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THEA – 377 – 01

15 November 2024

Observed Rehearsal of Director Pettis

On November 14, 2024, I attended a rehearsal under the supervision of Director Pettis. The rehearsal took place in the Wells Theatre from 9:00 to 10:00 PM. Attending this rehearsal was Director Pettis, assistant stage manager Ray Shaul, and the actors Drew Carlson and Lorelei Weidman. The goal of the rehearsal was simple: run-throughs and fine-tuning any last-minute details before tech week. While this was their last rehearsal and there wasn’t much heavy lifting to be done, the rehearsal was very constructive.

The overall feel of the rehearsal was very friendly and constructive. Everyone seemed at ease, and one thing I took note of was how comfortable the actors were with asking questions or clarifying directions with Director Pettis. The director handled everything calmly, always ready with suggestions to help the actors fine-tune their performances. Her communication was clear and encouraging, ensuring the actors understood what was working and what needed to be improved. Director Pettis also kept everyone informed on the timing of the rehearsal, letting them know that it would finish earlier than originally planned.

The room was arranged with director Pettis in the audience with the assistant manager nearby on the ground level. On the stage, an acting cube stood in for a toilet on stage right with a toilet paper rack positioned on the downstage side. Although the actual prop door was not available for their rehearsal, the actors mimed its presence effectively.

Director Pettis’ interactions with the actors were a standout element of the rehearsal. The actors seemed to trust and value her feedback and felt comfortable asking clarifying questions. She was constructive in her criticism, always focusing on how the scene could be improved without making it seem like something was wrong to begin with. This kind of open communication made for a positive working environment. Even when issues came up, Director Pettis was calm and focused on finding solutions.

One of the strongest moments of the scene came after the bride’s failed proposal. The pacing slowed dramatically, and the couple ended their blocking sitting on the ground, side-by-side. This created a quiet, intimate moment of defeat for both characters. It was a powerful picture of two lovers at a crossroads, unsure of their future. This moment stood out to me for the emotional depth and exposed vulnerability that is revealed to the audience.

However, one aspect that I feel needs to be worked on is the bride’s toilet paper blindfold. Tying the blindfold was tricky, and it took a long time, forcing the other actor to ad-lib until the bride was finished. There were also moments when the blindfold broke or fell off mid-scene, forcing the actors to restart or pause until it could be fixed. Because of how long it took to tie the blindfold, it made the scene’s pacing a little clunky as everything ground to a halt the moment that the blindfold needed to be made. However, I do not feel like there is an easy solution to this problem. A big point in the scene is the creation of the blindfold and if it were to be pre-made, then a big moment of the scene would be lost.

The director did a great job communicating her vision and notes to the actors. Her feedback was clear and actionable, and the actors seemed to take her direction seriously. However, I would have handled the pacing of the rehearsal a little differently. After the first run and subsequent notes, Director Pettis gave the cast a full five-minute break. Considering the amount of time spent working, I felt as though the break was unnecessary. The decision to shorten rehearsal from 10:30 to 10:00 also made sense given the circumstances, but then everyone was let out at 9:45, which made the session feel even shorter. While it didn’t hurt the mood, I feel like there could have been a bit more focus on making use of the limited time.

There were also some more broad issues that I noticed with the rehearsal. Drew, one of the actors, is clearly a teenage boy, and while his talent is unmistakable, it was a little uncomfortable watching him play an adult who is about to get married. The gap between the actors, college and high school students, made the romantic elements of the scene feel awkward. While Drew has worked with the college on many productions in the past, I’m not sure it is ideal to have minors play roles for a college production, especially when the subject matter involves love or marriage, and the age gap is so noticeable between actors.

Overall, the rehearsal was productive and constructive, with strong communication and a focus on improving the scene. Despite some minor challenges, the atmosphere was positive, and the rehearsal helped to move the performance closer to being stage-ready. While there were some issues with timing, the experience was insightful to me to see how another director works.