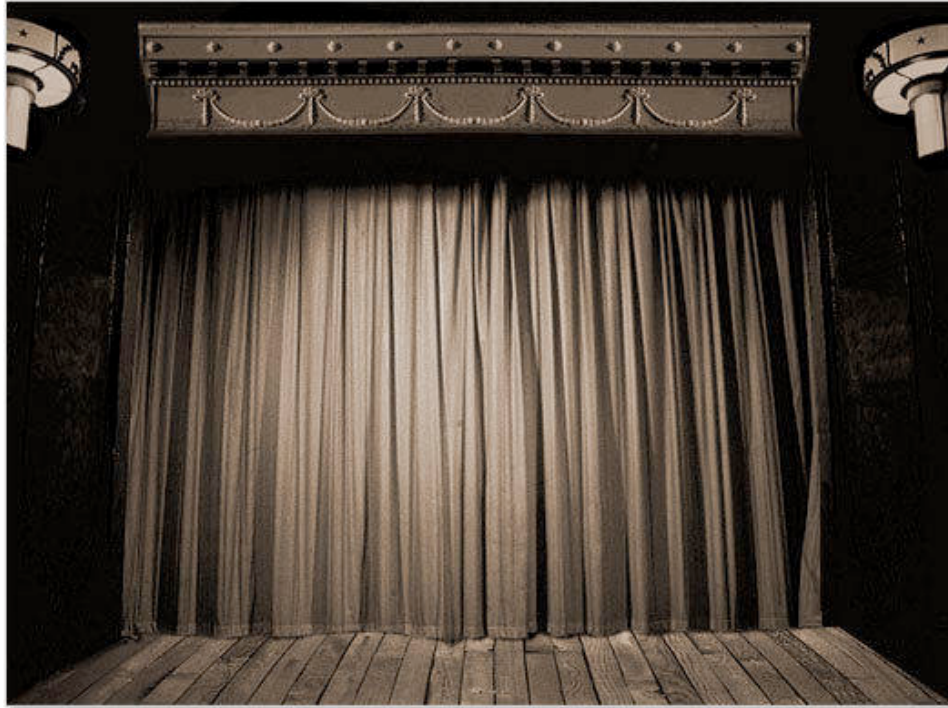


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

## Playing with Scale: Shadows



Figure 7



Figure 8

## Mechanical World

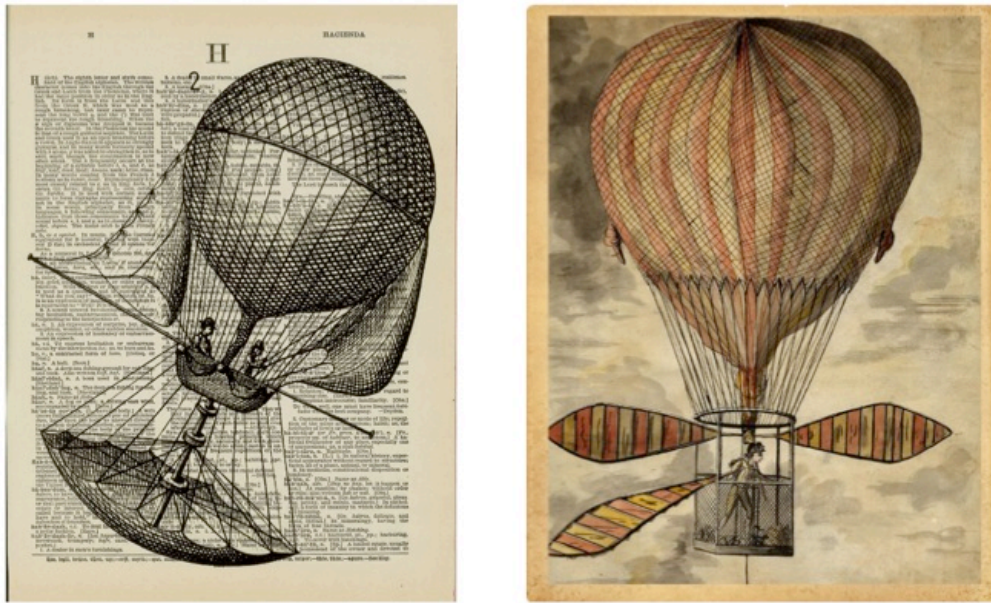


Figure 9

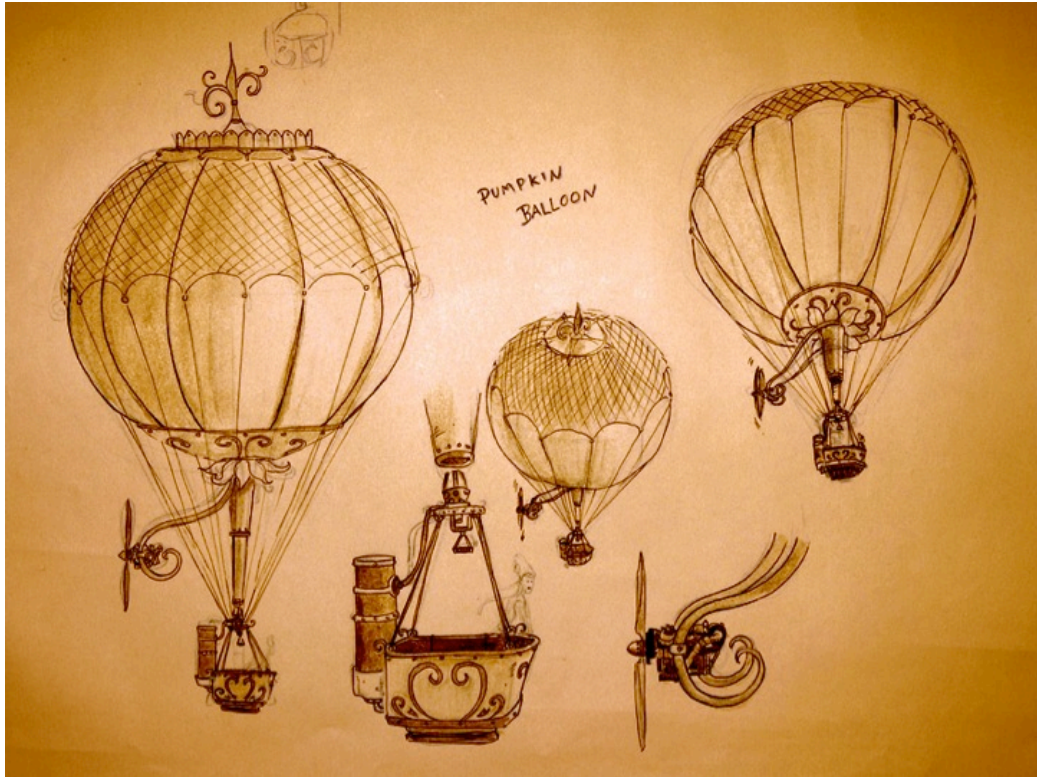


Figure 10

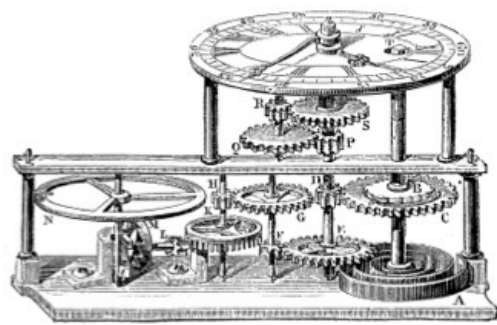


Figure 11

# Color Inspiration



Figure 12

# Color Inspiration



Figure 13

## 1.2 DEVELOPING THE DESIGN

After multiple meetings and discussing the research images extensively with the director, Michael Baron, the next step was developing the design. The first step of that process was making a collage of research images (Figure 14) that spoke most potently to the creative team. I discussed with my advisor, Daniel Conway about how to create a tight color palette in the collage that was both complex and captured the magical nature of the play. Next, I sketched and tried to flesh out some of the curiosity cabinet ideas. The director and I talked about that combining playful storage with Vaudeville. Once the design ideas were more solidified I created a ¼” color neutral model (Figure 17) to start discussing how we could use the space and the opportunities that Rachel would have for her choreography.

While the initial design left room for flexibility, the creative team agreed that we needed a space that was more specific. In a meeting, Michael and I discussed the possibility of the entire play taking place in “Ladahlord’s Curiosity Shop”. By giving the environment a specific location, we were able to make all our decisions off a magical curiosity shop.



Figure14



Figure15

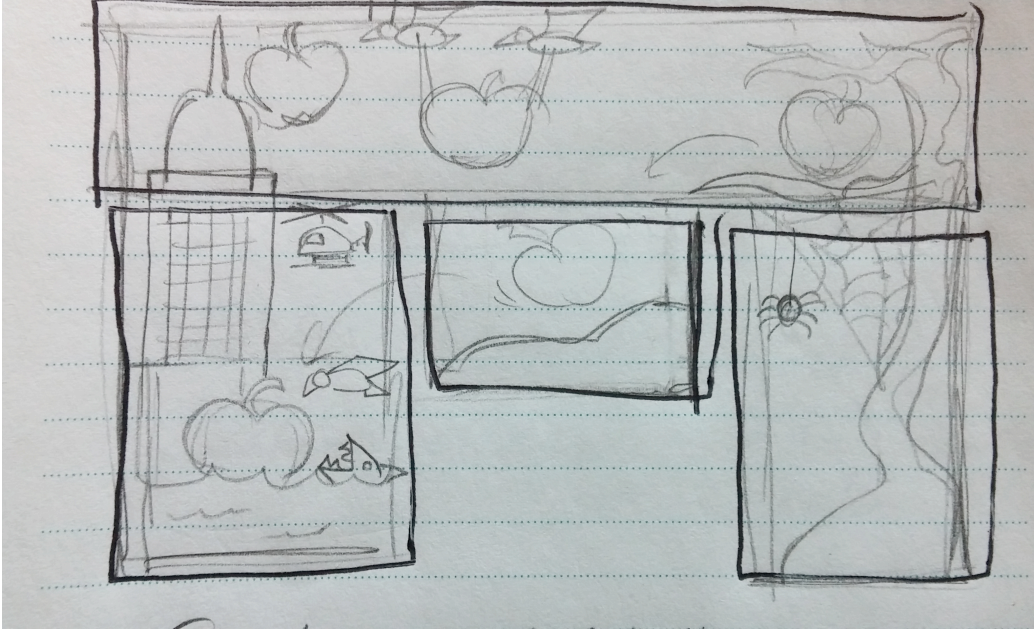


Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

## Chapter 2: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

### 2.1 PAPERWORK AND DESIGN NOTES

To better understand the flow of the musical, I created a scenic breakdown to track: scenes, locations, musical numbers, and characters. This tool allowed the director and me to have conversations about the movement of the scenes, character entrances/exits, and shifts in location.

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH Scene Breakdown			
Adventure Theatre Musical Theatre Company			Director: Michael Baron
JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH			Scenic Designer: Katie Sullivan
PG.	SCENE	LOCATION	Musical Numbers- Character Count
1-3	Prologue		Overture
			Right Before Your Eyes- Full Company
4-9	Scene 1	Painswick Orphanage- London, England	On Your Way Home- James
9-15	Scene 2	A Boardwalk- Dover, England	Property of Spiker and Sponge- James & Aunts
16-27	Scene 3	Spiker and Sponge's Decrepit Garden	Right Before Your Eyes Reprise 2- Ladahlord
			Shake It Up- Ladahlord, James, and Insects
			Shake It Up Reprise- Ladahlord, James, and Insects

Page 1 of 3

Figure 23

28-34	Scene 4	Morning, Spiker and Sponge's Decrepit Garden	There's Money on That Tree- Full Company
35-37	Scene 5	Spiker and Sponge's Decrepit Garden	On Your Way Home Reprise 1- James
38-49	Scene 6	Inside the Peach	Floatin' Along- James and Insects
			Floatin' Along Reprise- James and Insects
50-52	Scene 7	Spiker and Sponge's Decrepit Garden	A Getaway for Spiker and Sponge- Spiker and Sponge
53-58	Scene 8	Nighttime, The Deck of the Peach	Everywhere That You Are- Earthworm, Spider, Ladybug, Grasshopper

Figure 24

59-63	Scene 9	The Deck of the Queen Mary	Right Before Your Eyes Reprise3- Ladahlord
			I Got You- Spiker and Sponge
64-74	Scene 10	Sunrise, Deck of the Peach	Plump and Juicy- James and Insects
			Right Before Your Eyes Reprise 4- Ladahlord
75-82	Scene 11	Somewhere Over New York City, USA	On Your Way Home Reprise 2
			Welcome Home

Figure 25

Notes from the Prelim Design Meeting with the creative team and the production staff

James and the Giant Peach Prelim Design Meeting

-How scary do we get? “Fear Factor” –This is a dark story, but if we go too dark will it be too scary for the young audience?

-Humor and brightness– This musical has everything . . .ballads to vaudeville.

Detailed nature of the script- Use as a guideline or create our own? (As applies to puppets and set)

Circus poles? Sheet Screens?

Integrating LED changers- ability for stationary fixtures

Shadow 1- Lighting Research String Lights above the audience– Discuss further with Rob. What other “magic” moments can we make with the lighting?

Puppet Theatres

-Talk about Props/ Puppets with Dre Moore

Puppet types: Hand puppets, Shadow puppets,

-Median for puppets, costumes, and set– Living in the same world, what materials are we using.

Are there limitations that the costumes and set cause for the choreography?

Little Vaudeville theatre? Victorian toy theatre?

Cubby for James: Flexibility of the space to move from location to location. How does the pace of the music change the feel of the show?

Practical Sound Effects

MONDAY at 1 PM– Scene by Scene Meeting

## 2.2 THE DRAFTING

After there was an agreed upon design from the creative team and the production staff, the next step was to create a packet of technical drawings i.e. drafting to be used by the scene shop to build the show. These plates of drafting (Figure 26 to Figure 30) include information regarding: dimensions, materials, and placement in the theatre.

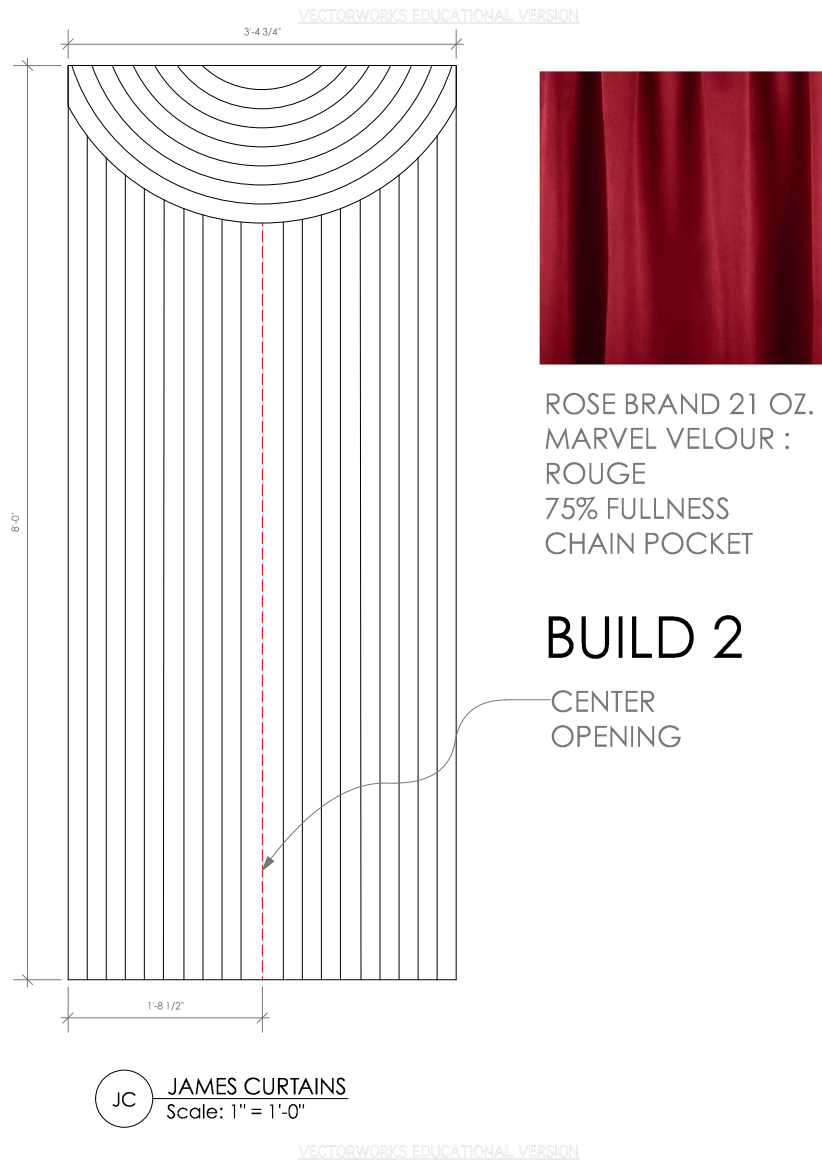


Figure 26

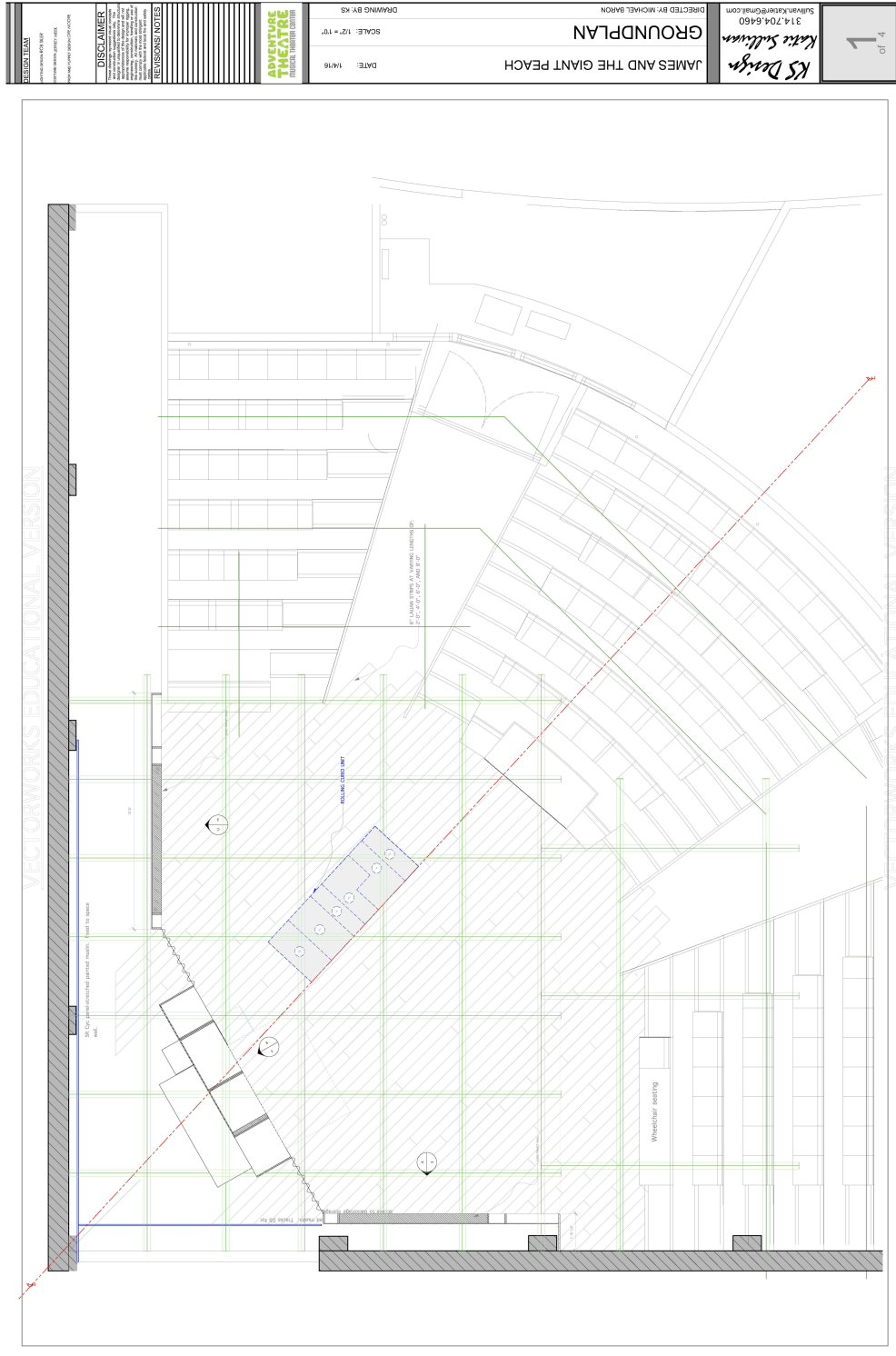


Figure 27







### 2.3 PAINT ELEVATIONS

Paint Elevations communicate color, texture, and detail to the scenic painter who is responsible for executing all aspects of painted detail on the production. Since there were multiple scenic painters, it was important I specified exactly what I wanted things to look like. I had regular check-ins with the paint shop on the show's progress. Due to the painters' lack of availability, I painted to help complete everything before opening night



Figure 31

#### 2.4 THE PROPERTIES LIST

The Properties List communicates to the prop master the various prop needs for the production. This list describes the look, function, and quantity of the prop as well as potential cost. Dre Moore, the Props/ Puppet Designer, and I created the prop list together. In developing the shadow puppets, we worked closely with Michael on the functional needs of the play. A convention that we pursued was seeing moments in multiple ways. We achieved this idea by switching back and forth between shadow puppet play and live characters on the stage, allowing more room for movement.

## James and the Giant Peach - Props and Puppets list

Hand Puppets								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
	Ladybug	wings that open	hand/rod puppet	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
	Grasshopper	simple leg movement	hand/rod puppet	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
	Earthworm		hand/rod puppet	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
	Centipede		hand/rod puppet	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
	Female Spider		hand/rod puppet	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
	<b>Male spider</b>	in web, made into sandwich	small/flexible to be mashed into sandwich	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
	Flying peach		rod puppet, flies over walls with seagulls attached, <b>lights up?</b>	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
Shadow Puppets								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
	Rhino	<b>only face of rhino</b>	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				\$ 500.00
9	Motorcycle	<b>also characters inside motorcycle, check costume rendering; will be seen in front of shadow screen</b>	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
18	Hill for house	cottage inside curio cabinet, hill supports	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
	Tree with removable peach	starts in tall shadow box, extends into long shadow box	<b>shadow puppet, peach should be colorful if possible</b>	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
	<b>James</b>	<b>not holding ax</b>	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
	<b>Centipede</b>	<b>for being chased by James</b>	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
	Spiker and Sponge's faces	for James nightmare sequence	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
	Blue ocean		color in shadow puppet, <b>check with Ryan for how much gel would cost</b>	<b>experiment with materials, purchase materials, build</b>				above
	<b>Ocean liner</b>	for sailing	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
64	Sharks	ramming the sides of the peach, take a big bite of underside of peach	shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
64	Seagulls		shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
69	Spider's web	to loop around seagull necks to make peach airborne	shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
70	Flying peach	Ladahlord reveals	shadow puppets, large flying light up beach ball for flying scene?	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
72	Centipede	falls out of flying peach	shadow puppet	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
74	Peach flying over Central Park		shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
75	Peach being attacked by helicopters		shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
76	Peach being attacked by anti-aircraft missiles		shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
76	The plane sliced through the spider web, peach plummets towards earth		shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
76	Peach lands on the spire of the Empire State Building		shadow puppets	hardboard/chipboard cutout, purchase materials and build				above
puppet estimate:								\$ 850.00

Scene 1 - Painswick Orphanage, London England								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
3	Pillow and blanket	for bed	<b>CUT?</b>	purchase				x
4	Pair of glasses	distinctive horn rimmed glasses, <b>broken on p. 36 by Sponge</b>		Jeffrey providing ones to be rigged				costumes
4	Scarf	red with black polka dots, <b>torn on p. 36 by Spiker</b>		Jeffrey providing ones to be rigged				costumes
8	Small suitcase	Matron nurse hands to James, only puts in scarf and glasses		pull from stock	x			x
Scene 2 - A Boardwalk, Dover, England								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
9	Motorcycle	with side car, large enough for both actresses	<b>Change to shadow puppet</b>	build				
10	<b>2 Pocket watches</b>	Spiker and Sponge pick from a pocket		pull from stock	x			x
10	Wallet	Spiker and Sponge pick from a pocket		pull from stock	x			x
11	Purse	Spiker and Sponge pick from a pocket, gets tossed offstage		costumes				
12	Coin	from Sponge's bosom		pull from stock	x			x
12	Telegram	Bobby Cop hands to Spiker and Sponge		print on stock paper	x			x
	<b>Billy club</b>	for Bobby		pull from stock				x
13	<b>Handlebars</b>	for Spiker and Sponge's motorcycle	light on front, large handlebars	purchase materials, build				\$ 20.00
14	Paperwork	carried by Matron Nurse	<b>clipboard with Orphanage written on back</b>	pull from stock, print paperwork	x			x
15	Rope	Spiker and Sponge tie around James, drag him behind the motorcycle		pull from stock	x			x
Scene 3 - Spiker and Sponge's Decrepit Garden								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate

	Cottage on hill		inside curio cabinet, at top corner of shadow box, light up windows	purchase/build				\$ 30.00
	Coat rack	to become peach tree	CUT	purchase				\$ 50.00
	Peach	to be pocketed by Ladahlord to place onto coat rack		purchase				\$ 10.00
18	Spider web		ribbon/lightweight material for actors to hold, will have male spider on, spider to be removed and squishes between bread slices	purchase materials, build				\$ 50.00
19	(Female Spider)			repeat from above				above
19	Male Spider		not shadow puppet, will be crushed inbetween fake bread slices	purchase materials, build				above
19	Two bread slices	Sponge uses to snatch male spider, eats spider sandwich	fake bread	fake - purchase materials, build				\$ 20.00
19	Picnic basket	James brings from house		pull from stock	x			x
19	Axe	Spiker hands to James		check stock, purchase and dull down	x			\$ 25.00
20	(Earthworm)			repeat from above				above
20	(Centipede)			repeat from above				above
22	Bag	carried by Ladahlord, glows on p.26, contents/crawling crocodile tongues crawl out p.27	Carpet bag - will need doubles for one to catch ingredients and other to have glowing orbs inside	build - purchase materials				\$ 250.00
22	Book of spells	inside bag		check stock for book to alter	x			\$ 50.00
24	Milkweed milk		on curio shelf; small bottle/pitcher with removable lid	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			x
24	Strand of silk		on curio shelf; small strand of silk	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			x
24	Rare Osaki juice	oversize bottle with label appears	on curio shelf; small bottle/pitcher with removable lid	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			x
24	Two Raven's claws		on curio shelf; two small bird feet	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			\$ 10.00
24	Four Tiger paws		on curio shelf; four small paws	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			\$ 10.00
24	The Marrow of a moose		on curio shelf; container	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			x
24	Tarantula poop		on curio shelf; container	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			x
24	Sloppy Joe made of kangaroo	oversize can with label appears	on curio shelf; looks like can of sloppy joe with different label	check stock for containers, build labels/alter as needed	x			\$ 10.00
27	Crocodile tongues	spill out of bag	light up balls to tumble out of bag; also add other small bouncing balls to the mess, about 6 more	ordered, purchase other items as well	x			\$ 100.00
27	(Ladybug, Grasshopper, Spider, Centipede)	take crocodile tongues offstage		repeat from above				above
Scene 4 - Spiker and Sponge's Deceit Garden								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
28	Several peach umbrellas/parasols							\$ 50.00
30	Bullhorn	Spiker pulls out, speaks into		pull from stock, might need batteries	x			\$ 15.00
	Helicopter	on stick, for Buzz to puppeteer		purchase and build				\$ 75.00
32	American money	Buzz tosses into the air		purchase ink, print on stock paper	x			\$ 50.00
32	British money	Garden Guild tosses into the air		purchase ink, print on stock paper				above
33	Contract and pen		long, accordion folded document; tape several sheets together and fold, will be signed each night	check stock				\$ 20.00
Scene 5 - Many Weeks Later, Spiker and Sponge's Deceit Garden								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
36	(Spiker tears scarf)		how much does scarf get torn?	rig with velcro				above
36	(Sponge breaks glasses)			rig with magnets				above
42	Plastic horse	to be run over by peach		pull from stock	x			x
42	Oversize Willy Wonka chocolate bar	to be run over by peach, breaks in half		purchase materials, build				\$ 25.00
Scene 6 - Inside the Peach								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
	Blue silk fabric for water (Wood ladder)	for on board peach	for ocean - attach to curio walls	purchase				\$ 60.00
	Peach colored umbrellas		to create giant peach on stage - sticking into curio cabinet/trunks	purchase	x			\$ 150.00
44	Fiddle	for Grasshopper to play	does not need to work - remove strings	purchase				\$ 60.00
47	Hard shell purse	for Ladybug	how large/what does this want to look like/costumes?	purchase/build				\$ 25.00
47	- pair of bloomers	used to make flag for seaworthy peach	needs to be stiffened to be flag; alter bloomers when Jeffrey delivers	costumes is providing				\$ 10.00
Scene 7 - Moments after the Peach escaped the Garden, Spiker and Sponge's Garden								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
51	Sponge's purse			costumes				
51	- whipped cream	Sponge eats		consumable - check actor preferences/allergies				\$ 50.00
Scene 8 - Nighttime, the Deck of the Peach								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
53	Oversize peach leaf	James is sleeping under, used later as a blanket		purchase materials, build				\$ 25.00
54	(Ladybug's purse)			repeat from above				above
54	- small hunk of peach resembling a crumble			check stock for materials, build				x
54	- tea cup and saucer			purchase plastic set				\$ 15.00
54	- napkin			pull from stock				x
Scene 9 - Many Days Later, The Deck of the Queen Mary								

page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
	(Framed image of the Queen Mary)		Framed photo on curio cabinet	purchase/build frame, print image				\$ 30.00
	Deck chairs	for Spiker and Sponge	on deck	check stock at UMD				\$ 50.00
	Tanning reflectors	for Spiker and Sponge	on deck					
62	Tray	Ladahlord brings to Spiker and Sponge, not consumed		pull from stock	x			x
62	- double fizzy		not consumed, attach to tray	purchase glasses, make fake liquid inside	x			\$ 25.00
62	- some nuts		not consumed, attach to tray	purchase fake	x			\$ 5.00
62	Binoculars	for Spiker		pull from stock	x			x
64	Something for non-shadow puppet seagulls and spider webs	maybe something that lowers from the grid that the ropes attach to, but would have to be quick released						\$ 150.00
<b>Scene 10 - Sunrise, the Deck of the Peach</b>								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
72	(Centipede falls out of flying peach)		shadow puppet					
72	Spider web	ties around James' waist, jumps over side of peach to rescue Centipede	real or shadow puppet?	check stock for rope, purchase if needed				\$ 25.00
74	(Peach leaf)	Ladybug drapes over James' shoulders		repeat from above				above
<b>Scene 11 - Somewhere Over New York City, USA</b>								
page	item	script description	director/designer notes	notes/questions	reh.	tech	show	estimate
	(Framed image of New York City)		Framed photo on curio cabinet	purchase/build frame, print image				\$ 30.00
75	(Bullhorn)	Sponge speaks into		repeat from above				above
77	2 Fumigator nozzles	spraying mists of poison		purchase				\$ 50.00
78	Wet, sticky chunks of peach dropping from	narrowly missing Spiker and Sponge	puppet moment?		?			\$ 50.00
78	Giant peach pit	obscures Spiker and Sponge, legs revealed a la Wicked Witch of the	puppet moment?		?			\$ 50.00
estimate:								<b>\$ 1,730.00</b>

## 2.5 PROPS AND SHADOW PUPPET RESEARCH

The Props and Shadow Puppet Research includes examples for the set dressing, shadow puppets, and insect puppets. Dre Moore, Jeffery Meek (the costume designer), and I had very close discussion about the mechanical aesthetic for the insect puppets. Since Jeffery was creating a world influenced by Steam Punk, we wanted the puppets to live in the same world.



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39



Figure 40

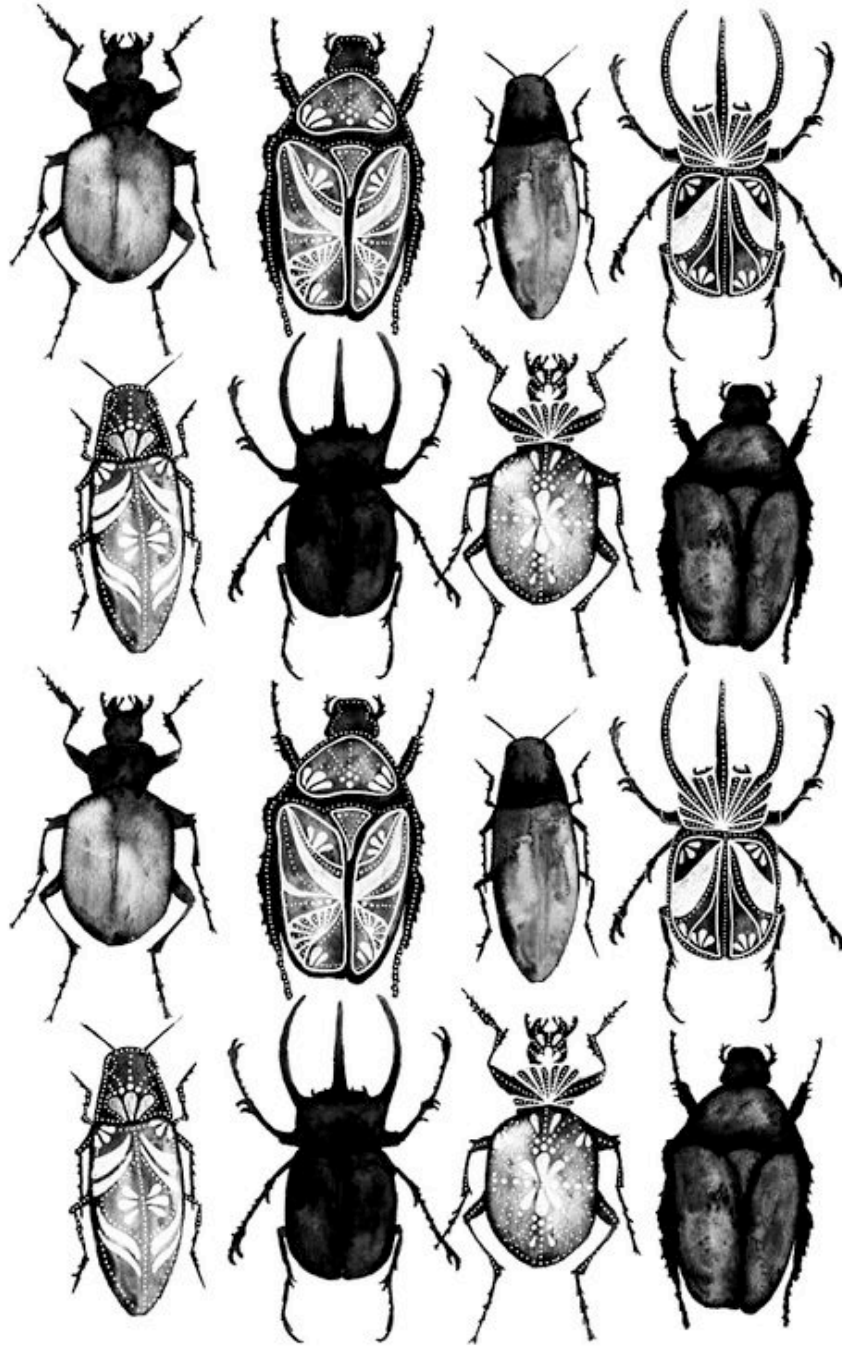


Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43

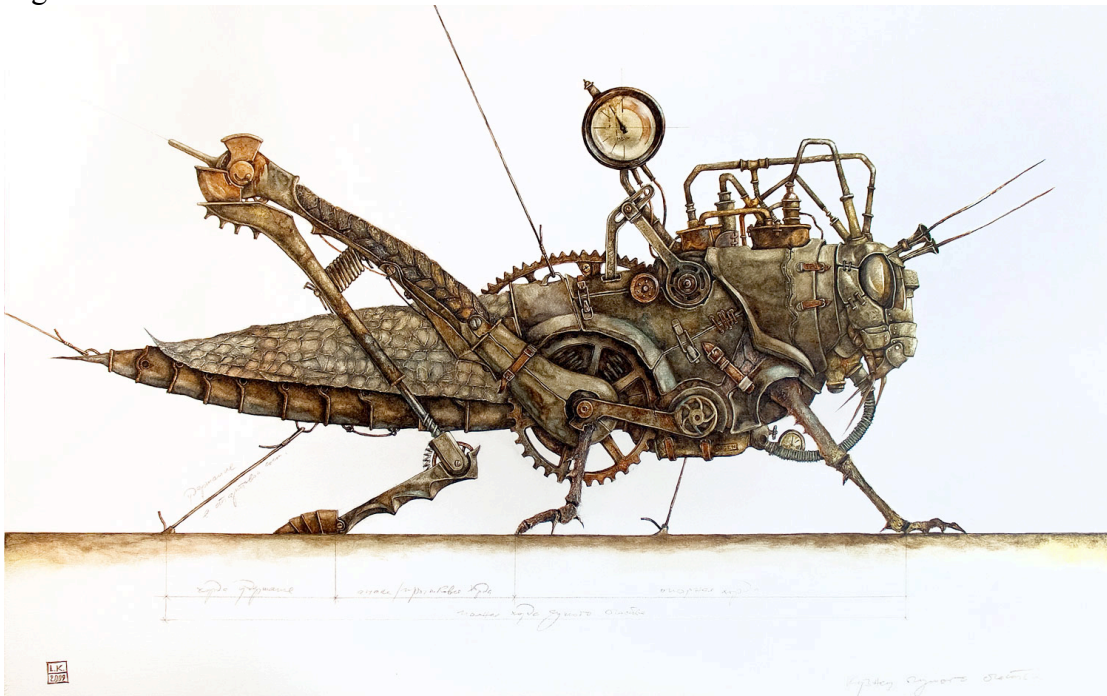


Figure 44



Figure 45

## Chapter 3: THE PRODUCTION

### 3.1 PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

The following images are from the final dress rehearsal of the production.



Figure 46



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50



Figure 51

### 3.2 PRODUCTION REVIEWS



## **JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH AT ADVENTURE THEATRE MTC (REVIEW)**

By Lorraine Treanor February 23, 2016

From the creative mind of Roald Dahl who created such masterpieces as “Matilda,” “The Fantastic Mr. Fox,” “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” and lots more, comes this adaptation of “James and the Giant Peach.” This Adventure Theatre MTC musical production mixes full blown imagination with Broadway-style savvy flair assuring a terrific time for all.

Master storyteller Dahl has a well-honed sense of the human experience and spares no punches for anyone, especially his humble protagonist, a sweet orphan James, played in rotation by Eli Schulman and Henry Niepoetter. The sudden discovery of living relatives brings no relief to the poor fellow as they instead wreak havoc in his life. Delightfully played by Karen Vincent and Awa Sal Secka, the two despicable aunts work James to shreds while harnessing him up like a trained monkey. Guided by a mysterious Merlin type conjurer, nicely rendered by renowned stage actor Keith Richards, James devises a potion that creates the humongous peach and escapes to a life filled with opportunity and adventure. With mega-doses of fantastical whimsy, the peach is massive enough for everyone to comfortably live in while sailing across the ocean, drawn by sea gulls tethered by spider webs. Yes, Adventure Theatre makes it all happen—right before our eyes, a refrain in one of the many memorable Pasek and Paul songs.

True to the beloved tale, insects that make most people squirm and recoil with disgust befriend the destitute lad, even becoming a strange sort of “family.” Director Michael Baron brings out the “humanity” in the critters and Adventure designers make them loveable characters with feelings and individual expressions. Talented dancer Jimmy Mavrikes is a treat to watch as Grasshopper, Emily Zickler as “Lady Bug” has the regal poise of royalty, even when she’s offering her bloomers to serve

on the masthead, Suzanne Lane is the daintily attired spider with netting accenting a bouncy dress hem, Joshua Simon plays the scowling cranky centipede who has to be convinced that humans can really care about such lowly creatures, and Tobias Young as the nearly blind earthworm adds a spirited joviality to the motley crew.

Baron knows how to pluck humor and fun from the smallest gesture such as when introducing the unscrupulous Aunts pick-pocketing oblivious strollers. I thought I had seen it all, but what Baron can do with gentle ease and slight of a hand is noteworthy. Cleverly designed costumes by Jeffrey Meek steal the show, especially the conjurer's robe, grasshopper's dapper three piece suit and lady bug's regal red and white shell-shaped dress accented with black circles, complete with the most adorable pantaloons tied at the ankles. The attention to detail is amazing, pictures don't do them all justice—the hats alone are worth a trip to see. Also when a nurse character ushers James to his new surroundings, she wears the full white regalia top to bottom, complete with red cross insignia for just a walk on moment. There's even color-coordination when the Aunts travel on a steamboat where the color of their tropical drinks match their attire...See? Priceless!

Versatile and moveable set design by Katie Sullivan offers a panoramic view of a life well lived, shelves of books, cubby holes filled with musical instruments, and apothecary bottles of all shapes and sizes, properties and puppet designs by Andrea "Dre" Moore.

As in his other creations, Dahl seems to be working through issues of being an outsider, living by one's own wits, outsmarting with kindness those who want to do one harm, and generally making the best of what one's been given. That happens here with no sugar-coating whatsoever. When James is at his lowest point, there's no rich Daddy Warbucks with deep pockets at the rescue. The sweet voiced youngster endures the abuse and is reminded of his parents with the hanky worthy song—"They Are With You Where You Are." Through it all, James trudges along with an open and accepting heart and perspective, on his own deciding not to be friendless or alone. Patrons of all ages can learn so much from family productions. In this case, sailing to a new land in a giant peach filled with insect friends actually shows that being happy is as much about choosing to be regardless of life's circumstances and conditions.

Presented with care, fun music and flair by Adventure Theatre MTC, the message comes alive and settles in our hearts—it doesn't get much more real than that.



## **REVIEW: 'JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH' AT ADVENTURE THEATRE MTC**

By Kendall Mostafavi February 18, 2016

The world of Roald Dahl is a fantastical place that stretches the boundaries of imagination. One of his best known works, next to *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*, is *James and the Giant Peach*. Adventure Theatre MTC has taken on a musical adaptation (with Lyrics and Music by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, and Book by Timothy Allen McDonald) of Dahl's famous tale of an enormous peach, talking bugs the size of people, and a voyage over sea and air.

Directed by Michael Baron, *James and the Giant Peach* is a wonderfully fun and imaginative production. Baron has created a truly touching version of this incredible tale of finding the real meaning of family.

Costume Designer Jeffrey Meek has created beautiful and intricate costumes for the over-sized bugs. And along with the incredibly creative use of umbrellas, puppets, and projections, by Props and Puppetry Designer Andrea Moore, Scenic Designer Katie Sullivan, and Lighting Designer Rob Siler, the magical adventure of James comes to life.

After losing his parents, James (Henry Niepoetter) is left in the care of his only living relatives, two greedy, heartless Aunts, Spiker (Karen Vincent) and Sponge (Valerie Adams Rigsbee in for Awa Sal Secka), who only agree to take James on for the money and free labor they think they can get out of him. The duo introduces themselves with the song, "Property of Spiker and Sponge," and the Aunts immediately endear themselves as the amusingly despicable villains.

Niepoetter tenderly conveys James' sadness and vulnerability over the death of his parents, and the sisters do a marvelous job at reveling in their own wickedness and belittling their nephew, which only makes James' character all the more lovable.

Benj Pasek and Justin Paul's score for this production, guided with musical direction by Aaron Michael Broderick, is gorgeous. And even the simple "On Your Way Home," sung by James, carries with it the magnificent simplicity of the love of family.

The charming Keith Richards plays Ladahlord, who gives James the magic to change the course of his life and also serves as a guide throughout the story. The ensemble sings the lively "Shake It Up" as James and Ladahlord gather all of the special ingredients they need for the spell. But when James trips and spills the magic potion onto the ground, at the base of an old peach tree, he fears that he has lost his chance for a better life.

Soon after, though, we learn that the magic was simply absorbed by the tree, which then produces an enormous peach. Discovering a door on the peach, James ventures inside where he meets Spider (Suzanne Lane), Green Grasshopper (Jimmy Mavrikes), Centipede (Joshua Simon), Ladybug (Emily Zickler), and Earthworm (Tobias Young). These common bugs have transformed into human sized, intelligent insects.

From there the journey has begun and the magic proves to have done its job in giving James a second chance at creating a happy life.

Lane as Spider, Zickler as Ladybug, and Mavrikes as Grasshopper are poignantly kind to James and exude on Niepoetter the doting attention that the hurting James needs. They sing the moving song, "Everywhere That You Are," to remind James that his parents will always be with him and the harmonies are heartbreakingly beautiful.

Simon, as the adorably ill-tempered Centipede, and Young as the hilariously spastic

Earthworm, complete the insect quintet and each bring their own dash of attitude and flavor to the show. Young finds his Earthworm groove with the show stopping “Plump and Juicy.” And Simon proves that no one is immune to the strong, uniting feel of family.

Adventure Theatre MTC’s *James and the Giant Peach* is a show the whole family should see. It’s moving and hilarious and extremely entertaining. Bug your parents to take you now before the run sells out!



## **THEATRE REVIEW: ‘JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH’ AT ADVENTURE THEATRE MTC**

By Derek Schwabe February 23, 2016

Simply delicious. That’s perhaps the best word to describe the Adventure Theatre’s new production of *James and the Giant Peach*, which made its triumphant opening this past weekend at Glenn Echo Park. A well-matched coproduction with the Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, this feisty mini-musical, based on the popular book by Roald Dahl, is a must-see for families eager to introduce young children to the magic of musical theatre. The cast and production staff at Adventure Theatre-MTC, led by director, Michael Baron, and assistant director, Michael Windsor, serve up an absolute visual, musical, and comical smorgasbord, jam-packed with endearing characters, brilliant costumes and a rousing, colorful score.

*James and the Giant Peach* tells the story of the young orphan, James, who is taken in by his only living relatives, two cruel, conniving Aunts who intend to exploit him for their own gain. When he’s sent to chop down a fruitless peach tree in his aunts’ backyard, he discovers the recipe for a magic potion that causes the tree to proliferate into an enormous peach. Before he knows what’s happening, James finds himself inside the peach, surrounded by a friendly band of human-sized insects (and a spider), who were also enlarged by the potion. But as the story rolls on, it’s James who sees the biggest growth spurt, as he earns the trust of his new friends, finds his voice as a leader, and learns the true meaning of family.

This high-energy cast was simply delightful. Each actor seemed genuinely ecstatic to be on stage, a contagious sentiment that the audience couldn’t help but catch. Crowd favorites included the roguish, motorcycling duo of in-your-face aunties, Spiker and Sponge, and James’ instantly endearing gang of buggy comrades—a dainty royal ladybug, ever-chipper grasshopper, unassuming spider, chronically terrified

earthworm, and cynical centipede. There's a character for practically every personality type, which makes for loads of both laughable and teachable moments. The play's young lead and Bethesda resident, Eli Shulman, was a relatable James, and kept pace with his more senior cast members, especially in the tap-dance department, choreographed by Rachel Leigh Dolan.

The Adventure Theatre production team proved itself ambitious and resourceful, pulling together an elaborate set by Katie Sullivan, eye-catching shadow and rod puppetry by Andrea "Dre" Moore, colorful lighting by Rob Siler, imaginative props managed by Ellison Roberts and April Carter, and stand-out costumes by Jeffrey Meek to set this story in vibrant motion. The backdrop, made of floor-to-ceiling wooden shelves covered with eclectic knickknacks, was like a two-page spread out of an *I Spy* book. Rolling stacks of equally busy boxes and crates were slid across the stage to frame places like James' drab orphanage, the hilltop home of Spiker and Sponge, and the luscious center of the giant peach. A collection of bright orange umbrellas was cleverly incorporated to represent the puffed-up peach, doubling as both set and prop, and repeatedly adapted throughout the show to animate the peach's barreling journey down hills, across the ocean and through the air, to reach its harrowing height at the pinnacle of New York City's Empire State Building. A playful, foot tapping score by TONY-nominated team, Pasek and Paul, adapted by Aaron Michael Broderick and executed by Matt Otto, builds the show's momentum. Rachel Hishorn's dialect expertise helps transport this story—and the audience with it—out of Washington DC and into the English countryside where it is set. Meek's outlandishly imaginative costuming was truly the icing on the cake (or perhaps cream on the peach?), enhancing the magic of everything else unfolding on stage.

There were a few isolated moments, particularly during James' more reflective solos, when lyrics sounded somewhat muddled and difficult to hear—no doubt an opening wrinkle that will be quickly ironed out. Adventure Theatre's Glen Echo venue is quite tiny, so patrons need not concern themselves with finding a good seat. However, if you really want to feel immersed in the action, the first few rows are a good choice.

At just over one hour, the brisk pace and abbreviated run time ensures even the greenest little peaches in the audience will have no problem keeping attention. Creative, colorful and teeming with many-legged life, *James and the Giant Peach* at Adventure Theatre is chock full of imagination and sweet lessons for every member of the family. Harvest your tickets before it goes out of season!

## Chapter 4: FUTURE PRODUCTION & REFLECTION

Since this production of *James and the Giant Peach* is a coproduction with the Lyric Theatre in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, there opportunity to fix some of the issues that came up during the rehearsal and production process. One of the major changes is moving from the cone shaped stage at Glen Echo to a proscenium theatre. Drawing the audience into the action will be one of the challenges facing us on the larger proscenium stage. Below, the “Creative Artist Statement” functions for the Lyric Theatre as part of a grant submission for additional funding.

Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, Inc.

Primary Creative Artists

### **Katie Sullivan (Scenic Designer) – JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH**

The opportunity to work on Roald Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach* at the Lyric Theatre is such a wonderful experience. Dahl’s work is so beloved by individuals’ young and old that the chance to design one of his cherished stories is a dream come true.

When approaching the story, the goal was to take all the creative aspects from Dahl’s work and highlight the imaginative and fantastical nature of his narrative. The initial response that I had to this was: this is a story about the forming and discovery of an “unconventional” family and the love they have for one another. This message resonates in bright upbeat musical numbers and moving lyrical ballads, not to mention a splash of ridiculous and horrifying aunts. On an artistic level, I wanted to support the needs of the story, but not over power any of the action happening on

stage. Since the story calls for so many locations and unique scenic needs (for example: seagulls carrying a giant peach over the ocean) the main challenge was figuring out a design vocabulary that the entire world was able to live in. The initial research and tone of the play led us to a world influenced by a distinctly British feel. Images of carnivals, vaudeville, and curiosity shops became the artistic world we set as our playground. By making the design Ladahlord's Curiosity shop, we were able to fill the selves with most of the prop needs of the show as well as make almost an "I Spy" world for the story to inhabit. Jumping from different size scale of props was one of the ways that we created the design vocabulary. Using props from around the environment in different ways was another way we then manipulated the space. In addition to the props, the set incorporated the use of shadow puppets. We used the puppets as a story telling device for both movement of the play and setting location. The shadow puppets ended up being instrumental in the success of bridging between reality and the imaginative in the environment. The design ended up being a space that felt lived in and slightly magical. The audience was able to see how Dahl's ideas of family and home were shaped through a world that continually asked them to change their preconceptions of what they think things are and go with us on this magical journey of James' discovery of what family truly means. This play had many unique challenges to overcome on the design end, but with the strong leadership of Michael Baron, we were able to create a world that was flexible, creative, and served the needs of the play.

I think that this production of *James and the Giant Peach* was an incredible learning experience. I created an environment that could serve the various specific needs of the play while remaining a flexible space for an imaginative show. The diversity in style of song and story telling lent itself to a playing space that could hold and transform with the musical. The collaboration between costumes, puppets, and set created a design that balanced the idea of vaudeville and curiosity shop. Michael Baron, the director, had a strong direction for the production, but was very receptive to all the suggestions that the creative team brought to the table. This rapport among the creative team led to a very safe and supportive artistic environment to explore, discover, and create the design in.

The greatest challenge that I encountered on this production was the execution of the design by the shops. During the development of the design, the theatre did not have a technical director so conversations about construction of the set did not happen until after the first rehearsal. As a result, the lack of finished quality in the set left me disappointed. In addition, there were two different paint painters throughout the process. Due to this, I had to come in and assist in the painting of the set and was not happy with how much of it ended up looking. During the tech process, getting notes finished seemed like a herculean task. I had to consult the production manger on prioritizing what notes were accomplishable and which notes were not. As frustrating as that situation was, it was invaluable to experience the challenges that come with working for a smaller theatre that does not have equal technical support as collegiate or large regional theatres.

If I could change anything about my final design, I would fight harder for the specificity and elegance that was in my research, but got lost throughout the negotiation process with the theatre. I would really question the company's capability to execute the set, paint, props, and dressing I designed and tailor to their ability and budget. I am really looking forward to revising the set for the Lyric Theatre and focusing on translating the research into a better design.

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