

MEN ON BOATS

By Jaclyn Backhaus

With Vassar College Experimental Theater

2024/6 - 2024/10

Powerhouse Theater, Poughkeepsie, NY

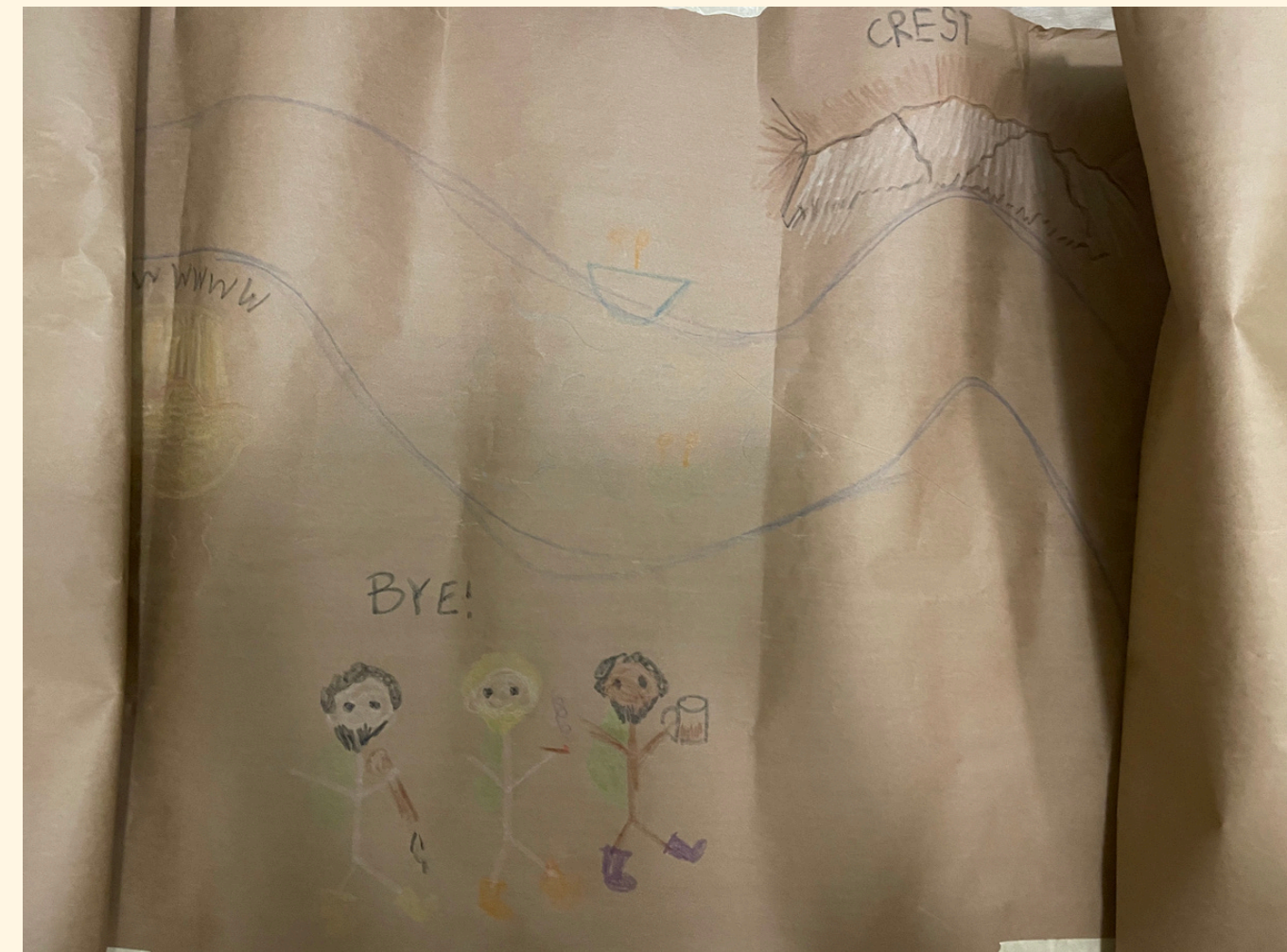


Photos in this document by Gabriel Leonard, Karl Rabbe, and Yining Shang

REHEARSAL - BOUNDING

As a director, I believe firmly in the power of creating art in a group and really love the magic of creating art works that bound people together.

In the process of this rehearsal, we spent some time of the first week drawing a long road -map of all the events that happened in the duration of the play and also spent time decorating rehearsal boats together. The time we spend together help people get along very fast and therefore improved group listening.



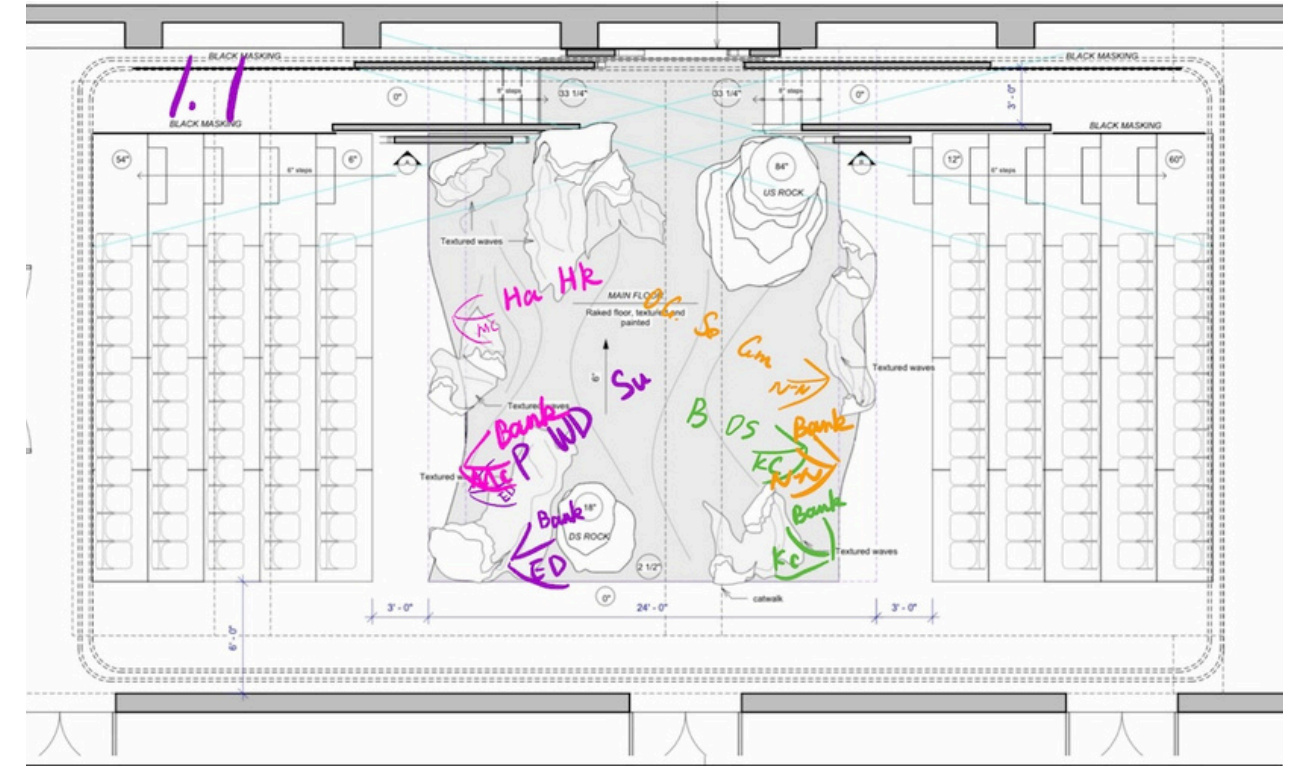
A small portion of the co-create road map, also story board



Dramaturgical
presentation and
discussion together

BLOCKING- BOAT

The blocking of boat movement scenes are essential in terms of playing with audience sideline, directing attention to the “CENTER BOAT” of the scene, balancing all the pulling and banking movement, and leaving space for fight choreo.



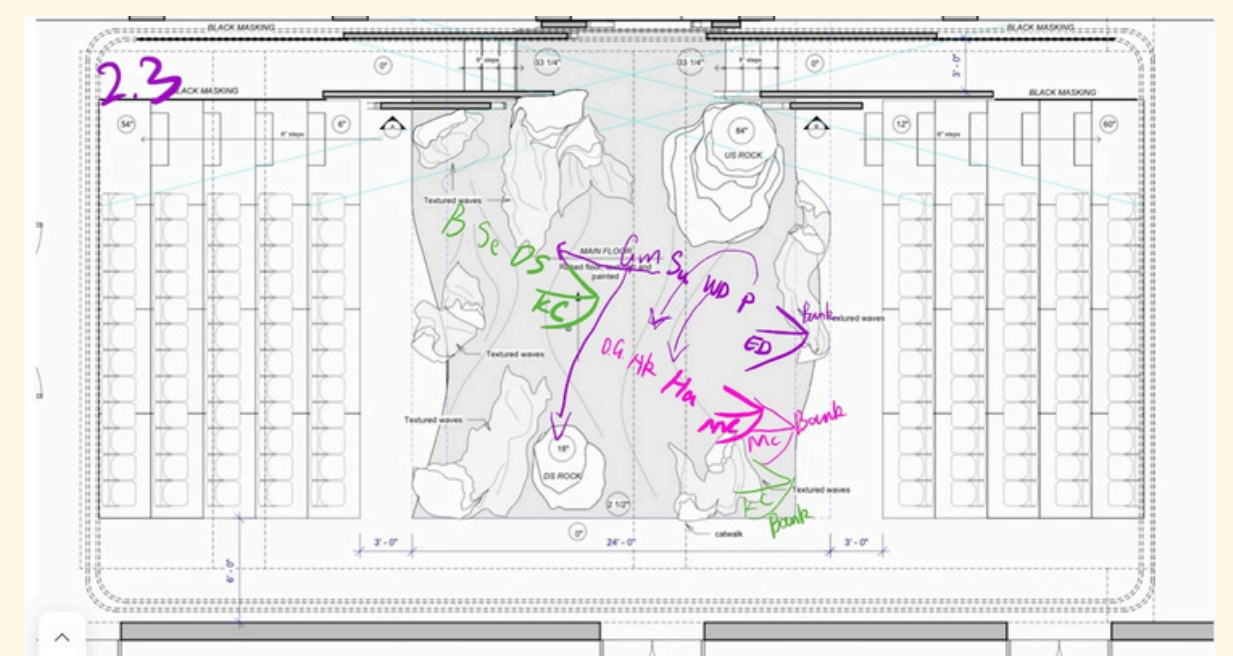
First scene, people doing introduction



No-Name Overboard
Involves spinning and 3 people going overboard



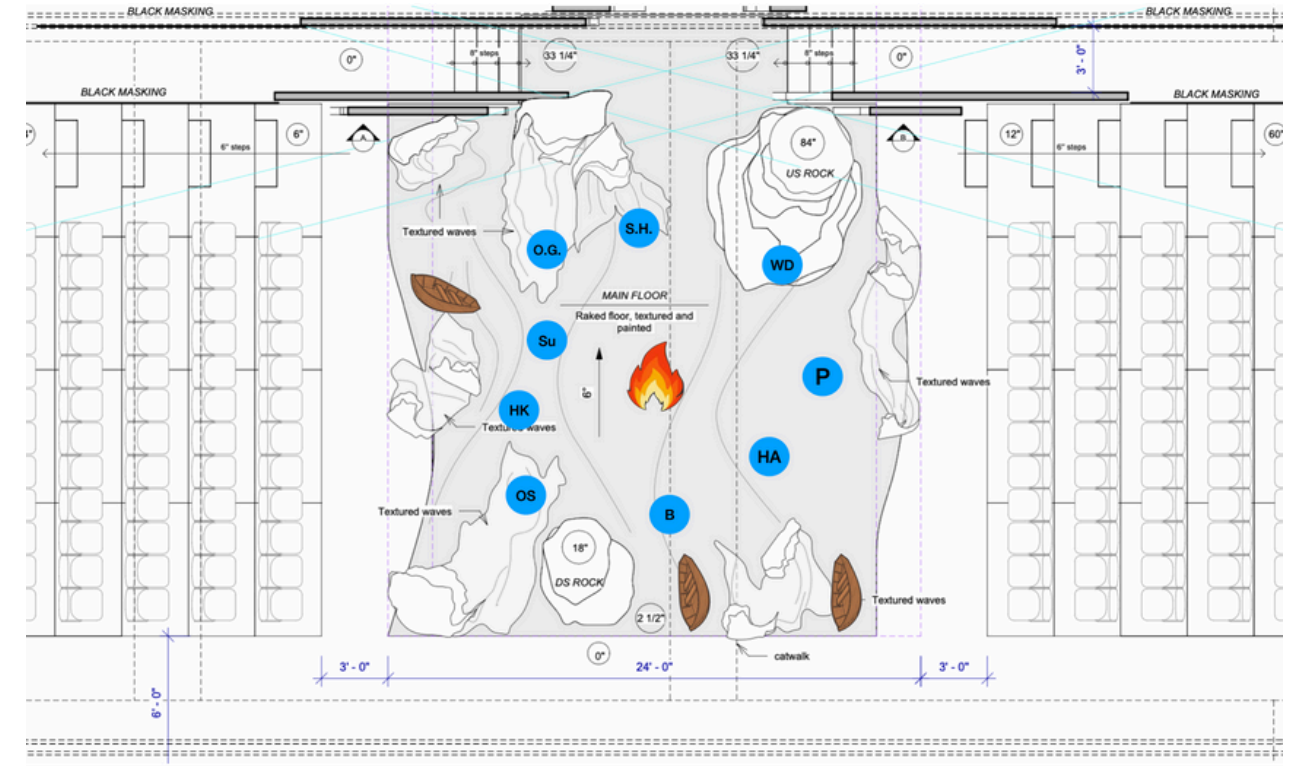
Overhead Stage Picture



Emma Dean Overboard
Involves getting pulled and 4 people
going overboard.

BLOCKING- CAMPFIRE

The blocking of campfire scenes is very crucial in setting up character's relationship with each other, creating arch and nuances of character's emotional journey, also balancing off playing towards the center stage versus playing towards the audience facing away the group.



Pre-Planned campfire blocking



Beginning scenes of bounding and playfulness



middle scene of tiredness and separation



ending scene of group separation

BLOCKING-MOMENTS

Specific blocking choices are made to emphasize crucial moments and turning points in the script.

- In the beginning and the ending scene, characters come through a center door, signifying the concept of people coming from “outside” and therefore reinforcing the idea that these characters are trapped in the Canyon and trapped in their mental world
- The motif of characters standing in a CIRCLE also repeats. Once when they walk in starting with really high spirits, in the middle where they first encounter the Grand Canyon, and then in the end at the moment of most despair when they believe they are about to die



“Perhaps we’ll die”



Split Scene in which characters are far away looking at each other



Mr.Asa coming in from “the outside”



Final Monologue of Mr.Asa that concludes the play

SCENIC:

An Ally-way set up with audience on both sides of the stage create a clear image of a Canyon space with characters living in the space between. With the audience getting raised up, we create the sensation that audiences are the original dwellers on the space to create the sensation that these characters are coming in to intrude the world.

Certain scenes happen with actors right next to audiences, creating the sensation that they are on top of a mountain, and also the feeling of intrusion and the audience being forced to be involved in their activities.





PROPS

The idea of just the skeleton of a boat front with physical oar is to emphasize on the concept of uncertainty on this river. Nothing is fixed on this playground and everything can be moved around.

Campfire is also build by the oars used in the process of rowing, signifying the collective effort of the team to get a fire build. The campfire getting disassembled in the process of a scene also signifies how the team fall apart later in the process.



COSTUME

The key concept we talked about in costume design is not to hide the femininity on the actors as non-male-identifying actors playing historically male characters.

This is also a concept discussed in rehearsal process and character building. As a director, I believe the message of this play tells us that we don't need to PLAY MALE in order to be involved in such an historical event.



LIGHT

The light design concept of this show focuses on the concept of fluctuation. With the non-changing set representing both landscape and water, the light really took the lead in creating the water pattern. This further build into the concept of **uncertainty** and **fluctuation** in which the same land the characters are resting on is also the water filled with danger.



House Warmer



Intermission



House Cooler



Canyon Reveal

SOUND

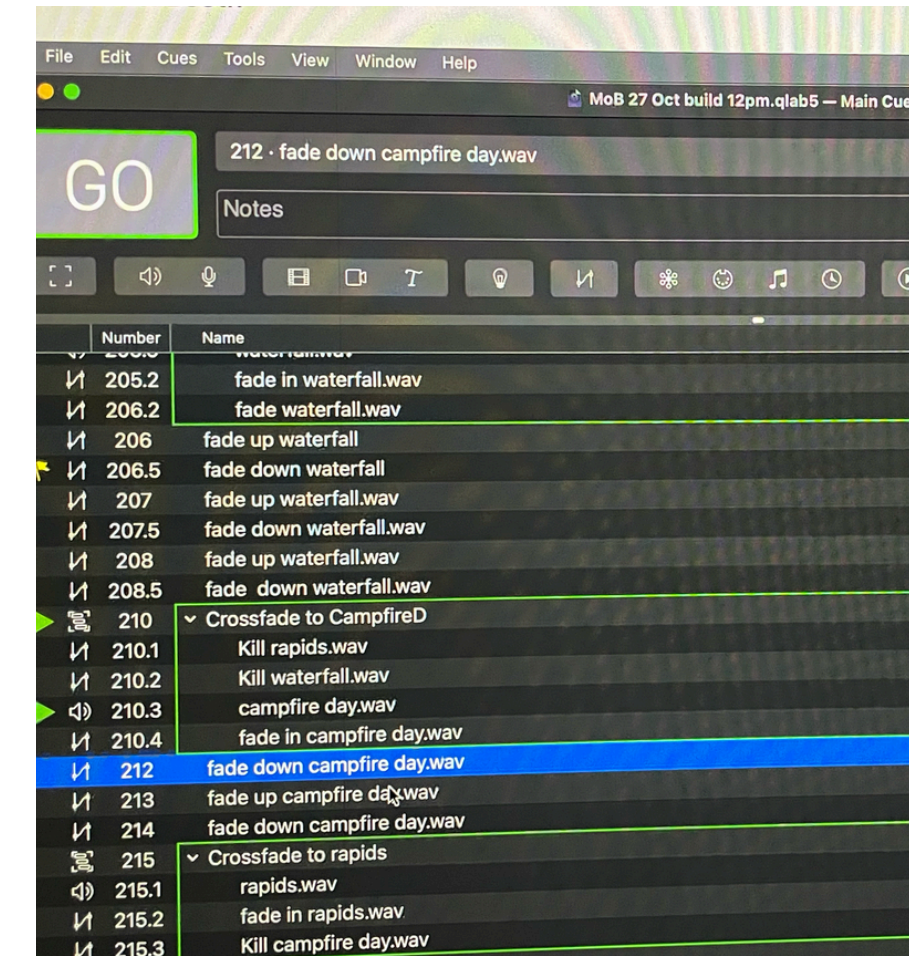
The sound build of this show is more to create the immersive soundscape of this world of rapids, canyons, winds and campfire. They are mostly ambiance that will fade up during transition to set up the world and then fade down during the scene.

In key moments of serious discussion and grand reveal in the midst of the journey, we add in wind sounds, low frequency droning and heart beat to add on to idea of “Grand and dangerous”

There are also a lot of soundscape **created by actors on stage**. Old Shady, as the character that sings in this group, often start singing with the discovery of interesting sound scape like forks hitting plates, or patting oars. These noises created by hand prop forms an important part of this production and also a crucial idea of the whole group supporting each other in this very raw and very not artificial environment



hitting Tin Plate for sound



Qlab with water and campfire soundscape

Patting oar and using oar to hit the floor to create beat

