THE MARRIAGE OF MUSICAL THEATER AND THE AVANT-GARDE:
THE MUSICAL THEATER OF TINA LANDAU AS EXPERIMENTAL THEATER

by

Wendy Ann Gordon

Copyright © Wendy Ann Gordon

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
SCHOOL OF THEATRE ARTS
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2003
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgement of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the copyright holder.

SIGNED: [Signature]

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

[Signature]
Judith Sebesta
Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts

4-30-03 Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Tina Landau, for taking the time to talk with me and for allowing me to observe her in rehearsals and being so hospitable during my time in Chicago. Thanks as well to Theresa McCarthy for participating in an interview.

Thank you to my committee: Marsha Bagwell, who pointed me down the path which led to this thesis and helped me work out the definition of a musical; Jerry Dickey, for all his mentoring and helping me to refine my first paper in graduate school which ultimately became this thesis; and finally Judith Sebesta, for all of her support, encouragement, guidance and patience throughout the whole process.

Finally, thanks to Brad for being so understanding and patient and keeping life's day-to-day details running while I was absorbed with the details of writing and rewriting.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... 5

CHAPTER 1: Introduction .................................................................................................... 6

CHAPTER 2: Theatrical Background .................................................................................. 20


CHAPTER 4: Floyd Collins .................................................................................................. 61

CHAPTER 5: Dream True ..................................................................................................... 73

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 85

APPENDIX A: Interview with Tina Landau ........................................................................ 89

APPENDIX B: Interview with Theresa McCarthy ............................................................... 104

WORKS CITED .................................................................................................................. 111
ABSTRACT

Tina Landau's writing and directing work has gained increasing prominence over the last decade. She has made strides in both the experimental and the musical theater arenas, and her accomplishments in each are noteworthy independent of each other. However, her concurrent interest and success in both arenas, which are commonly viewed as quite disparate, make her work particularly interesting. These interests, which might seem incongruent, are actually interrelated; her work in one area influences her work in the other, a fact which is evident both in her rehearsal process and the end products. Her experimental work has a musical sensibility and her work in musical theater is quite experimental. This thesis examines works for which she was both writer and director as representative examples: 1969, Stonewall: Night Variations, Space, Floyd Collins and Dream True. Her amalgamated sensibility results in a directing style which serves contemporary musicals, particularly "smart musicals," well.
CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Over the last decade, a trend has emerged in musical theater towards what can be termed the “smart musical.” A number of composers, including Adam Guettel, Ricky Ian Gordon, Jason Robert Brown, Michael John LaChiusa and Jeanine Tesori, are writing musicals that are musically complex (straying from the tradition of Tin Pan Alley toward music which is consistently rhythmically complex and dissonant) and serious in nature, often dealing with topics previously reserved for drama and avoiding plots which center on romance. This group of composers is often referred to as the “Sons of Sondheim,” pointing to the seriousness and complexity their work shares with that of Stephen Sondheim, who many consider a pioneer in a new chapter of musical theater history. Included in this category are works such as Michael John LaChiusa’s Marie Christine, a retelling of the Medea story, which was so vocally demanding that the star, Audra McDonald, only appeared in six of the eight weekly performances, and Adam Guettel’s musical Floyd Collins and song cycle Saturn Returns, with their often dissonant chords. Many of these composers also tackle subject matter unusual for the musical, as in Jason Robert Brown’s Parade, which tells the real-life story of the trial and lynching of the Jewish man Leo Frank in the South or Ricky Ian Gordon’s Dream True, which is about the telepathic relationship between two men.

Although David Patrick Stearns’s discussion of this trend focuses primarily on the composers as the promulgators of this trend, further examination of the productions

---

1 While I cannot pinpoint the exact origin of this term, it is one that David Patrick Stearns suggests by the very title of his American Theatre article “The Smart Set,” which discusses the group of composers discussed in this paragraph.
these composers have generated reveals that several theater professionals in addition to
the composers have been involved with a number of these productions as well, and their
contributions to the development of this trend merit further investigation. Among them
are Ira Weitzman, who served as director of musical theater first at Playwrights Horizons
and then for Lincoln Center Theater, director/choreographer Graciela Daniele, who
directed Michael John LaChiusa’s musicals *Marie Christine* and *Hello Again*, and
writer/director Tina Landau, whose work this thesis will explore in depth.

Tina Landau was born in Riverdale, a suburb of New York City, in 1962 to
Jewish parents. Her exposure to the arts began at an early age—her parents, Eli and Edy
Landau, were independent film producers. In fact, two of her brothers are also in the
industry: one was a producer for the movie *Titanic* and the other is a television director.²
Although her family moved to Los Angeles when she was a teenager, she considers
herself a New Yorker, and New York is now her home base. She went to college at Yale
University in New Haven, Connecticut, focusing on theater there. Shortly after
graduation, she went to the American Repertory Theatre Institute in Boston, which was a
professional theater training program. It was there that she first met Anne Bogart, with
whom she has had both a collaborative professional relationship and a long-term
romantic partnership. In fact, she has met many of her friends in the theater: besides
Bogart, composers Adam Guettel, Ricky Ian Gordon and Jeanine Tesori are among her
best friends (Landau, Personal Interview).

² Basic information about Landau’s background is actually rather difficult to find. The biobibliography in
*Women Playwrights of Diversity* has surprisingly little information (“Tina Landau”) and Hedy Weiss
provides some information in a piece on *Space*. 
Tina Landau’s love for the theater had its roots in her childhood: she grew up going to the theater every weekend and learned to play piano by being taught specific songs she loved, such as “Tomorrow” from *Annie* and “Johnny One-Note” from *Babes In Arms*. Her career as a writer and director began early: in high school she wrote and directed her first musical, *Faces on the Wall*, which was picked up and produced professionally before she began college. At Yale, she composed two more musicals before deciding to focus instead on her work as a director. Her career has since come full circle: her résumé includes writing plays as well as authoring or co-authoring musicals, in addition to numerous directing projects (Landau, Personal Interview).

Tina Landau’s writing and directing work has gained increasing prominence over the last decade. Her sprawling, experimental, site-specific work *Stonewall: Night Variations* garnered her critical praise in the early 1990s. She has been commissioned to develop plays using the Viewpoints technique, made prominent by Anne Bogart and adopted by Landau, by such well-respected theater companies as Actors Theatre of Louisville and American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Landau has also earned acclaim for her work in musical theater, most notably with *Floyd Collins*, which she co-wrote with Adam Guettel, and she made her Broadway directorial debut in summer 2001 with the revival of *Bells Are Ringing*.

Landau has made strides in both the experimental and the musical theater arenas, and her accomplishments in each sphere are noteworthy independent of each other. However, her concurrent interest and success in both arenas, which are commonly viewed as quite disparate, make her work particularly interesting. Musicals have long
been widely viewed as shallow and two-dimensional, works with a lot of flash and little substance. Although the trend has recently begun to shift, traditionally Broadway, the most mainstream American theater venue, has showcased primarily musicals, reinforcing a common perception of them as endeavors which value commercial ideals over artistic ones. This perception is not without reason: with musicals usually requiring a larger budget than nonmusicals, they are significantly riskier financially to produce, and to offset this risk, musical productions tend to have broad commercial appeal, leaving less room for experimentation. In contrast, experimental or avant-garde theater, by its very definition, places emphasis on experimentation, exploring, for example, nonconventional forms and subjects. The avant-garde’s focus on experimentation or innovation creates an expectation, on the parts of both theater practitioners and audiences, that artistic and creative values will be prized over commercial appeal. To minimize the financial risk associated with this experimentation, the avant-garde is most often relegated to the sidelines (i.e. fringe theaters), where production costs, and thus the financial investment, are lower than that of the mainstream. As a result, musical theater and experimental theater are on opposite ends of the spectrum. Landau acknowledges this dichotomy: “I think my influences were first off the American musical. [...] I became interested in much more sort of heady, avant-garde writers and experimental theatre technique. [...]

3 According to Robert Cohen, “[...] between 1998 and 1999, only six new American plays were seen on Broadway (compared to more than twenty musicals) [...]” (Theatre 290)

4 In 1999, the “standard weekly break-even cost for a Broadway musical” was $400,000 (Stearns, “Broadway”). Additionally, Robert Cohen notes that “in New York, during the past decade, as much as 80 percent of Broadway’s box office income has derived from musicals alone [...]” (Theatre 276), a fact which Michael Powell and Christine Haughney back up: “Musicals are Broadway’s cash cows, generating about $518 million in gross revenue last year [2002], or 81 percent of the total.”
And I couldn't figure out how to put those two things together" (Rodda Interview 305). Consequently, the fact that Landau prizes both and that she has bridged the gap between the two arenas is quite unique and establishes the need for further scholarly examination of her work.

Scholarly writing about Landau is virtually nonexistent. A doctoral dissertation by Katherine Ellen Rodda examines Landau's work alongside the work of Anne Bogart. Rodda is particularly interested in them as "director-slash-playwrights"; she focuses largely on discussing the Viewpoints method for which Bogart is known and which she has refined over the years with Landau. Michael Bigelow Dixon and Joel A. Smith edited *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*, which is a collection of essays about Bogart's directing style and the Viewpoints method, one of which Landau contributed, entitled "Source-Work, the Viewpoints and Composition: What Are They?" This essay primarily describes the Viewpoints, and overall the book focuses on Bogart. Landau and Bogart are currently completing a book which Landau describes as a practical guide for using the Viewpoints in rehearsal (Personal Interview). Outside of these documents, there are no full-length studies of Landau's work. Information about her to date has consisted of newspaper and magazine articles and interviews. Documentation of her work is not widely available: only one of her original scripts has been published (1969), and only two of her musical productions, *Floyd Collins* and *Myths and Hymns* (later retitled *Saturn Returns*) have led to the release of a cast recording. Remarkably little has been written about this woman whose work is helping to shape the future of musical theater.
Not only has Landau’s work been largely overlooked, there is a severe dearth of serious writing on related subjects as well. Although there are numerous books on musical theater, they often function as promotional merchandise and are predominantly geared toward a general, non-scholarly audience. Of the serious writing which does exist, a good portion is chronologies and histories of musical theater. Foster Hirsch’s book about Hal Prince for the *Directors in Perspective* series is the only writing I’ve encountered which probes, in a scholarly way, the career of a director whose work has been primarily in musical theater. Analysis of musical writers’ writing is also markedly limited. Much of the writing targets the general aficionado and centers largely on the work of exceptionally well-known writers such as Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Neither do women in musical theater receive much scholarly attention, other than a few books which focus on women as performers. Therefore, not only will this thesis look at the important work of a vital woman in theater, it will also seek to begin to fill these other gaps in musical theater scholarship.

This thesis will focus on the relationship between Landau’s interest in the avant-garde and musical theater, demonstrating that these interests, which might seem incongruent, are in fact interrelated and that her work in one area influences her work in the other. The cross-pollination of the two arenas is visible both in her rehearsal process and in the end products. Closer examination of her projects will show that her

---

5 See, for example, *Cabaret: The Illustrated Book and Lyrics* (Newmarket: 1999) or Keith Richmond’s *The Musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber* (Virgin: 1995).

6 Stacy Wolf’s book, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*, while scholarly, is one of those which deals specifically with women performers.
experimental work has a musical sensibility and that her work in musical theater is quite experimental.

I have selected the works for which she has both director and writer credits as the field of inquiry, looking to *Stonewall: Night Variations, Space and 1969* for information about her experimental work and *Floyd Collins* and *Dream True* for her musical work. I will focus primarily on her work as a director, although I will also discuss the writing insofar as it relates to her work as a director, since as a director, she is in a position to shape the writing, and she is consistently attracted to working on particular types of writing. Primary source materials form the basis for my analysis, including audio and video recordings, playscripts and libretti, interviews, production photographs, production histories and reviews. For her nonmusical works, I will look primarily at her use of music, blocking and choreography, as well as her use of the Viewpoints method. I will then look at how she carries these tools over into her musical work, as well as at her shaping of these musicals as experimental works.

There are several terms which will be used throughout this thesis, whose meanings as used in this thesis should be clarified. The first of these is “avant-garde.” In the introduction to his book on the subject, Christopher Innes identifies the shared characteristics of the avant-garde as “a specific attitude to western society, a particular aesthetic approach, and the aim of transforming the nature of theatrical performance” (4). Among the artists he associates with the avant-garde are Alfred Jarry, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Ariane Mnouchkine and Robert Wilson. Bert Cardullo, co-editor of an anthology of avant-garde drama, echoes Innes’s description,
characterizing the avant-garde as work which does not reiterate or hone what already exists, instead creating a new way of expressing itself, countering “accepted social institutions and established artistic conventions” (5). He goes on to identify the avant-garde as the hallmark experimentation within modernism (12). However, his limitation of the term “avant-garde” to the period of modernism makes “avant-garde” a finite movement and negates the term’s contemporary use, in contrast to Innes’s belief that “the avant-garde has mounted a successful takeover of the traditional/establishment stage, making its principles the driving force of contemporary mainstream theatre” (222).

Richard Schechner’s description of the avant-garde represents a compromise between Cardullo and Innes’s divergence. He discusses two distinct factions within the avant-garde: what he terms the “historical avant-garde,” which falls in line with Cardullo’s modernism, delineated by theatrical movements such as surrealism, futurism, symbolism, expressionism, dada, poor theatre and environmental theatre, and what Schechner categorizes as “‘experimental’ performance”: “whatever is happening at the boundaries, in advance of the mainstream” (15). This second faction he views as experiments primarily in terms of form, with “the means of communicating, the places where the events took place, the persons employed as performers, the relationship to the audience” (17), citing the Living Theatre, the Bread and Puppet Theatre, and Teatro Campesino as examples. He describes theater as having three primary elements: text/narration, music/rhythm/movement and architecture/scenography. Where traditional
theater relies most heavily on text/narration, the experimental privileges the other two elements or at least gives them equal weight.\textsuperscript{7}

Schechner's definition, which predates Cardullo's and Innes's, is useful as a way of bringing the two together: the "historical avant-garde" represents Cardullo's definition, while the ""experimental' performance" is the theater which is attempting to transform the definition of performance. New experimentation is indeed declining, but previous experiments are now making their way into the mainstream theater, applying nonconventional ideas on a broader scale, and the incorporation of these nontraditional ideas into the most traditional of venues represents experimentation of a different sort. In keeping with Schechner's equation of the experimental and the avant-garde, this thesis will use these two terms interchangeably, incorporating aspects of Schechner's, Cardullo's and Innes's definitions: experimental or avant-garde theater is theater which explores nonconventional subject matter and/or nontraditional methods of performance, which utilizes nonlinear and/or non-narrative structures, thus falling outside the realm of the popular and traditional.\textsuperscript{8}

Defining exactly what constitutes a musical poses a more difficult task. This question has not often been taken up, largely because there has been an implied understanding of what that term means, and the border between "musical" and "play" has been fairly distinct within the cultural imaginary. This boundary has become harder to

\textsuperscript{7} At the time when he wrote \textit{The End of Humanism}, Schechner felt that experimentation was on the decline, but he noted that at the time he was writing, it was too soon to know for certain what direction experimental theater would take (18).

\textsuperscript{8} Fringe festivals, which highlight experimental plays, and the increasing incorporation of experimental work by theaters of status have moved some of these plays toward the mainstream, but they are still regarded as "other" and as such, I will continue to include them in this category.
distinguish in recent years. Works that are categorized as plays use music throughout the production, sometimes performed live and sometimes composed specifically for the piece, for example, a number of Shakespeare's plays, including *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, as well as Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*. On the other end of the spectrum, Lincoln Center's 2000 production of *Contact* was categorized as a musical, winning the Tony for Best New Musical. The piece uses dance and music throughout, but that music is neither original nor sung live, and as a result, *Contact*'s inclusion in this genre aroused a great deal of controversy in the theater community as to whether it should be considered a musical. In a similar situation to *Contact* are *Swing!* and *Riverdance*, both of which are primarily dance pieces but which were also eligible for Tony awards in the musical category (Hofler).

By and large, neither scholars nor theater practitioners attempt to define what constitutes a musical, including Richard Kislan, author of *The Musical*, who feels that "few phenomena avoid formula as resolutely as does the American musical theater tradition..." (vii). In the preface to *Musicals: An Illustrated Historical Overview*, Rüdiger Bering echoes Kislan's sentiment: "the musical has assumed so many different forms that an all-encompassing definition is nearly impossible" (7). Denny Martin Flinn also neglects to define the term in his well-known book *Musical!: A Grand Tour*. Robert Cohen is one of the few exceptions; in his introductory theater textbook, he defines the

---

9 When the Tony Administration Committee decided, before the 2000 nominations were announced, that *Contact* would be eligible in the Musical category, the president of the musicians union protested (Pacheco, "Tony Controversy;" Hofler) and according to *Newsday*'s Patrick Pacheco, Jack Goldstein resigned from the nominating committee over the decision. Although the Tony Committee says the decision was not specifically related to the *Contact* controversy, the month after the *Contact* controversy a new Tony category was created, Special Theatrical Event (Pacheco, "Tonys to Introduce").
musical as "a dramatic play with an integrated music score, often lavishly produced, whose characters both sing and dance" (Theatre: Brief Version 240), and he points to the "extensive music score, particularly [the] vocal score" as the defining characteristic of the musical (Theatre: Brief Version 39). Cohen's definition is misleading in suggesting that lavish production is often an essential ingredient; while there are indeed quite a number of lavishly produced musicals in the mainstream (such as Miss Saigon, Disney's Aida, and Phantom of the Opera, to name a few) there are also quite a number of smaller, simpler musicals being produced, not only off-Broadway and in regional theaters but even on Broadway (such as Triumph of Love, Godspell, and Romance/Romance on Broadway and The Fantasticks and Nunsense off-Broadway) and his definition dismisses these merely as the exception. Cohen's inclusion of dance as an essential element also excludes a number of shows with little or no dance which are unquestionably musicals, such as, for example, Stephen Sondheim's later musicals (e.g. Sunday in the Park with George and Into the Woods), in which, as musical theater scholar Judith Sebesta points out, dance "has been kept to a minimum: Carefully directed stage movement, punctuated by moments of actual 'dance,' is the norm" (24). Thus, Cohen's definition is a little too narrow. Instead, much of Cohen's discussion of the musical centers on subgenres, which are quite numerous: musical comedy, musical play, revue, concept musical, book musical, chamber musical, rock musical, megamusical; of course, these subgenres can

---

10 In the fifth edition of Theatre, Cohen has adjusted his definition somewhat: "a theatre that employs a full singing score, usually accompanied by an orchestra and often dance as well" (275). This new definition addresses the issue that dance is not absolutely essential, and while noting that a musical "usually" has an orchestra is perhaps a little too limiting, this definition is broader and more workable. However, it is still too vague to be useful in determining whether a show is a play or a musical.
overlap with shows falling into more than one category. Additionally, there has been an ongoing dialogue between composers (including Stephen Sondheim and Michael John La Chiusa) and critics (including The New York Times’s Terry Teachout) about the distinction between the musical and opera, but this sheds little light on the question of what distinguishes a musical from a play.  

Theater artists and scholars have declined to define the musical up to now, perhaps because until recently, the line between musical and nonmusical has been fairly clear. However, with that distinction becoming muddier, it will be useful to create one. Although, as Flinn and Bering suggest, creating one all-encompassing definition is virtually impossible, fashioning a definition which includes the greatest possible number of productions commonly considered to be musicals will be useful. As such, I will define a musical as: a work of theater which usually includes choreography and which always includes music (usually original music) which 1) is an integral part of the show, 2) advances the plot or illuminates a character’s thoughts and 3) is sung by the characters.

Like the definition of the musical, the distinction between choreography and blocking is also difficult to pinpoint. Most sources, if they choose to define “choreography” at all, equate it with dance. However, the term has been used to describe movement which is not dance in the strictest sense. The phrase “fight choreography” supports the use of the word “choreography” with a non-dance connotation, referring instead to the precision and timing of the movement which is used for stage combat.

---

11 Sondheim posits that venue determines genre: his Sweeney Todd, when performed on Broadway, is a musical, but when an opera company performs it, is an opera (“Musical or Opera”). LaChiusa insists that his Marie Christine is a musical (LaChiusa), while critic Terry Teachout strongly disagrees, categorizing it as opera due in large part to its serious subject matter; Teachout also describes Sondheim’s work as opera.
Rüdiger Bering’s definition of choreography—a “delineated sequence of steps and movements of a dance”—in his *Musicals: An Illustrated Historical Overview* provides a starting point for differentiating blocking and choreography (176). His definition points to the fact that movement which is choreographed is intended to occur in precisely the same way and at the same instant within every performance, and to endure for a very specific length of time. Choreography is usually set to music because music provides a structure for keeping the starting moment and the length of the movement consistent by its use of an audible beat; however, music is not an essential component of choreography. Blocking, on the other hand, has a starting position and an ending position and the exact timing, length, tempo and shape of the movement may vary from performance to performance. For instance, an actor who was blocked to cross from downstage center to a chair downstage right might be told, “Begin your cross at the beginning of the line, cross straight to the chair, and sit on the last word, crossing your right leg over your left.” An actor who was choreographed to do the same might be told, “It is eight beats from the beginning of the line to the end. Take one step on each beat, on beat four, hold your hand out in this manner, and arrive at the chair on beat seven, sit down on beat eight, and cross your right leg over your left on the next beat.” In both scenarios, the actor has accomplished the same movement over the same amount of time, but in the choreography example, the size and pace of the steps has been dictated and the exact moment for each movement to occur has been set. Therefore, the term “choreography” is not limited strictly to dance. The use of the term “choreography” to describe non-dance movement is reinforced by a member of Anne Bogart’s acting company, Ellen Lauren: “What Anne is
asking is that you build with your fellow players a physical life unrelated to the text; *choreography* with perhaps ten stops or moments that in and of themselves speak of a relationship*"* [my emphasis] (67). There is a distinction to be drawn between dance choreography and non-dance choreography as well. When I refer to non-dance choreography, I mean choreography which is primarily comprised of typical, everyday human movement, i.e. tapping a pencil. Comparatively, dance choreography is more abstract and less literal than non-dance choreography. Dance choreography usually requires the use of music, whereas non-dance choreography can be set to music, but music is not essential. As the following chapters will demonstrate, such distinctions are important to a discussion of Landau's work, since she guides the choreography, much of which is non-dance choreography, for many of her productions, both musical and nonmusical.

Setting the parameters of these definitions at the outset is crucial to a discussion of Landau's work because, as this thesis will explore in greater detail, Landau's work pushes the boundaries of these definitions. Indeed, it is the fact that her work stretches these definitions which connects her musical and experimental work. As her productions push the limits of these definitions, the forms start to overlap, so that her avant-garde shows are not as vastly different from her musical shows as one might expect. An overview of her work and career will begin to reveal how.
CHAPTER 2: Theatrical Background

One of Landau’s first professional directing jobs was a workshop of a piece called *In Twilite*, produced in the spring of 1989 by the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts (where she had met and first worked with Anne Bogart the previous year). For the project, she adapted four short stories by Chekhov: “The Butterfly,” “Difficult People,” “In the Ravine,” and “The Student.” While reviewer Kevin Kelly describes her work as “rudimentary” and “narrative,” and the project as boring, he notes the strength of Landau’s choices in placing the four stories within the whole.

Landau’s relationship with Bogart led to the opportunity to direct two projects at Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island while Bogart served as artistic director for the company. The first of these was Landau’s initial professional collaboration with fellow Yale alumnus Adam Guettel on a musical version of *A Christmas Carol* in 1989. Guettel provided the music and lyrics and Landau directed the project. The second project, a few months later, was Landau’s adaptation and direction of the DuMaurier novel *Rebecca*.

In 1991, Landau directed *The Almond Seller*, a play by Oana-Maria Hock at BACA in Brooklyn, New York City. Set just after the Romanian revolution, *The Almond Seller* follows a Romanian woman who emigrated to America and returns after the revolution as a photojournalist, only to discover that although the Communist dictator was replaced with a leader promising freedom, little has changed (Gussow). The fact that this production featured an original score (by Jeff Halpern) is not surprising in light of
Landau's professed interest in the use of music in her work, and its use sets a precedent for the incorporation of music into her nonmusicals, a proclivity which resurfaces throughout her career.

Landau's relationship with Bogart extended into a professional partnership after Bogart resigned from Trinity: the two co-wrote *American Vaudeville*, which was done at the Alley Theatre in Houston in 1992. *American Vaudeville*, a meditation on vaudeville in America, was conceived as the first of a series of three plays about American art forms, to be followed by *Marathon Dancing* in 1994 (about the titular marathon dancing) and *Birth of a Nation*, dealing with silent film¹ (Shteir). As described by Bogart, who acted as director for *American Vaudeville*, “The piece is not just about how [vaudeville] was, but about how we feel about how it was; it’s not just about bringing vaudeville back to life, but bringing a perspective on what it was” (qtd. in Shteir).

In September of the same year, Landau directed *Marisol*, written by José Rivera, at San Diego's La Jolla Playhouse. The title character in *Marisol* is a young Latina who is abandoned by her guardian angel when the angel leaves to join in a revolution against God. The play follows Marisol through the resultant apocalyptic world. When George C. Wolfe, who was originally slated to direct the production, declined the project to enable him to take on *Angels in America*, Landau was hired in his place.

*States of Independence*, a musical, marked her first collaboration with composer Ricky Ian Gordon, whose songs would later be featured on Audra McDonald’s 1998 recording *Way Back to Paradise*. *States of Independence* was produced at the American*

¹ *Marathon Dancing* and *Birth of a Nation* were written by Bogart alone.
Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia in 1993. The musical features a number of historical characters from the Revolutionary War in America, such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine and Betsy Ross. Landau describes the piece as probing “what it means to be an American, how the notion of ‘America’ came into being, what relationship I have to our past, and what our past actually is . . . other than the requisite facts I learned— and forgot—in high school” (Program Note).

Landau’s next project was a Charles L. Mee play, Orestes, produced by En Garde Arts, a New York City company which specializes in site-specific work. Orestes explores the aftermath of the events which conclude Aeschylus’ The Oresteia. Mee’s play features the characters from the trilogy—Aeschylus, Electra, Menelaus—but adds modern twists to the story, such as Helen’s discussion of skin-care products, which give the play a contemporary bent. The production took place at Penn Yards, a pier along the Hudson River, and Landau’s staging took full advantage of the steel remnants of the defunct Penn Yards buildings (Landau, Orestes).

Landau drew increased critical attention in 1994. Among her projects that year was the play 1969, which she wrote and directed at the Humana Festival alongside Tony Kushner’s Slavs!. In anticipation of her upcoming project with En Garde Arts (Stonewall: Night Variations) which would be set in 1969, Landau set out to explore the history and meaning of the year (Landau, Personal Interview). The piece was generated out of explorations with the actors in rehearsals: “We would spend each day either working on a section that was already on paper or we would generate raw material for a
section I hadn’t yet written” (1969 180). The final script featured a character, Howie, a product of this process, who Landau wrote into the Stonewall script as well.

Stonewall: Night Variations, Landau’s second production with En Garde Arts, drew considerable interest. As with all En Garde Arts pieces, Stonewall was a site-specific production. Set on a Manhattan pier, the project commemorated the 1969 Stonewall riots. Landau brought in her States of Independence collaborator, Ricky Ian Gordon, to compose original music for the production, which walked the border between the genres of musical and nonmusical. While there is some linear progression in the events of the play, it deals with a sprawling number of characters in a collage type of way.

Perhaps the most noted work Landau produced in 1994 was the first incarnation of the musical Floyd Collins, for which she again teamed up with composer Adam Guettel. It premiered at the American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia, and in 1996, was workshopped and then produced at Playwrights Horizons in New York. Floyd Collins marked for her a move toward more linear storytelling, as she puts it (Landau and Guettel, Williams Interview). The musical tells the story of a Kentucky caver who gets trapped underground, and the media circus that evolves above ground as they attempt to rescue him. Landau provided the book and collaborated with Guettel on the lyrics.

Landau returned to La Jolla in 1995 to direct another José Rivera work, Cloud Tectonics, which she subsequently directed again at Playwrights Horizons. Cloud Tectonics is a one-act play in which time slows down around the central character, Celestina del Sol, so that in the one night she and Anibal de la Luna spend together, two
years pass for the outside world. The play features realistic relationships and linear, narrative dialogue, but grapples with a concept that is not realistic in the strict sense of the word.

On hiatus from musical work, Landau’s next two directing projects were avant-garde pieces written by Charles L. Mee. The first, in 1996, was *The Trojan Women: A Love Story*, which was again produced by En Garde Arts. Based on Euripides’ *Trojan Women* and the story of Dido and Aeneas, the play deals with the Trojan War, blending the present into the past with contemporary references from Billie Holiday and Pink Floyd to Gershwin and Fred Astaire (Brantley, “Epic”). Being an En Garde Arts production, the project was staged outdoors, in East River Park. The second Mee play, *Time to Burn*, was produced by Steppenwolf in Chicago, where Landau became an ensemble member. *Time to Burn* was based on Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths*. Mee peppers the story, which is a statement on capitalism and poverty, with references to contemporary musical theater (Gershwin’s “Embraceable You”) and classic Greek theater (Aristophanes’ *The Birds*) (Istel, “Sinewy”). He transforms the foreshadowing of the Russian Revolution noted in Gorky’s original into a warning for contemporary American society (Henning, “Gorky’s”). The production garnered critical acclaim both for Mee’s script and Landau’s direction.

Steppenwolf also provided the first venue for the next play Landau wrote, *Space*. *Space* is an exploration of various conceptions of “space”—outer space, physical space and the space of the mind. Landau centers her exploration of the concept of “space” on a prominent psychiatrist who comes to reevaluate his long-held beliefs when three of his
patients claim to have been abducted by aliens, reporting symptoms which he himself
begins to experience. In late 1999, she directed productions of the play for the Mark
Taper Forum in Los Angeles and the Public in New York as well, revising the script as
she went. The productions of this play featured a great deal of sound and music—more
than five hundred sound cues and a character who sings (Landau, Personal Interview).

Space was not the only project she did at the Public—the company produced her
next collaboration with Adam Guettel, Saturn Returns, as well. Originally titled Myths &
Hymns, the project had initially been intended to be a full musical production, but Guettel
and Landau decided the piece worked better as a staged concert, the form which it finally
took (Hausam Interview). The piece is based around myths (such as Icarus) and hymns
(which Guettel encountered in a nineteenth-century Presbyterian hymnal). In Guettel’s
program note for its final form as a song cycle tied together by the titular theme of myths
and hymns (non-narrative by its very definition), he mentions that “‘Saturn returns’ refers
to the completion of Saturn’s 28-year cycle around the sun. It is thought to be, for many
of us, a time of profound reassessment” (Saturn Returns Program), and he goes on to
describe “[t]he myths and the hymns [. . .] as attempts to reach for what is missing”
(Landau and Guettel, Hausam Interview).

Landau next returned to Steppenwolf to direct another Mee play, The Berlin
Circle. Based on the Chinese fable that served as the subject of Brecht’s Caucasian
Chalk Circle, the play is set in 1989 Berlin, when the Berlin Wall fell. Three women
argue before an arbiter as to who should be allowed to keep a lost baby—his mother, or
one of the two women who rescued him when his parents left him behind. In Brecht’s
play, it is one peasant woman who cares for the boy when his parents abandon him, and
she ultimately keeps him; similarly, Mee gives custody of the boy to the two women who
rescued him. Landau employed Brechtian techniques in the production, placing actors
onstage as observers of the action and staging action in and above the audience (on a rope
bridge).

In 1999, Landau once again collaborated with composer Ricky Ian Gordon to
create the musical *Dream True* at the Vineyard Theatre in New York. *Dream True*,
which is based on George DuMaurier’s novel *Peter Ibbetson*, is the story of two boyhood
friends, separated in childhood, who reunite and find that they are able to connect through
their dreams, dreaming the same dreams simultaneously. Reviews describe the blocking
as “beautifully balletic” (Jacobson, “See You”), “arty [and] a studied surrealism”
(Isherwood, “Dream True”), and the show itself as “closer to modern opera, with its
avant-garde music and the tragic dimensions of its story” (Backalenick).

The next year, Steppenwolf produced its first musical, with Landau as the
director: a new musical called *The Ballad of Little Jo*, written by Mike Reid and Sarah
Schlesinger. Set in the late 1800s, the story centers on Jo Monaghan, a woman who
moves West after she gets pregnant out of wedlock. Although originally she was aiming
for California, she ends up living in Idaho and after being robbed and raped on the way,
disguises herself as a man for her own protection. As a “man,” she falls in love with a
miner, who happens to be engaged; the miner’s fiancée falls in love with Jo. Reviews
describe the piece as “earthy but hardly commercial” (Jones, “Earnest”), and Landau
herself acknowledges the musical’s unusual status: “I’m afraid that people who want a
good, old-fashioned musical will leave because people are getting beaten up and people who want a play where people get beaten up will walk out because people are singing” (qtd. in Coppens).

In the summer of 2001, Landau achieved her first Broadway credit, directing the revival of *Bells Are Ringing* (starring Faith Prince and Marc Kudisch), which arrived on Broadway in spring 2001. Of all Landau’s projects, *Bells* probably has had the most commercial appeal. This 1956 musical by Betty Comden and Adolf Green is the story of a telephone answering service operator who falls in love with one of the service’s clients. While recent years have seen acclaimed re-envisionings of older musicals such as *Cabaret, Music Man* and *Oklahoma!*; Landau’s production of *Bells Are Ringing* felt rather dated when I saw it on Broadway. This seemed to be largely due to the script itself, which although entertaining, was firmly rooted in its original time period both by the plot and the philosophical outlook. Landau’s faithfulness to the script and its intentions led to production choices such as leaving it set in its original time, which did little to give the production a more contemporary feel or relevance, instead creating more of a period feel.

Among Landau’s most recent projects were two for Steppenwolf. The first, which opened in February 2002, was an adaptation of *Maria Arndt*, a play from the early twentieth century by German playwright Elsa Bernstein. The title character in *Maria Arndt* is a mother who, while away with her teenage daughter, has an affair and becomes pregnant and must choose between running away from her loveless marriage with her lover, thus abandoning her daughter, or going back to her husband as her daughter wants
her to do, denying herself. Ultimately, she refuses both choices and kills herself instead.

The second Steppenwolf project was her direction of William Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life*, which opened in September 2002. *New York Times* critic Bruce Weber listed the production as one of the top ten most memorable productions of the year (“Theater: The Year In Review”), and *Variety*’s Chris Jones praises Landau’s direction of this “collection of character studies” (“Time”). Most recently, in January 2003, Landau revisited *Floyd Collins* in an encore production for Playwrights Horizons, the show’s original Off-Broadway producer, to inaugurate the company’s new theater with revivals of some its most memorable productions.

As evidenced by this overview of her oeuvre, Landau often works collaboratively, and with the same artists repeatedly. Her teaming with Adam Guettel started at Yale, and Landau says of their early collaboration: “[...] we really didn’t get along at first. We didn’t like each other. We respected each other, wanted desperately to work together, but we had issues about practically everything else” (“Nature”). Professionally, she and Guettel have done *Floyd Collins* together, as well as *Saturn Returns* and *A Christmas Carol*. Landau and Ricky Ian Gordon collaborated on *Dream True* and *States of Independence*, in addition to his writing the music for her original script *Stonewall: Night Variations*. Her planned collaboration with Jeanine Tesori rounds out her propensity for collaboration with the group of five composers critic David Patrick Stearns dubs “the smart set” (“Smart Set” 18). It is not only composers with whom Landau collaborates on multiple projects: she works repeatedly with other production staff including lighting designer Scott Zielinski (who has designed almost every production Landau has directed
since 1994), set designer James Schuette, and performers Theresa McCarthy (who has performed in at least seven of Landau's productions) and Christopher Innvar (*Floyd Collins* and *Maria Arndt*), to name only a couple.

As with many directors, Landau's repeated collaborations are likely due in part to having a good working relationship and a shared vocabulary with these collaborators. Directors are often particularly attracted to specific categories of theater as well, and certainly this is the case with Landau. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the three composers with whom she regularly collaborates work on musicals which fall into the "smart musical" category. She is especially drawn to these shows which push the form of the musical. Her particular attraction to the smart musical begins to make the tie between her simultaneous interest in musical theater and experimental work more evident, as this thesis will explore in more depth.

Landau's reliance on a collaborative model of directing rather than an auteur style is noteworthy as well. As Katherine Rodda explores at length in her dissertation, collaboration is at the heart of Landau's directing aesthetic. She views as collaborators not only the composer and the design team, but also the performers. A collaborative style is certainly unusual in musical theater, which is often more rigid due to the number of elements—music, dance, acting and sometimes extravagant technical elements—which must be accommodated during a rehearsal process the length of which is limited by budget considerations. Certainly her choice of collaborators has shaped her career, and perhaps the most influential of her collaborators is Anne Bogart, who emphasizes collaborative creation in her own work.
Landau uses Viewpoints, the system of working which is most often associated with Bogart, for all of her projects, conducting training at the beginning of the rehearsal process for any performers who have never used it before (Landau, Personal Interview). Not only does this method of working make Landau’s process unique, it also shapes her final product. In the primary book on the subject, Michael Bigelow Dixon and Joel A. Smith’s *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*, Landau contributed the essay articulating exactly what the Viewpoints are and how they are used. For purposes of being able to discuss Viewpoints in relation to Landau’s work, I will summarize that essay here. Landau points out that the way she and Bogart use this system in their work differs (Rodda Interview 306); therefore, the examples and descriptions of their method below will come from Landau’s words and work.

There are three aspects to this system: Source-work, the Viewpoints and Composition. Although the Viewpoints is one of the three parts of the system, the system as a whole is also often referred to as “Viewpoints.” The following paragraphs will break down the three areas individually, but throughout the rest of this thesis, “Viewpoints” will refer to this three-part system as a whole.

Source-work is the preparatory work at the beginning of rehearsal by which the collaborators get to know the source material and the piece itself, entering into and defining the world of the play. It can (but need not) include the Viewpoints and Composition. This time is the research period, when the actors will access information about the subject and the period. Visual research is also an important part of this process for Landau, who will cover the walls of the rehearsal room with hundreds of images
related to the idea of the show. Dramaturg Greg Gunter describes his preparation for Landau’s production of *Orestes*, for which he “literally covered a thirty-five foot section of wall with a collage of pictures” (49). He calls his collage a “visual interpretation of the text,” the purpose of which was to “create a past, present and future for each of the characters, with each relationship and each major action explored through images.[...] They provided the actors access into the characters in a way that hadn’t before seemed possible” (49-50).

The next aspect of the system, the Viewpoints, is “the set of names given to certain basic principles of movement” (Landau, “Source-Work” 20), the vocabulary for discussing what physically occurs on stage. When the book on Viewpoints was published six years ago, there were nine Viewpoints divided under the general headings of Time and Space. The Viewpoints of Time are Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response and Repetition. Tempo refers to the speed at which movement occurs; Duration, the length of time a movement or sequence of movements lasts; Kinesthetic Response, the timing of an involuntary reaction to the movement or sound of someone or something else; and Repetition, the repeating of something either of the self or someone/something outside the self. The Viewpoints of Space are Shape, Gesture, Architecture, Spatial Relationship and Topography. Shape refers to the “contour or outline the body (or bodies) make in space.” This shape can be round, angular or a combination of both, either moving or immobile, and can be the body alone, the body in relation to another body, or the body in relation to an object. Gesture is “movement involving a part or parts of the body” and can be Behavioral (literal, one that any person on the street might make)
or Expressive (abstract). Architecture is “the physical environment in which you are working and how awareness of it affects movement” with the subcategories of solid mass, texture, light, and color. Spatial Relationship refers to what traditionally might be called picturization—how far apart objects, particularly bodies, are onstage. Topography is concerned with the pattern, from an overhead view, that the movement onstage creates (Landau, “Source-Work” 20-23).

These nine Viewpoints function in a variety of ways. They act as what Landau refers to as “shorthand” for the performers. For example, if Landau wants to alter the stage picture, she could simply call out “spatial relationships” and the actors will shift their positions so that instead of being clumped in one area of the stage with another area empty, they will occupy more of the stage (Simas, Interview). Not only does this shorthand quickly communicate to the actors what needs to be adjusted, it also allows the actors to have input into how that adjustment is made.

In addition to allowing the actors to make the adjustments themselves, the Viewpoints are a way for the actors to create their own blocking instead of having it imposed by the director, which becomes a way to create the staging for a piece. Landau gives an example of an assignment she might create: “I send them into a room and I say, ‘You’re from a southern newspaper. Each of you has to come up with a walk, a shape, two behavioral gestures, and show them to me.’” She creates numerous such assignments for a project, her goal with each assignment being “to find a seed that will open up a sense of possibility.” To arrive at the staging for the production, she relies on the results
of these assignments: “We just start piecing them together. It’s truly just cut and paste” (Personal Interview).

The nine Viewpoints can also be used to train the actor, reminding him to be aware of all of the specific components of movement so that his movement choices can become more precise. They also require a greater awareness of fellow performers, helping performers to listen and respond to one another, not only in direct conversation but also when onstage at the same time. For example, in Maria Arndt, during a scene change which the characters were blocked to perform, two women closed two doors on stage simultaneously. They could not see one another, nor did they rely on a cue light or predetermined point in the scene change music to assist them, yet the doors were always closed together. Landau attributed the women’s ability to do so to Viewpoints, to their ability to “listen through your back” and be aware of one another onstage even when they could not see each other (Personal Interview). Katherine Rodda gives another example from a Viewpoints workshop run by Bogart: “One person was to initiate a jump, and the whole group had to jump at the same time, leading us to a unison movement. […] If one person tried to force the rest of the group by signaling in some way, Bogart singled him or her out, steadfastly maintaining that the goal of this exercise was to work as a democratic ensemble” (43).

Composition refers to the creation of a work by the company collaboratively. The company will create short improvised pieces based on specific parameters given by the director. They usually have a limited amount of time to do so, forcing their work to be
guided by intuition rather than spontaneity. Landau gives the following example of a hypothetical composition assignment:

Divide into groups of five. Each group will create a 6 minute piece which is an expression of a "Chekhovian" world.

The piece should be in three parts, each with a clear beginning and end, and each separated by a device (a blackout, a voice-over, a bell, etc.). The three parts are titled:
1) The way things look in this world
2) The way things sound in this world
3) The way people are in this world

You must include in your Composition piece:
- All the Viewpoints.
- A setting (somewhere in this building) which is the perfect architectural environment for your piece.
- A clear role for the audience (Are we voyeurs? Judges? Historical archaeologists? Etc.).
- A Revelation of Space (for example, the curtain rises and we see the stage, or a door opens and we see endless corridors behind it).
- A Revelation of Object (for example, someone opens a box and there is a gun inside it).
- A Surprise Entrance.
- Music from an Unexpected Source (for example, the doctor opens his medical bag and the aria of an operatic soprano emanates from inside it).
- 15 Seconds of Simultaneous Unison Action.
- Broken Expectation.
- A Staged Accident.
- Two Uses of Extreme Contrast (loud/quiet, fast/slow, dark/bright, violent/gentle, still/chaotic, etc.).
- The Objects:
  - A gun
  - A cigarette
  - Playing cards
  - A tea cup
  - Fire in any form
- The Sounds:
  - A clock chiming
  - Birds chirping
  - Someone singing offstage
  - Silverware clinking
- The Actions:
  - Tripping over something
  - An embrace
A slap
Whispering
“Laughing through tears”
- The only text you can use is:
  I was so happy.
  Do you remember?
  Whatever do you think has come over her (him) today?
  Two hundred years from now, I wonder if human kind will still be suffering?
  My boot.
  Do you hear the wind?
  We must go on living.
  We must work.

You have twenty minutes to make your piece. Go. (Landau, “Source-Work” 28-30)

Numerous such assignments can be given. The director then sifts through the Compositions to create the final work. Landau often uses these as inspiration for her writing, having the actors “create their own materials, which I steal, edit, revise, shape” (Landau, Rodda Interview 299).

An important feature of this three-faceted process is its reliance on collaboration, on making the actor part of the process instead of a marionette at the mercy of the auteur director. Theresa McCarthy, a performer who frequently works with Landau, describes the effect of Landau’s use of Viewpoints: “She has a way of letting you think you’ve come up with everything yourself so it feels really good and right and the commitment is that much stronger because it really feels organic and like it’s from you” (Interview).

Rick Simas, who assistant directed the San Diego production of Floyd Collins, noted the same thing about Landau’s use of Viewpoints there: “Rather than coming in and saying, ‘This is what we did. This is what you do,’ she gave them [the actors] so much ownership” (Interview).
One of the main strengths of the Viewpoints system as Landau sees it is that “[...] it’s unquestionably true that what those twenty people come up with in a room is far more intricate and complex and detailed than anything I can imagine, sitting alone, in my little brain” (Rodda Interview 300). She also notes that Viewpoints provided a vocabulary for ideas which she already knew and used (Landau, “Source-Work” 16).

Katherine Rodda, having observed a rehearsal of Landau’s San Diego production of Floyd Collins, points to another benefit of using Viewpoints in rehearsal: relying on Viewpoints as a means of exploring character and getting into the world of the play, the actors were able to do detailed character and relationship work during the first week of rehearsal, before they were off book (133). This allowed them more time to acquaint themselves with their characters, and allowed deeper exploration early on than a more traditional text-based model of rehearsal would.

Landau used Viewpoints to write 1969, Space and a project at American Repertory Theatre, Modern Fears. She and Guettel also based the book writing for Floyd Collins on work which came out of Viewpoints during the workshop of the piece (Landau, Rodda Interview 299). She confirms that she will no doubt continue to use it for her future projects, both musical and nonmusical: “I would have thought a few years ago if someone had asked me, yeah, I might grow out of Viewpoints, and the opposite has happened. I have become increasingly convinced that it is a portal for magic” (Personal Interview).

Certainly several common threads run through the list of Landau’s productions. Viewpoints serves as a point of commonality for many of her shows, in some instances as
a means of generating a script and always as a method of working. Viewpoints is an essential part of the process for both her musical and nonmusical productions, a method that works for these two very different forms. Landau's use of the same technique for both forms begins to demonstrate the link between the two areas in her career, as the following chapters will discuss in more depth.

Landau has authored three non-musical scripts: 1969, Stonewall: Night Variations and Space, and the creative processes for each of the three epitomize her interest in collaborative creation and the use of Viewpoints. Moreover, all three of these scripts evidence her avant-garde leanings in a variety of ways, as this chapter will explore. She employs experimental techniques with all three shows, but they all demonstrate a link to her musical theater work not only in the methods she uses in producing them, but also in her conception of the scripts.

Landau authored 1969 using Viewpoints for the 1994 Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Producing Director Jon Jory asked her to develop a piece collaboratively for the festival, and in four weeks of rehearsal time, the group had arrived at the script anthologized with the other Humana Festival scripts for that year (Landau, 1969 180). As mentioned before, Landau had already agreed to create a project for En Garde Arts surrounding the Stonewall riots, and she wanted to investigate more about the year they happened, leading her to choose “1969” as the idea she wanted to explore using Composition and Viewpoints. The production at the Humana Festival was the only time this script has been performed (Landau, Rodda Interview).

Alternatively titled “Howie Takes a Trip,” the play centers on a homosexual teen named Howie Raskin (played by Barney O’Hanlon, a member of Anne Bogart’s SITI company) who is ostracized by his high school classmates for his sexual orientation. The six other characters represent high school archetypes: Robbie, Howie’s childhood friend, who is extremely well-rounded; the popular athlete Curtis, who happens to also be
African-American; Stef, the booksmart girl; Roz, the feminist activist; Logo, who represents what we might term a “stoner” today; and Royce, their ultra-liberal teacher. Issues of the day pepper the script: Howie is contending with his father who wants him to enlist in the Marines and go off to Vietnam; the Black Panthers appear (through the character of William P. Williams), promoting “black pride” and attempting to convince Curtis to speak out with them; Roz is making a stand for women’s rights; drug use, including marijuana and LSD, comes into play; and blatant homophobia is evidenced by the play’s events.

There is a sense of linear progression in the play’s events; however, the play is not strictly linear, with fantasies and hallucinations interspersed with the events. Most of the scenes are set in or around the high school. The play begins with a yearbook-style introduction of the six students, and segues into Curtis and Logo offering Howie drugs. Howie initially refuses, but a few scenes later, after having hidden in the shower stall after gym class and having to listen to the other guys make homophobic jokes, Howie seeks out Logo to get drugs from him. He goes on several drug-induced trips, the first ones euphoric but the final one nightmarish. In the meantime, Curtis grapples with whether he should join with and speak out for the Black Students Alliance, while Roz takes a political stance at assembly and is suspended from school. Royce takes a few students to the movies, after which he walks Howie home (guiding Howie on a “political trip” where he sees famous dead political figures including JFK and Malcolm X on the way). Howie falls in love with Royce and writes him a love letter, which Robbie and Curtis find. They report the letter to the school board, who fires Royce for his supposed
perversion, i.e. homosexuality. Roz and Howie run away to New York City, Howie burning his draft card and continuing on to New York when Roz decides to return home for graduation, and the play ends with Howie’s arrival in Greenwich Village.

References to popular culture pervade the play. Most prolific are the numerous *Wizard of Oz* allusions. Howie likes the movie, and he identifies with the character of Dorothy, while Robbie identifies with the Tin Man; there are also numerous references to the yellow brick road and to New York as Oz. Janis Joplin also figures prominently in the piece, with segments of Dick Cavett interviewing her played at various points during the show. In addition to several Joplin songs, other music of the period, such as Jimi Hendrix’s “Little Wing” and the Mamas and the Papas’s “Dream a Little Dream,” serves as the soundtrack to the play.

As mentioned before, Landau created this play using Viewpoints and Composition (Landau, Personal Interview). She did so by creating numerous “assignments” for the actors that they used to create short pieces which they presented to her and each other. Not every Composition created would be included in the final script, but rather, the actors presented her with a panoply of choices from which she culled and edited the scenes which ended up in the script. The script is filled with examples of work which appears to have grown out of Composition assignments. One example is the opening sequence of the play in which the characters are introduced by voiceovers which give yearbook blurbs about each one; take, for example, the voiceover which introduces Robbie: “Name: Robert Parerra/Nickname: Robbie Bobbie Baby/Activities: Varsity Football, Varsity Track, Yearbook Staff, Photography Editor, Newspaper/Voted As:
Most Well-Rounded" (182). A Composition assignment which Landau often uses is to have the actors create an autobiographical snippet in some form for their characters, and in this case, the biography came in the form of a yearbook blurb, since they were dealing with high school students. Another example is the scene called “Howie’s Poem.” As the audience hears a voiceover in Howie’s voice of a poem Howie has written, six “snapshots” (tableaus, perhaps with some movement) which encapsulate Robbie and Howie’s relationship at six different stages are enacted by the characters on stage. This again resembles a typical Composition assignment Landau might give. Certainly this method of playwriting is experimental in the sense that it is nontraditional; additionally, basing the writing on varied compositions which relate in theme tends to cause the structure of the play to be nonlinear.

While there is a linear thrust to the play overall, the forward movement of the story is interrupted by the fantastical sequences of Howie’s trips and his dream. Although the scenes are in chronological order, the events of the play are not linked in a tight cause-and-effect chain. The more abstract nature of some of the scenes, such as “Howie’s Poem” which the previous paragraph describes, is largely responsible for the episodic feel of the piece, as are the choppy transitions between scenes.

Of note in the production is its reliance on sound, which is plentiful throughout the script. Landau points out in her introduction to the text: “The written text of 1969 represents just one layer of several that actually make up the piece. There are two other ‘tracks’ that are as important as the spoken one indicated here: the images (staging) and the sound score (music)” (180-181). Music plays a crucial role in every production for
Landau, and she claims it is one of the media with which she feels most comfortable working. In the production, she included both live and recorded music, with Logo playing guitar, and there was a large number of sound cues, with music in almost every scene. Landau notes: “1969 was scored like a piece of music—the aural world was continual and seamless” (1969 181). The use of sound in this play evidences the musical sensibility she brings to her work as well as her interest in using music theatrically.

Landau refers to her staging of the production as choreography—“the physical choreography was complex” (1969 181), and when comparing it later to her production of the musical Floyd Collins, asserted that “1969 was much more choreographic [...] than Floyd Collins” (Rodda Interview 306). Moments which call for choreography abound in the text: during “Howie Monologue 1,” “the other boys dance à la girl group but laid back and cool” (185); in the following scene, “The others enter and do a unison dance to TIME HAS COME TODAY by the Chambers Brothers. It is a dance of conformity excluding Howie” (186); during Howie’s first trip:

(IN A GADDA DA VIDA: a red rubber ball rolls across the stage.
Howie and Logo dance. Howie takes off his shirt. The girls appear from inside the lockers, dressed in green and holding green tambourines.

FEELIN’ GROOVY: a red rubber ball rolls across the stage. Curtis and Robbie enter, wearing bright red jogging suits and exercising. RED RUBBER BALL: all dance.)

LOGO: Holy holy holy!
(GREEN TAMBOURINE: they all do Yoga. Royce enters, blows smoke from his mouth and ears. Exits.

RED RUBBER BALL: more balls roll across.

IT'S GETTING BETTER: Stefanie plays Mama Cass and sings to Howie. Howie looks up into a cascade of red poppies which fall on him. He twirls in space [...] (196).

These are just a few examples of the myriad points in the play which require choreography. The choreography was generated by Landau and by the actors, again using Viewpoints.¹ Like her use of music, her use of choreography in this play is a link to her interest in the musical and stands as an example of her incorporation of musical theater elements into her nonmusical productions.

1969’s intermingling of choreography and a great deal of popular music with an ensemble-generated text, and the nonlinear structure of the script, position it as different from contemporaneous mainstream theater of 1994. As such, the piece certainly reflects an experimental aesthetic. This is reinforced by the fact that no one has attempted another production of the play, largely because its aesthetic is so different. According to Landau, “A number of people told me they were interested in [directing] 1969, but then ultimately when they looked at the text they said, ‘I can’t do this. I don’t know how to read a text like this’” (Rodda Interview 302).

One can see evidence in this production of 1969 of Landau’s interest in musical theater, in terms of her reliance on music and her choreographic staging. Her musical

¹ This assertion is based on Landau’s statement in my interview of her that until 2001, she never worked with a choreographer. Additionally, no choreographer is credited in the production staff list.
theater sensibility informs the production as a whole, as she applies these aspects which
are quintessential elements of musical theater to her work on this avant-garde play. *1969*
is not the only example of this, as close examination of her production of *Stonewall: Night Variations* will reveal.

Landau developed *Stonewall: Night Variations* for En Garde Arts, for whom she had already directed *Orestes*, in 1994. As is all of En Garde’s work, the piece was designed to be site-specific, performed on a pier in Manhattan. Landau got the idea for the piece when, on the day she was meeting with En Garde producer Anne Hamburger to discuss creating a project for the company, she found herself in the middle of New York City’s gay pride parade. In thinking about how and why the parade had come into existence, Landau became interested in the Stonewall riots, acknowledged as a watershed event for gay rights. Landau and her dramaturg, Gregory Gunter, researched the riots and the years leading up to them, interviewing people who had been present at the riots and who were active in the gay community at that time. According to the program note, because there was little television or film coverage of the riots and the many accounts of the evening which Landau and Gunter encountered conflicted, Landau attempted to “invoke the spirit of the event” rather than show it “journalistically” (Stonewall: Night Variations – Clippings/Programs).

Landau collaborated on the piece with composer Ricky Ian Gordon, with whom she previously had worked on the musical *States of Independence* and with whom she would later write the musical *Dream True*. The cast of sixty-plus featured Theresa
McCarthy (a frequent Landau performer), Bruce Katzman, Joseph Mahan, Steven Skybell, Barney O’Hanlon, Sharon Scruggs, Michael Malone, Tyrone Mitchell Henderson, Camilia Sanes and Andrea Darriau in the main roles. The work incorporated extensive use of production elements such as lighting (done by Brian Aldous), sound (designed by John Gromada and Chris Todd) and film (done by Jennie Livingston, director of *Paris is Burning*). Scene design was equally crucial—James Schuette had to find a way to make the sprawling site of the abandoned pier a usable acting space.

The production took place at Pier 25 in lower Manhattan. The audience entered at dusk into a parking lot set up with stations like carnival booths, with actors at each station. After walking the booths, the audience was directed toward the main acting area, where there was a concrete two-story structure which had once served as a driving range. The driving range structure, representing the Stonewall Inn, acted as a backdrop to the main playing area. Although it had a roof, the structure had no walls, and visible just beyond it were a green and then the Hudson River. Risers seating about 400 audience members were arranged in a proscenium configuration in front of the sand-covered playing area, the perimeter of which was lined with police crime scene tape. The main part of the play, which took place in this playing area, began once darkness had fallen. Banners which hung down from the driving range were used as a surface onto which film clips were projected throughout the production.

As with *1969*, the sound for the production was complex and extensive. There was sound throughout virtually the entire production, lending greater weight to moments of silence, while shaping the moments which did have sound. The sound score for the
piece included original music by Gordon, familiar music (for example, “Come out, come out, wherever you are,” from *The Wizard of Oz* and “Summertime” by the Gershwins), and environmental sound (including discordant tones and practical sound cues such as police sirens). The production blended recorded sound cues with live singing (accompanied by recorded instrumental parts); while the songs were performed by characters in the piece, many of the characters did not sing. Some of Gordon’s music was not composed specifically for this production (e.g. “Prayer,” which was one of a series of Langston Hughes poems he set to music before *Stonewall*), and Landau provided lyrics for some of the songs he composed. Each of the pre-show carnival stations had its own individual music or sound as well. The fact that the production took place outdoors with a large playing area necessitated the use of a sound system, which allowed latitude in playing with volume and effects such as reverberation.

The activity at the carnival booths acted as a prologue to the work. There were a number of stations with short scenes involving characters who appeared in the play, each scene “looped at roughly one minute,” as Landau specifies in the script. Some are monologues while others are two-person scenes. The booths have the feel of carnival sideshows, with the audience invited to gape at the “freaks” (here gays and lesbians instead of the traditional Siamese twins and bearded lady) on display. The characters are “penned in” by the walls of their booths, the effect of which is to keep the “freaks” locked up. This prologue also helps to introduce some of the main characters in the play and their relationships. A yellow brick road of sorts on the ground guides the audience through the sideshows, suggesting an order in which to view them, but the audience is
free to follow or ignore this yellow brick road, and due to proximity of the stations to one another, they may see sections of more than one sideshow at once (McCarthy).

The main part of the play follows a number of characters on the first day of the 1969 Stonewall riots, focusing primarily on five relationships. Matt Branfield (Skybell), a Vietnam vet discharged for his sexual orientation, and Howie Raskin (the character from *1969*, played by O’Hanlon), a new-to-New York Midwesterner, meet at the bar that night and a romance sparks between them. Trish Phillips (McCarthy), a student photographer who happens to be a lesbian, is meeting Eliot Shomberg (Katzman), a middle-aged man who has gone through aversion therapy to cure him of his homosexuality, in front of the Stonewall Inn to photograph his Judy Garland memorabilia collection. Angelina “Chuck” Romano (Scruggs), a cross-dressing lesbian, is pursuing Geneva (Sanes), who is in a relationship with Ultra Violet (played by Stefanie Zadravec). Finally, there are Francis Sinclair (Malone), the transvestite hustler who has had an ongoing relationship with a policeman, and Wanda N. Price (Henderson), a black drag queen. Andy Warhol (Darriau) also appears sporadically throughout to share his observations. As mentioned before, the cast is quite sizeable, numbering sixty-plus. In addition to the long list of named characters, Landau has a chorus of angels in flowing white robes who are seen on the green while the audience is entering and remain onstage throughout the performance.

Described in most reviews as “kaleidoscopic,” *Stonewall* is a collage of scenes, shifting from one of the five main storylines to another every few minutes. The framing device is the carnival barker from the pre-show (Mahan), who stops the action and acts as
a narrator at times. All of the scenes are set inside of or in the immediate vicinity of the Stonewall Inn, where the riots took place. Each of the five scenarios is not a self-contained whole; rather, the characters from the various storylines interact with each other, and there are characters who are not specific to one particular storyline. The play follows these characters for the hour before the riot and culminates with the riot itself, which is played five times. Each subsequent playing of the riot shifts to the perspective of a different character or set of characters from one of the storylines, building on the previous retelling. The play ends with a recitation of a long list of famous figures who were reputedly homosexual.

Like 1969, Stonewall abounds with allusions to popular culture. The play draws heavily on references to The Wizard of Oz, using it as a metaphor for the homosexual experience, with phrases such as “come out, come out, wherever you are” taking on new meaning as encouragement to “come out of the closet,” and the world of the play being termed “The Village of Odds, not Oz, but O-D-D-S” (5). The appearance of cultural icon Andy Warhol is another example of incorporation of popular culture into the production. The inclusion of music such as the Gershwins’ “Summertime” and the Isley Brothers’ “It’s Your Thing” is yet another example.

Stonewall clearly falls into the category of avant-garde. Its content is undoubtedly one reason for this. With mimed sex and men in the fellatio position, its portrayal of homosexuality and gay relationships is unflinchingly candid. Stonewall’s refusal to “sugarcoat” that portrayal is still quite unusual in mainstream theater, with plays such as the contemporaneous Angels in America representing the exception and not
the rule, and theater which deals with gay issues continuing to be sidelined as alternative theater. In dealing with unconventional subject matter, and dealing with it in such an uncompromising way, Stonewall is positioned outside the mainstream. This positioning outside the mainstream is further reinforced by its performance as site-specific work; not only is it physically outside the mainstream, being located downtown instead of in the theater district, it is also separated from the mainstream by its use of a nontraditional performance venue. Its methods of performance are also nontraditional: keeping all of the sixty-plus performers onstage at all times is one example of this. The carnivalesque prologue through which the audience enters is another example. While other productions have used pre-show performance to prepare an audience, the multiple booths which this audience visits and the simultaneous looping scenes are certainly atypical. Finally, the piece is nonlinear: the intention that the pre-show scenes be looped with the audience able to experience them in differing order creates a non-linear structure for the opening section. While the opening pieces do tie together, each scene is so short that there is no narrative structure within most of them. The main part of the play, with its collage structure, is also somewhat non-linear: as each narrative thread develops, it is interrupted and we move to the next piece.

One aspect of Stonewall which is particularly intriguing is its use of music. As mentioned before, there is music or sound throughout most of the performance, making the moments with no sound important, and shaping the moments that do have sound by the qualities of the sound that is being used. The live singing in the production and the

---

2 Its venue is nontraditional because not only does it not take place in a theater, its choice of location is not used as a theater at any other time, but rather is a found space around which they create the work.
amount of music make it very much like a musical. In fact, reviews differ on how they categorize the piece—"music theatre spectacle," "musical work," "play"—if they attempt to categorize it all, which most do not.\textsuperscript{3} When asked, both Landau and Theresa McCarthy, who performed in the production, said they would categorize the piece as a play with music (Landau, Personal Interview; McCarthy). Like them, I maintain that the piece is a play and not a musical in that the songs do not advance the plot or illuminate the characters' thoughts, a point with which Landau agrees (Personal Interview), and because so many of the characters do not sing. Perhaps the most important reason is that music is not the key feature of the production; rather it is one of several production elements of which the production makes extensive use. As in 1969, Landau’s use of sound is in keeping with her interest in musical theater and makes the connection between her avant-garde work and musical theater work quite understandable.

Landau’s sensibility as director of this production is very musical. The movement of the white-robed figures at the beginning is very precise and stylized, movement which is choreography rather than blocking. The ending sequence which shows the actual riot from five different views is also quite choreographed. Movement is slowed down to be shown with more precision, and each character performs their movement, in sync with the other characters, each time through the riot, with the focus being redirected by lighting each time. The movement in the riot is choreography because of its repetition and synchronicity.

\textsuperscript{3} Of eleven critics, only four categorize it: Evans, Greene, Burke and Goldman.
Landau's use of space in this production is particularly noteworthy, using the environment within which the production takes place creatively and in unusual ways. Not only does she use both levels of the driving range structure, but she blocks Ultra Violet and Geneva onto the top of the structure (above the roof) at the end of the piece. Her decision to use the green beyond the structure gives the stage picture depth and landscaping, as does the visibility of the river beyond. Not only does she use the obvious playing areas in ways that allow her to create interesting compositions, she also uses all of the space available to her quite imaginatively. Before the audience arrives, she buries a character up to his neck in the sand in the main playing area, to have him emerge when Francis and the Barker sing "come out, come out, wherever you are." There is a building located to the audience's right, on the other side of a fence. At the beginning of the play, Landau blocks two performers onto the roof of this building and has two characters as police accost them for being up there. She uses the roof again during the riot at the end of the play as she develops the chaos onstage. Use of the parking lot to create a pre-show environment for the audience to walk through is also quite interesting—no useable space is left unappropriated.

Landau's blocking incorporates a great deal of variety in levels and movement. For example, in the carnival booths, Howie, who is virtually boxed in, uses several levels and a variety of movement even within the limited amount of space. The riot at the end has characters at a number of levels—on top of the driving range, on the second floor of the driving range, standing on the ground, bent over, kneeling, laying on the ground—and in several planes, helping to reinforce the chaos which is occurring onstage. However,
Landau does not block movement indiscriminately; she is not afraid to use stillness when it is called for. An example is Eliot’s scene in the prologue—he barely moves during his scene, in which a phone call from Trish about photographing his Judy Garland memorabilia has him stricken with fear.

Landau is talented at creating stage compositions and demonstrates her skill with them in this production. One way she does this is by using performers to create the environment. In addition to using them for the carnival pre-show, she positions performers in the main acting area in character to be discovered by the audience members upon their entering. Chuck lurks upstage by the driving range waiting, while in a different area of the stage, as mentioned before, another character is buried in the sand onstage. In the play itself, she has all the characters remain onstage regardless of whether they are involved in the action at that moment, relying on her lighting designer to direct the audience’s attention appropriately. In this way, the performers become part of the scenery, the environment. Instead of small, focused scenes, the production becomes a landscape with focus directed toward a particular area within the landscape at any given point in time by lighting or movement. Not all critics found this effective, however; Ben Brantley of The New York Times notes, “So much is happening on every part of the immense set that when the actual rebellion occurs, its impact is oddly diffused” (“Stonewall”).

---

4 This was my impression from watching the videotaped production, which I relayed to Landau, who confirmed that I was correct, and that an audience watching the live production would likely have experienced it in this way.
Although Landau set out to connect with the audience (McCarthy), she has a difficult time doing so. The visual imagery is striking, and the idea of the piece is interesting: certainly a feeling or a general idea about the Stonewall riots was conveyed by this production. However, the number of storylines, the number of characters and the fact that everyone stays onstage the entire time makes it difficult to keep the stories straight and follow the narrative threads. These issues also make it difficult for the audience to develop a relationship with particular characters or feel empathy for them, because the focus is constantly shifting. This is compounded by the fact that the characters are not well-developed, primarily because there is no time to do so with the number of stories and characters. Cathy Burke of the *New York Post* summarizes: “The energy makes you woozy. It’s just too much to look at, listen to, absorb and appreciate.” *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby adds that the performance area also affects the audience’s connection to the piece: “The space is simply too big and too spread out to invite much in the way of emotional involvement.”

Landau’s use of techniques which lean toward the avant-garde also inhibit the degree to which she can communicate with her audience. She attempts to challenge audience expectations in a number of ways throughout the production. The production begins with one such instance, greeting the audience with a carnival barker as they enter and having them pass by side show booths before they get to the performance space. The fact that the performance space is environmental, even though it is laid out in the traditional audience/actor configuration, is another way in which audience expectations are challenged. *Stonewall* also challenges the audience with the way its subject is
portrayed. The play does not just handle issues of the treatment of homosexuals, but approaches them from an activist sensibility, as evidenced by the play's candor. The play's political statement is quite clear: the character Billie says, "Because there has been an increase in acceptance of gay people, those without historical perspective imagine this acceptance to be permanent and likely to increase with time. Unfortunately, tolerance is like the river tide. It reaches a high watermark and then can recede out of sight again" (50), a line which Landau points to as the meaning of the piece (Istel, "Queen"). While gay characters have been portrayed in the mainstream, bringing gay activism to the forefront of a piece breaks with established audience expectations.

Landau conceived of the piece as an event, calling the script for *Stonewall* a skeleton for production. "I never wrote them [1969 and *Stonewall*] with an attempt to design something that could be read as a play, performed in a theater space. They were more kind of sketches but with words, again, big messes of blueprints" (Personal Interview). It is precisely this sensibility which leads to her extensive use of sound, particularly music, and choreography in the production, again a bridge between her avant-garde work and her musical theater work. Her use of space and her stage compositions carry over into her work with musicals, making her musical blocking striking and averting the need for her to use a choreographer. As the next section will demonstrate, *Space* further confirms these ideas.

Landau first began writing *Space* in 1994 with a commission from the American Repertory Theatre (ART). ART gave her the opportunity to work in a workshop setting
with twelve actors for a month (Weiss). She used Viewpoints and Composition exercises to generate material, which she then crafted into the production script. As with 1969, Landau came into rehearsal with the ART group and said “I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I want to do a piece around this one word and that word is space” (Personal Interview).

There have been three major productions of the script, all directed by Landau. The first was at Steppenwolf in Chicago in December 1997. The cast for the Chicago production included Tom Irwin as Allan and Amy Morton as Bemadette. The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles next produced the play almost two years later, in October 1999, with a completely different cast than the Steppenwolf production, featuring Francis Guinan as Allan and Shannon Cochran as Bernadette. Following the run in Los Angeles, Landau directed another production of the play at New York’s Public Theater in December 1999. This production brought three of the original Chicago cast members back to reprise their roles: Tom Irwin, Amy Morton and Daniel Smith (who had played Bernadette’s assistant Carl). Frequent Landau performer Theresa McCarthy also appeared in this New York production. McCarthy was not the only one of Landau’s frequent collaborators who worked on the script: set designer James Schuette, lighting designer Scott Zielinski, and sound designers Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen designed all three productions. Additionally, Landau used a projection designer, since there was a large number of projections used in all three productions.

The inspiration for the play was Harvard psychiatrist John Mack, who became an object of ridicule when he published a book about alien abduction in which he expressed
his belief that there might indeed be some truth to the phenomenon. The main character in the play, Dr. Allan Saunders, is modeled on Mack. A renowned psychiatrist, Allan has three patients all claiming to be alien abductees: Devin Gee (renamed Devin McFallen for the later two productions), Joan Bailey, and Taj Mahal, each complaining of the same symptoms (including headaches and nosebleeds).\(^5\) Instead of dismissing their claims, as was his first inclination, Allan begins to take their allegations of abduction more seriously, something contrary to everything he has believed his whole life. Allan goes to the office of Dr. Bernadette Jump Cannon, an astronomer involved in researching whether life exists on other planets, to seek her assistance in trying to rule out alien abduction as a possible phenomenon. Bernadette and Allan form a romantic attachment, and she takes him to an observatory where they spend time observing and “listening” to space, because it is Bernadette’s belief that “Space is not empty. It’s teeming—listen. Space is a clamor-filled shell” (48). To reinforce this idea, a singer appears throughout the play to sing in otherworldly tones. The play ends with Bernadette, who has lupus, dying, and Allan’s patients each attributing their belief that they were abducted to some other psychological cause.

Landau describes the idea of this man allowing for the possibility of something which has always been impossible in his world view as central to the work, an idea which she has his character voice in the play: “And the work is asking me to reconsider

---

\(^5\) Throughout this section, unless otherwise noted, I will refer to the Chicago production, of which I saw a video recording, when discussing production and the script for the New York production, the only one available to me, when referring directly to the script.
everything I’ve ever believed in” (54). Reviews also point out that the play deals with the concept of space on three different levels—the space of the universe, the space of the mind and the space of intimacy, an idea which Allan voices in the script (101). The way that the play grapples with the theme of “space,” examining various contexts of the word simultaneously, is reminiscent of the collage-like feel of Stonewall. Some reviews fault the play for digressing into a trite love story, but with the space of intimacy as one of the incarnations of “space” the play explores, this objection discounts the variety of types of space Landau attempts to examine. The play leads the audience to think about the idea of space, what constitutes it, and why it exists, framing the exploration with the conception of space as outer space.

The script clearly has a narrative element to it, and the story does have a sense of progression. The structure of the script tends toward the fragmentary, however, interposing scenes with Allan’s patients among scenes with Bernadette and more fantastical scenes which feature Galileo, Darwin and Freud. The play also reminds the audience that questions of space become inextricably tied to issues of time as well, and Landau uses this issue in the structure of the piece, obscuring the lapse of time and disorienting the audience by making the script so fragmentary. She uses this fragmentation to play with physical space onstage; for example, in the scenes where Allan first meets his three patients, which are interspersed with scenes of his rehearsing a paper he is presenting, the scenes stop short as if they were paused, and jump to another scene, changing the space in which the scene is occurring by changing the scene.

6 The ideas of the three different kinds of space and the changing of one’s lifelong worldview are ones which numerous reviews and articles include.
Characteristically, Landau uses the physical space available to her very well and creates an interesting visual landscape for her audience in this production. Taking advantage of the cyclorama wall, she positions performers to be silhouetted against it at times, and she makes use of footlighting, with performers casting tall shadows onto the wall. Her stage picturization makes good use of levels. In one scene, for instance, she has Cannon kneeling, Saunders sitting, the Singer standing in an upstage doorway, and Galileo standing on a ladder.

Like Stonewall, the productions of Space relied heavily on use of the technical elements. Critic Joel Henning notes that “[the designers] bring an otherwise hopelessly abstract enterprise to life” (“Seasons”). The set featured a tall cyclorama-like upstage wall with a number of doors in it, which also served as a projection surface. Projections played an integral part in the production as well, with a designer dedicated specifically for them. Also as with Stonewall, sound and music run throughout virtually the entire production. Landau describes the sound for Space as “scored,” with more than five hundred sound cues (Personal Interview). She mentions that the sound in Space was so vital, she thought of it as a character. In fact, the number of characters in the piece was limited by budgetary constraints, so she cut a minor character between the workshop and rehearsals for the first production so that there would be enough money in the budget to pay a sound technician to be at every rehearsal, with the thought that “the sound character is very vital so we don’t need this other little one” (Personal Interview). There is a variety of types of sound, ranging from melodies to atonal ambient sounds, some electronic, some harsh, some sweet. Contrasting the use of constant sound in the
production, Landau also uses a full minute of complete silence in the last scene between Allan and Bernadette before Bernadette dies as a moment of peace, having them both simply sit and “listen to” and observe (outer) space (82).

Although categorization of *Space* as a play rather than a musical is more clear cut than with *Stonewall*, Landau again blurs the line between the two genres with this piece. Besides the music/sound throughout the performance, the production includes original music, and a performer onstage sang several songs live. In this case, however, there was only one singing character, and this character did not function in the primary storyline. Unlike *Stonewall*, reviews do categorize this show as a play. Landau herself agrees: “*Space* is a play, although there are songs in it, and it’s underscored from beginning to end. And I guess I think of music as one of the tools, one of the colors we have to paint with” (Rodda Interview 303). While *Space* is definitely a play, it uses an unusual amount of music and sound, rivaling the sound of a musical.

The fact that the play was produced at venues which, while they do experimental work, are not squarely outside the mainstream, stretches the categorization of *Space* as experimental, but it is indeed experimental. While regional theaters such as Steppenwolf, the Taper and the Public have a strong subscriber base and must include productions with commercial appeal in their seasons, they do also produce new and experimental works, so *Space*’s production at these theaters does not automatically preclude it from the category of experimental theater. Other factors further support the play’s inclusion in this category. Taking on the subject of alien abduction and tackling somewhat scientific ideas
was rather unusual ground in the theater when Landau wrote this. Reviews of the New York production echo this sentiment: "[...] Off-Broadway theater often fails to take chances of this sort" (Stearns, "Space"); "[Space] is a grandly ambitious piece of work" (Isherwood, Space). Although Landau asserts that the play is about much more, many audience members took the play to be about the paranormal, an area usually sidelined by intellectuals. Finally, the creation of the play using Viewpoints is certainly nontraditional, as is the script’s structure. For all of these reasons, Space can be categorized as experimental.

As do Stonewall and 1969, Space bridges the gap between Landau’s experimental work and her musical work. Her use of sound and her conception of sound as a character are a logical extension of her interest in musical theater. The interest she displays in intellectual or serious subjects, such as the Stonewall riots or heady ideas of space, will carry over into her work in musical theater. Similarly, the way she creates and rehearses pieces using Viewpoints and Composition, which she establishes as her standard method of working on plays, will inform her way of approaching musical productions as well. Finally, her creative use of physical space, both in terms of how she utilizes the space available to her as well as choreography and blocking, also carries over into her musical work, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

7 Copenhagen and Proof opened after Landau’s original production of Space, and while they and Arcadia do also tackle scientific subjects, these few shows are unusual, not the norm.
CHAPTER 4: Floyd Collins

Floyd Collins is probably the most well-known of Landau’s shows. Co-written with composer Adam Guettel (with whom she also collaborated on Saturn Returns and Christmas Carol), the show has received a number of productions, including several directed by Landau. Floyd Collins was commissioned by the American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia, where it was first workshopped in 1992 and received its first full production in 1994. The piece went on for an Off-Broadway run in 1996 at New York’s Playwrights Horizons. In 1999, a third major production went as a mini-tour to the Old Globe in San Diego, the Goodman in Chicago and Prince Music Theater (the renamed American Music Theater Festival) in Philadelphia.

The inspiration for Floyd Collins was Landau’s. She encountered the real Collins’s story in a Reader’s Digest anthology (Landau and Guettel, Hausam Interview) and was intrigued by the title of the story: “Deathwatch Carnival.” When she presented the story of Floyd Collins to Guettel among seven other ideas they could develop, Guettel also immediately gravitated toward Collins’s story (Landau and Guettel, Williams Interview). Collins lived in an area of Kentucky which was home to a number of caverns that were opened to the public as tourist attractions. Farm owners could make a good profit from having one of these caverns on their property. Collins was exploring the underground network of caves, looking for a bigger and better cavern, when he was trapped underground by a falling rock. A massive rescue operation was undertaken, and reporters and then onlookers flocked to the area, in what Landau describes in the liner notes for the cast recording as “the first great media circus of the modern era” (Guettel
and Landau). However, Collins died three days before the rescuers were able to reach him.

Landau and Guettel remain largely true to Collins's story. They begin with Floyd searching the cave and getting trapped. The audience is introduced to his family (brother Homer and sister Nellie, father Lee and stepmother Miss Jane) and his neighbors (Bee Doyle, Jewell Estes and Ed Bishop) who are above ground trying to devise a way to rescue him, since the route to Floyd is too narrow for any of the men to get through. Rookie reporter Skeets Miller appears on the scene, and because of his small size, he is able to crawl down to where Floyd is trapped, bringing him food and water as well as keeping him company. Engineer H.T. Carmichael is brought in to devise a way to free Floyd, and he takes charge of the situation, spearheading various attempts to rescue him. In the meantime, more reporters descend on the area, reporting (and distorting) the progress of the rescue efforts. Homer is able to get to the area above Floyd, attempting to dig through the opening above Floyd's head to get to him and free him. As he digs, he tries to buoy Floyd's spirits by having him reminisce, while Nellie, who is not allowed underground to see him, visits Floyd through a mutual fantasy (a plot device which Landau revisits in more depth in Dream True). There is a cave-in which prevents further visits with supplies for Floyd, and while the team above-ground, surrounded by a growing crowd of onlookers and well-wishers, scrambles against the clock to rescue him by building a shaft to reach him, Floyd finally dies.

Initial development of the script was done using Viewpoints. According to Landau, she and Guettel went to Philadelphia to workshop the show with a rough draft of
half of the first act. They worked with the actors, doing some improvisations (Compositions) and then used the results of those Composition exercises as their inspiration for the writing. Unlike Stonewall and 1969, however, the actual writing was done alone in a room instead of in rehearsal (Landau, Rodda Interview 297-299). Landau also blocked the productions using Viewpoints and Composition. Performer Theresa McCarthy gives an example of a moment which was done using Viewpoints in which Landau sent McCarthy, who was playing Nellie Collins, to another room with the men playing Floyd and Homer and asked them to come up with seven “postures” that represented a brother and sister relationship. When the three returned into the rehearsal room, Landau had them begin their song (“The Dream”) and as the song progressed, they automatically began to move into some of the compositions they had just created (McCarthy).

For the piece, Guettel wanted to use music which was authentic to the region, teaching himself how to play guitar so he could compose the piece using guitar, banjo, harmonica and fiddle (Stearns, “Smart Set”). The result is a score which reviewer John Simon describes as “[...] starting appropriately with bluegrass, adding Tin Pan Alley when the rescue operation becomes a sideshow, and pushing through to the use of music as authentic mood-painting as in modern opera [...]” Similarly, the lyrics, which Guettel wrote and to which Landau contributed additional lyrics, were written in local dialect. One example is the opening lyrics of the show: “Deep in the land of the hollows and creeks/If’n you git lost you git lost fer weeks” (1) or Lee’s lyrics in his duet with Miss Jane, “Heart and Hand”: “But we sure as hell got us some family./Craziest bunch of fools
was ever begot, But thar ain't no figurin' what the Lord plans, / An' I don't want no other
man's home" (33). Although a number of Guettel's lyrics do rhyme, he does not force
rhyme into every song, as the example above of Lee's lyrics from "Heart and Hand"
evidences. Like the lyrics, Landau also wrote the book in dialect. An exchange between
Lee and Nellie provides good illustration of this point: Lee tells Nellie, "You 'have
yourself like is proper. A girl got no place here in the first place, let alone yer condition-
to which Nellie responds, "That's right Pa, jes' afore I left the 'sylum they said to me,
'Now Nellie, don't be goin' spendin' time near no cave openin's with no men folk'" (10).

Landau and Guettel made changes to the script between the Philadelphia
production and the New York production, and again before the mini-tour. Between
Philadelphia and New York, the character of Johnnie Gerald was cut and his song, "The
Riddle Song," reassigned to Homer. Landau also notes that they narrowed the focus of
the piece from four stories or points of view—Floyd, his family, the press, and the
confrontation between the locals and the "outlanders" (Breslauer, "Unearthing")—to Floyd
himself and the carnival above ground. These changes were made because the two
wanted, "[...] rather than traveling a lot of ground, covering as much of the story as we
can get in, characters, ideas and events, to do what Floyd did, which is to choose one spot
and go deeper and deeper and deeper" (Landau, Rodda Interview 295). Between the New
York production and the mini-tour, they replaced a song: "'Tween a Rock and a Hard
Place" was cut and "Where a Man Belongs" took its place in Act One.

In the New York production, Floyd was played by Christopher Innvar, Homer by
Jason Daniely, Nellie by Theresa McCarthy (who also appeared in Stonewall and the
New York production of *Space* and Skeets Miller by Martin Moran. With the exception of Floyd, these performers had all been part of the Philadelphia production as well. The Chicago/Los Angeles/Philadelphia mini-tour featured a new cast: Romain Fruge as Floyd, Clarke Thorell as Homer, Kim Huber as Nellie and Guy Adkins as Skeets. For both the New York production and the mini-tour, the set was designed by James Schuette, costumes by Melina Root, lighting by Scott Zielinski and sound by Dan Moses Scheier. Landau was responsible for all movement, with no choreographer credited.

Schuette’s set consisted of a series of wooden beams and planks off to either side of the stage which stretched the height of the proscenium arch. They were constructed in a latticework of sorts, which was reminiscent of the structural supports one might expect to see in underground passages, and these set structures represented the caves. In the center of the stage was wide open space, backed by a cyclorama. Unlike in many musicals, it was a stationary unit set, with a limited amount of open space, less than many musicals commonly have. The use of the cyclorama allowed the space to feel open when necessary, and the built-up sides of the set, which came fairly far downstage, helped to create the feeling of confinement for the scenes involving Floyd.

Landau staged the trapped Floyd to be stationary against an angled plank which was part of the structure downstage right, representing his trapping by his lack of movement. The only time she allowed Floyd to move was during his flights of

---

1 Jim Morlino played Floyd in Philadelphia.

2 Schuette, Root and Zielinski also designed for *Space*.

3 Here and throughout, descriptions of the staging and production elements refer to the New York production, which I saw on video and of which I heard the cast recording, unless otherwise noted.
imagination, such as in “The Riddle Song,” when he and Homer shifted places as Homer encourages him to reminisce about his boyhood, and at the end of the show, when he fantasizes about having been rescued and the cave being opened to the public. However, when it becomes clear that it is only fantasy, Floyd returns to his stationary spot once more. He remained onstage the entire time, lit by very focused and relatively dim light which was on Floyd alone during scenes in the cave, enhancing the claustrophobic feeling of the cave. Landau contrasted this with the above-ground scenes filled with a flurry of activity and movement, which Zielinski lighted fully and brightly.

Landau’s stage imagery in this production was exceptional. She used striking silhouettes against the cyclorama and tableaux of characters at various points throughout the piece. The silhouettes functioned almost scenically—they were very angular, with varying levels and shapes. For a live audience, these silhouettes must have been quite memorable: in her interview of Landau and Guettel, Dana Williams points to these silhouettes as being quite memorable for her, and numerous reviews, both positive and negative, comment on Landau’s stage imagery. One example of the silhouettes was during Skeets’s song “I Landed On Him,” when there were characters silhouetted in the background, with the one farthest stage right kneeling and facing directly stage left and reaching out and up with his hands, the next person down on one knee facing stage right and bowing his head, a third person standing facing stage right with one leg slightly out in front of the other, making him appear shorter than the fourth person, who stands erect,

---

and finally the fifth and last person facing stage left and leaning forward at waist. Within this silhouette were various heights and angles, and the performers, who were only seen in silhouette, became part of the architecture. Many characters stayed onstage even when they were not involved in the scene, helping to set the mood. Rick Simas, assistant director for the San Diego production, notes that in that production “small things are happening that don’t steal focus, but if you choose to look elsewhere you would see that all these groups of people are doing meaningful activity that illuminates character and relationships of people and is not just making pictures” (Interview).

The movement in the production, which Landau generated, never moved into the realm of dance choreography. The movement does include choreographed elements, however. For instance, in the scene with the three reporters (“Is That Remarkable?”), they move in patterns around each other, interweaving and twisting as they build upon each other’s stories, sensationalizing and twisting the truth. Even their pencil taps are choreographed. What is unusual about the movement is that it was generated by the actors using Viewpoints instead of being decided outside of rehearsal by the choreographer and then taught to them (Landau, Personal Interview). While Landau might have clarified the patterning for their movement around each other, the impulse for the movement was the actors’. The lack of open space in the set design confirms the intention that *Floyd Collins* not include dance. Neither were audiences to be entertained with the spectacle of varied settings that many musicals utilize. Instead the focus remained on the words and the action of the piece. In the same way, the music encourages a performance geared more toward blocking than dance choreography—no
songs have dance breaks, nor is there a chorus. The piece flows well, with the end of each number moving right into a continuation of the story rather than acting as a break in the action. Landau’s use of nontraditional choreography is in keeping with her avant-garde work, which also used non-dance choreography, one of the bridges between the experimental and the musical for her.

The script’s structure is complex, dealing with the scenario of Floyd’s entrapment from multiple perspectives—Floyd’s, his family’s, his neighbors’, Skeet Miller’s, the rescuers’, the media’s, and the public’s. This in itself is nontraditional for a musical, and lends the piece, which has a strong narrative flow, some of the collage feeling present in *Stonewall*, which also demonstrates multiple characters’ perspectives on the same event. *Floyd* gives individual voice to the characters; it features no more than three people singing at any one time, and many of the numbers are dialogue or monologue. This stands in contrast to traditional musicals, which usually include a few group numbers, even if they do also include solo numbers. For purposes of comparison, I will look at *South Pacific* as an example of the traditional musical.⁵ This musical, written by the well-respected team of Rodgers and Hammerstein, is one of the more serious-minded traditional musicals in that it deals with serious subjects, including racism and war. In *South Pacific*, these group numbers include “There Is Nothing Like a Dame,” and “Honeybun,” to name a couple.

---

⁵ Although *Oklahoma!* is generally acknowledged as the first musical of the so-called Golden Age of musicals, a musical which deals with more serious themes serves as a better model for comparison to *Floyd Collins*, whose serious nature is often noted. In addition to filling this criterion, *South Pacific* was written by a known and respected team, whose musicals are a hallmark of the Golden Age, making it more representative of a “traditional” musical.
The characters and the relationships in *Floyd Collins* are complex and three-dimensional as well. Whereas in a traditional musical, only one relationship might be well-defined for each major character, in *Floyd Collins*, the relationship of one character to multiple others is examined. In *South Pacific*, Nellie Forbush's relationship to Emile is the only relationship of hers which is explored in any depth, and likewise Emile's relationship with Nellie is the only one explored. The other major character, Joe Cable, only explores his relationship with Liat. On the other hand, in *Floyd Collins*, Homer's relationships to Floyd and to Lee are well fleshed out, the first by his obsession with rescuing Floyd and the conversations the two have, and the second by a number of comments Homer makes both to and about Lee. The script communicates a great deal of information about Homer individually as well, with his questions of whether he should stay on the farm and what he wants from life, including being able to have things like a car and his potential interest in making a movie. Additionally, minor characters are developed as characters rather than acting merely as devices to further the plot. For example, Bee Doyle, who acts as one of the mouthpieces for the locals, gives a glimpse into his own history in the scene after the cave-in, with his line "Yes sir, Papa, I swear I'll take care of our farm -" which is preceded by the direction "In drunken memory, as a child" (71). This gives the audience more insight into Doyle's psychology and history.

Discussing her role as Nellie Collins, Theresa McCarthy said she believed that traditional musical characters were just as complex as Nellie was, and that the difference between Nellie Collins and a character in a more traditional musical was one of actor approach and not of writing. While I agree with McCarthy that traditional musicals can
be approached in a way which gives them greater depth and complexity—one need only look at the 2001 remake of the original film version of *South Pacific* as an example—the complexity is written into the script with *Floyd Collins*. This may be due in large part to Landau’s approach to the script, which corresponds with McCarthy’s point, but with Landau as director and writer, ideas which are generated by her approach can be incorporated into the final written script.

Landau approaches musicals and nonmusicals in exactly the same way, drawing on Viewpoints to create blocking and working collaboratively with actors (Landau, Personal Interview). Although collaborative directing is not a rarity in nonmusical theater, musical theater has functioned largely under an auteur model into the present day. While collaboration certainly is necessary between the director, musical director, choreographer and the designers, making the actor part of the collaborative team is new territory. This is an area where Landau has once again bridged the gap between the avant-garde and the musical, taking her experience working with large casts in nonmusical theater and trusting her collaborative process for musical theater as well. In his review for *Theatre Journal*, Rick Simas points out, “Landau, whose experience has primarily been in avant-garde theatre, brings a fresh, exciting aesthetic to the American musical” (465).

The subject matter of the piece is also unusual: a man trapped in a cave hardly seems like a prime choice for a musical. First of all, a central character who remains stationary throughout the show limits movement in a form which has traditionally been so movement-based. Also, for a genre which has been synonymous with “musical
comedy” to take on such a serious subject is noteworthy, as Jan Breslauer of the Los Angeles Times notes: “Such a grim and static subject as the plight of the doomed Collins might not seem ideal raw material for a musical, yet it may be precisely the dark side of ‘Floyd Collins’ that makes the work feel both archly American and particularly contemporary” (“Unearthing”). While there have certainly been musicals which deal with serious subjects, such as the earlier example of South Pacific, the difference is in the way the subject is handled within the piece. South Pacific deals with racism and war, but romance takes equal focus in the piece, and the issue is cased in comedy, with characters like Bloody Mary and Billis and numbers such as “There Is Nothing Like a Dame” and “Honeybun.” In Floyd Collins, on the other hand, there are no moments which function primarily as comic relief, nor are there any showstopping numbers, making it unusual in its serious-mindedness.⁶

The complexity of the Floyd Collins’s structure and music and its emphasis on the narrative are rather unusual for musicals, and in this way, Floyd Collins also stretches the form of the musical. In fact, similar to the difficulty in categorizing her nonmusicals, Landau tells of people who thought this musical had a very non-musical sensibility: “People on Floyd would talk about it as a play and it was like ‘A play! What are you talking about? There’s all this-’ ‘But it doesn’t feel like a musical...’” (Personal Interview) New Yorker critic John Simon agrees with this assessment of the show as groundbreaking, calling it “[...] the original and daring musical of our day, concerned

---

⁶ While Stephen Sondheim’s work indeed can be serious, without numbers which serve only as comic relief, his work represents a break with tradition, and shows like Floyd Collins are continuing in the direction led by Sondheim.
with saying something in words and music [. . . ]” Landau’s developing this show which stretches the form of musical theater is another way in which she brings her avant-garde work, which stretches form, to bear on her musical work.

_Floyd Collins_, then, demonstrates a connection between Landau’s musical work and avant-garde work, both in her approach to the material, including her collaboration with the actors and use of Viewpoints, and in the final product, in its complexity and groundbreaking nature. As the following chapter will show, the same is true of _Dream True_ as well.
CHAPTER 5: Dream True

Landau collaborated again with Ricky Ian Gordon (who had composed original music used for Stonewall) on the musical Dream True: My Life with Vernon Dexter, Landau contributing the book and lyrics as well as directing, Gordon composing the music and additional lyrics. The piece was first workshopped as a developmental lab production in June and July of 1998 by the Vineyard Theatre and subsequently received a full production there in spring 1999 starring Jeff McCarthy as Peter, Daniel Jenkins as Vernon and Judy Kuhn as Madge. Landau and Gordon intend to develop the piece further in the near future (Landau, Personal Interview).

Dream True is the story of two boyhood friends, Vernon and Peter. The story, based on George Du Maurier’s novel Peter Ibbetson, spans four decades, beginning in 1945. Peter’s widowed mother Sarah forces Peter to leave his Wyoming home and move to the Northeast to live with his uncle, Howard Emmons, where she is convinced he will have greater opportunity because as an influential psychiatrist, Emmons has greater means to provide for Peter. Peter and Vernon promise to stay in touch by “dreaming true,” a concept which Landau describes as “a way of dreaming where you can [...] meet another person in your dream, where you can share the same dream on the same night. And you can access levels of truth and reality that are not available to us” (Rodda Interview 303). However, the two fall out of touch and Peter does not return to Wyoming for fifteen years, finally prompted into doing so by news that his mother is deathly ill. He arrives too late and is told by Vernon’s mother Dray that both Sarah and Vernon have passed away. Peter returns to the east coast to his job at a New York architecture firm.
Back in New York, he has his first “dream true” experience, and shortly afterwards, he happens to meet Vernon and learns that Dray tells people that Vernon has passed away rather than admit that her son is homosexual. The men’s friendship is renewed, and Peter comes to find out that Vernon is in love with him. Although Peter feels the same about Vernon, Peter is married to a woman named Madge and tells Vernon he cannot leave her. Longing for companionship, Vernon leaves for Minnesota, telling Peter that he cannot stay nearby and continue a platonic friendship with him when he is in love with him.

In the years following, Madge leaves Peter because he is in love with Vernon and is emotionally absent with her. At the architecture firm, Peter’s colleagues think he is going insane as he is incessantly redesigning the building on which he is working, removing more and more walls from the structure to give it the feeling of the wide-open space in Wyoming. Emmons attempts to confront Peter about his madness with regard to his work, which leads to Peter assaulting his uncle. Emmons then gives him the choice between being charged with assault or voluntarily checking himself into a psychiatric hospital for evaluation; Peter chooses the latter. Peter manages to communicate with Vernon while institutionalized, initially through letters and later by dreaming true. Vernon moves from Minnesota to San Francisco and then to San Diego, becoming more and more active for gay rights. Years pass with the two dreaming true regularly, until finally Vernon, who has contracted AIDS, dies, and spiritually connected to him, Peter soon follows.
Landau describes the process of creating *Dream True* as different from her often-used style of “making a big mess” and then editing the work (as she says she did with *Stonewall*, for instance). She likens the development of the script to a philosophy of Michaelangelo’s which she often quotes: one can approach a piece of marble and set about shaping it in the image one already has in her head, or one can start chipping away at the marble with the belief that there is a figure inside the marble which will emerge as she works. Landau labels her attitude toward writing *Dream True* as the latter (Personal Interview). She says that with *Dream True* she focused on allowing the material to dictate the way it should be told.

As with *Floyd Collins*, Landau approached the direction of the piece in much the same way as she would a play: “[I]n terms of the sort of level of work I like to do with the actors, in terms of my commitment to Sourcework, exploration time at the beginning of the process, generating a lot of images and physical vocabulary and trying to focus that better, completely the same [approach]” (Personal Interview). She also used Viewpoints throughout the rehearsal process, as she has done for every show on which she has worked (with the exception of *Maria Arndt*) (Personal Interview).

The performance venue for the production, the Vineyard Theatre, has a small stage and a house which seats only 130 (Garvey-Blackwell). This forces the musical to be more intimate and the audience to be closer to the action, standing in stark contrast to the large Broadway venues which seat anywhere from five hundred all the way up to two thousand. The Vineyard’s stage is set up as a semi-flexible space which is usually used as a proscenium. Although this production retains the proscenium configuration, Landau
made good use of the space available to her by breaking the fourth wall and using the space in front of the proscenium arch as well. One example of a moment where she did so is in the scene at the beginning of the show, when the young Vernon and Peter are climbing up the mountain near their homes, in which she blocked them to climb ladders into the side boxes at the front of the house. The uncluttered set design echoed the feel of Wyoming’s openness for which Peter longs throughout the show. The effect of this openness is to maintain focus on the performers and their bodies. The set was primarily white with a cyclorama-like background which was sometimes used as a projection surface and against which characters could be silhouetted using footlights. This gave Landau the opportunity to create striking stage imagery as in Floyd Collins, using the performers to create some of the architecture onstage.¹

Designing the show to be smaller by keeping the number of performers low and using a strong storyline allows the show to be presented in a smaller venue such as the off-Broadway Vineyard Theatre. The smaller theater space translates to there being less space between the actors and the audience, which puts the audience in closer physical proximity, able to see the performers’ facial expressions and gestures, and generally allows them to feel more involved with the characters. Keeping the number of characters down also leads the audience toward deeper involvement in another way: if the audience has fewer characters with whom to acquaint themselves, they can get to know those characters better.

¹ Since no video or audio recording of the production is available, descriptions of the production are reconstructed from the script, collection of production photographs retained by Vineyard Theatre and secondary sources such as reviews and interviews.
Having fewer characters also allows Landau to focus on them more closely, drawing more complex, three-dimensional characters. This gives her the opportunity to develop the relationships between the characters in greater detail. *Dream True* does indeed attempt to create complex characters and relationships; there are quite a number of details in the book that help to flesh out the characters, giving glimpses of their motivations and inner thoughts. For instance, the audience gets to know quite a bit about Peter. He does not want to leave his mother and his friend in childhood but is forced to do so, which makes him so resentful toward his mother that he does not return to Wyoming for years; however, he still loves her, and he gets angry with his uncle who knew Sarah was ill but did not tell him. He rushes back to be with her, only to find he is too late. Peter is thrilled to rediscover his friend Vernon in New York, and while they share a subconscious connection and a close-knit friendship, Peter will not let it advance into a physical relationship, but once Vernon leaves, Peter becomes so obsessed with him that he drives his wife away and finally allows himself to admit how he feels about Vernon but again, is too late. This kind of detail and glimpse into the psyche is certainly uncharacteristic for a musical.

One of the first reasons this piece stands out in significance is the complexity of the story. This complexity is demonstrated both in the number of events covered over the long period of time that elapses during the course of the musical as well as in the number of developed relationships between the characters. A reader encountering the above plot synopsis would be much more likely to think it the plot of a play than that of a musical because of the intricacy of the plot. Landau summarizes the story: "[...] it's how they
choose to live their lives sort of transcending conventional notions of time and space and gender,” then adds with a laugh, “And it’s a musical” (Rodda Interview 303). In terms of length of time, the piece spans four decades, and it deals with a number of upheavals and significant events in Peter’s life: his father’s death, his moving to the east coast, his relationship with Madge and subsequent marriage and divorce, the renewal of his friendship with Vemon and their painful parting, his fight with his uncle and institutionalization, his madness at work and his estrangement from his mother and subsequent guilt after her death. The number of issues and events Peter faces is atypical for a musical. Returning to the example in the discussion of Floyd Collins of South Pacific as representative of traditional musicals, no one character goes through so large a range of events. For example, Nellie Forbush falls in love with Emile, has to make a choice about breaking his confidence to get information about him for the military, finds out about his Polynesian ex-wife and swears him off, then thinks she has lost him when he is assisting Joe Cable and goes to take care of his children, finally being reunited with him. In comparison, in Dream True, Landau as bookwriter and lyricist is pushing the musical form, going beyond the simpler plots often associated with musicals.

The relationships in the piece are also more developed and complex. The relationship between Peter and Vernon is the focus; however, the writers also give Peter’s relationships with his uncle and his wife a great deal of attention, and the show deals with Peter’s relationship with his mother as well. The tensions in the relationships are more three-dimensional. For instance, the central relationships in South Pacific between Nellie and Emile and between Joe Cable and Liat are straightforward and clear—Nellie and
Emile fall in love, as do Cable and Liat, but the difference in their cultures (namely racism) poses an obstacle to the relationship. The central relationship in *Dream True*, between Peter and Vernon, is much more complicated and subject to renegotiation throughout the show. They begin the musical as the closest of friends and are driven apart when Peter is sent away. They meet again as adults and renew their friendship. Vernon expresses his romantic interest in Peter which Peter returns but refuses to act on because of his marriage. However, after Madge leaves Peter and as Peter and Vernon share their psychic connection through dreaming true, their relationship grows. The piece culminates with Peter dying because Vernon, with whom he has shared this connection, has died. Even Peter's relationship with his mother is developed beyond simply the scenario of a son angry at his mother for sending him away. Her motivation for doing so and agonizing over her decision is made evident, as is his coming to terms with her decision and his guilt over ignoring her.

While the characters and relationships are much more developed than is typical for a musical, they are not quite as well developed as most plays; there are points at which the storyline is a little thin. One example of this is with Peter's uncle, Howard Emmons, who late in the show in a musical number shared with Peter, alludes to being in love with Peter, a fact which is never overtly stated nor developed. This may be in part due to Landau and Gordon's choice to have the piece span a period of four decades; by covering so much time, the piece is hindered from going into great depth in many areas. In this respect, the production is reminiscent of *Stonewall*: the expansiveness of the piece limits the depth of sections of it. Perhaps the greater-than-average development of these
characters creates an expectation that they be fully developed which is not met, but it should not be overlooked or dismissed that they are still developed in more complexity than is typical in a musical.²

The treatment of homosexuality in the piece is certainly unusual. In spite of the success of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, on the whole, works which probe gay relationships are still rare in mainstream theater, and works like *Angels* certainly represent the exception and not the rule. “Queer” theater is still sidelined as alternative theater. The musical genre, steeped in the tradition of the “boy meets girl” romance formula, is an even more unlikely place to find homosexual relationships not merely depicted but examined in depth, especially given the fact that due to production costs, musicals are forced to keep an eye to commercial success to a greater degree than plays are.³ Gay activism also has a mouthpiece in the musical, in the form of Vernon, who is a gay activist once he moves to New York; his character does give voice to some gay issues in an ancillary way throughout the course of the show.

While musicals certainly are nonrealistic in the strictest sense—in real life people do not spontaneously burst into song—with the exception of revues, musicals have largely remained linear and narrative, not being the grounds for extensive experimentation that plays have been under the auspices of such artists as Richard Foreman, Jerzy Grotowski and Antonin Artaud, for instance. Though there is unquestionably artifice automatically

---

² Music also contributes to character development as do the book and lyrics. Although the music for *Dream True* was unavailable, and therefore not factored into this analysis as a primary source, the reviews do support the assertions about character development made on the basis of the book and lyrics.

³ Although this exclusion is starting to break down with shows such as *La Cage Aux Folles, March of the Faflets*, *Rent* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, all of which involve non-heterosexual relationships, these shows still represent the exception and not the norm.
built into the form, however implausible or fantastical their plots may be, musicals are usually based in the known, natural world, typically exploring relationships or historical events. The surreal concept of communication through dreams, however, crosses into the realm of the supernatural and the mystical, and as such, is breaking new ground for musical theater. New York Times critic Peter Marks takes note of this, calling Dream True “the first musical, perhaps, to make a conscious appeal to the subconscious” (“Oh”).

Not only does Dream True experiment with subject matter, it also experiments with form, particularly in the way time is represented onstage. There are jump cuts, with Peter having simultaneous conversations with Bernard and Hal, Madge, and Emmons (80), not unlike Allan’s conversations with the three abductees interspersed with his rehearsal of his speech in Space. Landau utilizes breaks in the action with frozen moments as well, as when Peter and Vernon pass each other as adults before they have re-met, once when Vernon is asking directions and once when Vernon is protesting. Repetition is another device Landau uses, as with repetition of the opening scene when Vernon and Peter are separated in boyhood again in the second act. She also uses it to break suspension of disbelief in an almost Brechtian manner when, in the scene with Howard and Peter celebrating their fifteenth anniversary together, there is the stage direction, “For a moment, Peter stands frozen in Howard’s touch. Then, he snaps back into the present scene, Howard disappears” followed by Peter’s line “I wanna start this part again,” which leads to a starting again from the top of the scene (33). Another way in which Landau plays with time is to have the past and the present onstage simultaneously, as with the adult Peter and the child Peter onstage together at the
beginning of the show. Also of note is the show's constant shifting between fantasy/dream, memory and reality.

*Dream True* does not merely tackle a serious subject but looks at it in depth. In reference to his own work, Hal Prince describes the musical as a form in which politics and social issues could be tackled "because music is a placebo, a way of sugarcoating your statement but not erasing it" (qtd. in Hirsch 5). *Dream True* goes a step farther, not sugarcoating the situation but truly examining it. As mentioned before, although South Pacific deals with the weighty issue of racism, it undercuts the potential weightiness of the show with more lighthearted numbers such as "There's Nothing Like a Dame" and "Honeybun." *Dream True*, on the other hand, has no such numbers.

In contrast to the traditional conception of the musical as musical comedy, reviews describe *Dream True* as dark, humorless and heavy. In his review, Peter Marks takes issue with the lack of comic relief. Similarly, *Variety*’s Charles Isherwood calls the piece a "[... ] moody and continuously dreary tale [... ]" and *Time Out New York*’s Jason Zinoman describes it as "mirthless" and "moody." The lack of comic relief in a play would hardly even be occasion for comment; here the omission appears to be a mortal sin. Richard Kislan points out that the term "musical comedy" was used as a catchall phrase for all forms of American musical entertainment (174). While strides have certainly been made away from the equation of the musical with musical comedy—Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* is a prime example—the expectation for some sort of comic relief and the criticism that the show is too dark are holdovers from this old categorization.
Another point worth noting is the size and scale of the musical. Although there are certainly precedents for smaller chamber musicals, such as *The Fantasticks*, *Godspell*, and the more recent *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, smaller shows are the exception and not the norm in this era of megamusicals such as *Miss Saigon*, *Ragtime* and *Beauty and the Beast*, to name a few. Keeping the production smaller forces the show away from being glitzy and relying on spectacle to entertain the audience, as in Disney’s *Aida*, for instance, instead focusing the audience’s attention on the actors and the action of the musical. This contributes to the serious bent of the show and necessitates a more plot-driven musical.

Another interesting point to note is that there is no choreographer—dance is not a part of the production. This is not to say there is no choreography—Landau uses stylized, choreographed movement, but it would not be considered dance. Critic Eileen Jacobson describes the movement: “Some of these sessions are beautifully, balletically staged by Landau [. . .],” a sentiment which is echoed by *Back Stage* reviewer Irene Backalenick.

The effects of Landau’s experimental work can be felt throughout her work on *Dream True*. Notes given to the cast, which she took the time to type each day, and with which she included several quotes or writings which might be inspirational, such as “On Not Knowing Greek” by Virginia Woolf, demonstrate her view of the actors as collaborators in the process by her self-effacement and friendly, encouraging tone. With the strictures of music and choreography to be learned, musicals have tended to be directed in an auteur style, but here Landau is the exception. Her collaborative work on
her experimental pieces, which has informed her directing style for years, exerts its influence on this musical.
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

When asked if she approaches plays and musicals in the same way, Landau said: "My first response without thinking is that I don't really direct plays which . . . maybe I approach them in the same way in that every play is a musical to me" (Personal Interview). The result of her using the same approach for both musicals and plays is that she brings a musical sensibility into her avant-garde work and an experimental sensibility into her musical work, a fact which has been evidenced by *Floyd Collins*, *Dream True*, 1969, *Stonewall: Night Variations* and *Space*. Landau's work since these productions continues to blur the line between musical and play, as Chris Jones, critic for Variety, notes in his review of her most recent production, the play *The Time of Your Life*: "In Landau's hands, the show feels almost like a full-blown musical [...]" ("Time of Your Life"). Landau's tie between the two worlds of the avant-garde and the musical is creating works which defy pigeonholing, stretching the categories and making categorization not only impossible but irrelevant. Interweaving previously distinct forms and producing works which do not fit neatly into the parameters of any one genre is a hallmark of some of today's most talented directors, including Susan Stroman (with *Contact*) and Julie Taymor (with *The Lion King*), among whose ranks Landau is fast rising.

Perhaps Landau's amalgamated sensibility serves contemporary musicals better and represents a style which will be useful for the new generation of smart musicals, for which the more traditional style is inappropriate. This sensibility may also be one way to take classic musicals and make them more immediate for a contemporary audience. The
recent revivals of *Cabaret* and *Oklahoma!* stand out as examples of productions which have explored new approaches to more traditional texts. Performer Theresa McCarthy describes Landau's direction as guiding the actors to approach character in a way that is different from the "standard musical style," with the result that this new approach opens up choices in the production which are innovative and fresh, rather than what is expected and often stale (McCarthy).

Landau's influence on contemporary musical theater is exerted not only through her unique directing approach, but through her multiple responsibilities as writer/director as well. Her dual role puts her in a position to shape not just the production but also the script itself. She is integral in the development of a form which, whether it is termed "smart musical" or "Sondheimesque" or operatic or even merely different, is expanding the scope of the form labeled "the musical." She continues to create examples of shows which break the traditional "rules" by being gritty or serious, by not finishing with a happy ending, and by not focusing solely on being romantic or beautiful or "fun."

Landau currently has several projects in development, including a musical version of "Sleeping Beauty" called *Beauty* with Jeanine Tesori and a new Broadway work for Disney, for which Disney has allowed her to choose a number of songs from their entire catalog of music and fashion them into a musical, tentatively titled "When You Wish" (Landau, Personal Interview; Marks, "As Giants. . ."). Landau says the project "is completely accessible, and it is the most out there thing I've ever done" (Personal Interview). In addition, she is planning to work with Ricky Ian Gordon to revise *Dream True* and *States of Independence* and do another full production of those works (Personal Interview).
Interview). It will be interesting to see how Landau uses her distinctive style as she works on these projects, particularly the one for Disney Theatricals, the first musical on which she is not collaborating with a composer but can make decisions as the sole "author," and to see if and how her style evolves.

Because so little has been written about Landau, topics for further inquiry about her work abound. Landau’s use of music in her plays is reminiscent of the Brechtian ideas about music in theater, as she herself observes (Personal Interview), and an analysis of his influence on her work would be quite interesting. As noted in the biobibliographical item about her published in Women Playwrights of Diversity, “several of her works [...] have had homosexual themes” (“Tina Landau”), including Stonewall, 1969, Dream True and Ballad of Little Jo. While calling her a gay playwright would be reductionist, it would be interesting to look at her treatment of homosexuality, whether it be in her plays, her musicals or both. Examination of recurring themes in her work would also prove quite informative. She herself points to a link between Space, Dream True and Floyd Collins: “I see a huge connection between “Space” and “Floyd Collins" and this musical I did in New York this spring called “Dream True”,’ she explains. ‘All three pieces ask a similar kind of question that definitely is in the realm of the spirit’ (Breslauer, “Exploring”). She also discusses particular issues in which she is interested: “I’m committed to doing pieces that are part of American history. They’re all part of this search. Am I more American than I am Jewish? Or a woman? Or gay? What is my culture? What can I believe in? The Constitution? Gay Rights?’” (Istel, “Queen”) Tracing how these questions appear in her work would be a worthwhile endeavor.
With so much scholarly analysis of Landau’s work yet to be done, much of her life’s story is still to be written, and the effects of her influence to a large extent still remain to be seen. As she continues to gain prominence, the development of her technique and her career will be fascinating to follow.
APPENDIX A
Interview with Tina Landau
Saturday, 16 February 2002
Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago IL
(During previews for Maria Arndt)

Gordon: I’m primarily focusing on Floyd and Dream True because I think they’re really interesting shows, whether the reviews—well, Dream True got panned—

Landau: Except for the New York Times, which was actually a decent and respectable review. Dream True is so interesting because I was right in the middle of opening Floyd here at the Goodman. I was being courted by Disney and had just gone to see this thing in the theme parks in Orlando. I think it’s called “Fantasmic” or something. It’s this show that’s done outside. 6,000 people show up twice or three times a day, cram in, standing room only. We were having a hard time with Floyd. I was feeling very low about that and I was saying to Adam [Guettel], “These pieces are so hard. Will it ever end, will it ever be right?” I went back to New York and I saw a performance of Dream True where there were about forty people in the audience. About ten of them walked out and about fifteen of them gave it a standing ovation and about five of them told me it was the most life-altering experience they had had in the theatre. I was so confused, but I remember thinking, “This piece is interesting, it’s important and what am I doing?” It was sort of the crystallization for me of this crisis of “Where do I fit in?” and “Which world do I belong to?” I’m doing, on this one hand, this piece that I love and I think is pushing the form, and on the other hand I’m sitting at Disney watching “Fantasmic.” With Dream True—well, of course I’m going to say this—I was shocked at the critical response, truthfully, because the piece was ambitious and all over the place but really worthy and interesting. I always sort of hold onto those five people that talked to me about how it changed their life, which certainly happened. It was a very emotional piece for a very few number of people.

Gordon: That’s what reviews reflect—

Landau: No.

Gordon: You don’t think so? My understanding of the show is from the reviews. It sounded like people thought, “This is really interesting. There’s a kernel of really good promise in it, but it doesn’t quite go where it needs to.”

Landau: I thought the reviews said things like, “This is the most pretentious…” There were a couple of reviews that were… A lot of reviews talked about being very pretentious, I thought, but… No? Alright, good.

Gordon: Every one would say it’s ambitious, it’s interesting, but it’s not quite “good.”

---

1 This interview has been edited.
Landau: Well, Ricky [Ian Gordon] and I have done States of Independence, Stonewall, Dream True and we are most likely next year going on a writing retreat or working through a university to try to go finish and redo States of Independence and Dream True.

Gordon: Oh, really?

Landau: There’s this amazing analogy that Michaelangelo used, wrote about, in so much of his sculptures which is (this is probably quoted, I talk about it all the time) if you have a piece of marble and you’re going to make something, you go to it and you either have the vision of the completed sculpture in your head and set about chiseling to create it, or you can go with the sense that there is a figure trapped inside the marble and if you just start chipping away and listening to it, it will emerge and you don’t know what it is yet. The pieces I’ve made with Ricky all feel like that. It’s a process that is the antithesis of what I’m doing now on the Disney show, which is we worked from the broadest canvas—we made a mess—from the broadest canvas possible. It was sort of here is a vessel that can include the entire world. So as a result these pieces are huge, messy, I can truly push the form, and aren’t neat enough to work. It’s interesting because just recently I’ve gotten into the habit now of insisting on forcing myself to work with an outline before I start, because at a certain point on these pieces it became so impossible to go back to a simple—. Anyway, we’re probably going to do it next year. The score is beautiful.

Gordon: I was interested in how your avant garde influences your musicals, so I started looking at all the stuff you have writer and director credits on, which are five shows: Stonewall, 1969 and Space, Dream True and Floyd Collins. [Stops.] You’re looking at me strangely. You grouped them together that way in your bio [for Maria Arndt], actually. “Writer director,” and you name five shows.

Landau: I guess I’m thinking back over more obscure things. Oh, States of Independence.

Gordon: Yeah, I couldn’t get any information for that. Is that when you first met Ricky [Ian Gordon]?

Landau: Uh-huh. I’d met him before that, but that was our first piece together. If you’re talking about musicals and avant garde, you’ve got to look at States. I’d put States on that list and the Christmas Carol I did with Adam [Guettel].

Gordon: That’s another one I couldn’t get information on.

Landau: I got writer director credit on that—that was the first piece I ever did with Adam.

Gordon: And that was after Rebecca? Before?

Landau: Before. Anyway, there’s more in there, but those are a good five.

Gordon: I was looking at those and started to try to define what’s a musical and what’s not.

Landau: Okay, I’m sorry, I have to write things I have to get you. I want to get you States. I want to get you Christmas Carol.
Gordon: *Dream True?*

Landau: Oh yeah, right, *Dream True*. I want to get you everything. *Christmas Carol’s* wild. And I want to get you this thing called *Beauty* which I’m going to be working on with Jeanine Tesori.

Gordon: Really!

Landau: Uh-huh. And Disney.

Gordon: It’s funny, because Jeanine, Adam, Ricky, Michael John LaChiusa and Jason Robert Brown—the five of them are always categorized together.

Landau: I know.

Gordon: It’s funny that you’re working with three of them.

Landau: Jeanine, Ricky and Adam are three of my best friends.

Gordon: I didn’t know you knew her.

Landau: Oh, yeah. We’ve been trying to work together for the last five years and it keeps— But we’re going to do this version of “Sleeping Beauty.”

Gordon: Tell me, because I started trying to figure out what’s a musical and what’s a play, and I’ve thought of *Stonewall* as a play but it’s right on the line, I think. Would you categorize it as a play or as a musical?

Landau: I would categorize it as a play. With music. Although I have this phrase, which is what I’m calling *Maria Arndt*, which is a “play play,” which is what I really think a play is. *Stonewall* I guess was a play. It felt more like an event even than a play. So even a text like that I worked on in a very different way as I did 1969. I never wrote them with an attempt to design something that could be read as a play, performed in a theatre space. They were more kind of sketchbooks but with words, again, big messes of blueprints. I don’t even think of *Stonewall* as a play, but I say that because I guess I think of a musical more as the music, the songs, advancing story somehow. And in *Stonewall* they were more kind of “knee plays,” the kind of thing you might find in Brecht or something.

Gordon: It reminded me more of—you don’t go to Shakespeare to see the music but there’s live music sung by characters.

Landau: Right.

Gordon: And that’s what it seemed to me—more of a mood/context than a forwarding.

Landau: Right. You know, I have to say I loved that period of En Garde Arts when Adam and I first did *Christmas Carol* and *Floyd* because people on *Floyd* would ask us all the time, “Well, what is it? Is it a play? Is it a musical? Is it an opera? An operetta?” and we were so stunned by the question because we never thought about it. There was that period of my life when I never thought about definitions or boundaries. I’m so happy that I had that kind of period of ignorance is bliss because these questions were not
on my mind. It was like there was *Stonewall* and of course there’s going to be a sixty-five person production number. I guess the other thing is I think of music in the theatre as one of the elements that we have with which to be expressive, so we have lighting, we have sound, we have movement and we have text and music is so powerful, I think the most powerful. I’ve always thought of it like if there’s more music and story is told through it or character is expressed, yeah, maybe it’s a musical. But basically everything has music in it. Even this, *Maria Arndt*. I don’t mean the scene change music, but I experience the play as a piece of music.

**Gordon:** That actually leads me right to the next question I have, which is: Your plays have a musical sensibility, and it seems to me like the plays have choreography. *Dream True* didn’t use dance choreography, but it was very choreographed.

**Landau:** Well... Yes. There is a text. One has a text, usually, and I guess I’m not interested so much in underlining or illustrating or repeating what that text is already doing. I feel like there’s a language, truly a language of the theatre which is expressed in space and time and sound, and the director writes another kind of text using the language of the theatre. If you have two “texts” that are doing the same thing, they not only cancel each other out but allow the audience to become lazy and it’s sort of like a spell that can put you easily to sleep. So I think of it like there is a score that I’m creating with sound and light and movement that is as expressive and detailed and literary in a way as the written text.

**Gordon:** Like the flowers in *Maria Arndt*.

**Landau:** Yeah.

**Gordon:** Which don’t come out of the text, but they tell a whole story.

**Landau:** Yeah. Or like Maria standing onstage alone after Klausner leaves the first time. Malcolm, the stage manager, the first time was like, “Go!” on the scene change, and I was like, “no, no, no.” I was like, “Wait a long time,” then he waited like six seconds. I was like, “no, no, no, a REALLY long time.” And that’s music. It’s how long do you hold that note? What felt very uncomfortable to both the actress and the stage manager which is, I don’t know, fourteen seconds now or something, is to me what the moment IS. Yeah, it’s what the moment is, and that’s all about duration. I love music. I grew up going to musicals every weekend. I saw everything. I played the piano from a very early age, and I had a great piano teacher. The way she taught me was she came in and she said, “What’s your favorite song? What would you like to learn how to play on the piano?” I had just fallen in love with this woman named Birdie Wallach (Birdie Wallach is the daughter of Anne Jackson and Eli Wallach), who was in high school and I was in fourth grade, I think, or third grade, and she was doing *Anything Goes*. No, she was doing *Babes in Arms*, and they were using “Johnny One-Note” in it: [sings:] “Poor Johnny one-note.” I said, “I would like to learn how to play ‘Johnny One-Note.’” That’s what she taught me, no scales, nothing. Then I learned how to play “Tomorrow” from Annie, then I learned how to play “The Lady Is a Tramp,” and before I knew any theory, I was on fire with the love of music and I sat obsessively. There was probably a time where I
could as easily have gone into music as theatre. Did you know I used to compose my own music?

**Gordon:** No, I didn’t.

**Landau:** You haven’t found *Faces on the Wall*.

**Gordon:** No, I don’t know what that one is at all.

**Landau:** Oh yeah! That’s one I have a ton of press on!

**Gordon:** What was that?

**Landau:** That was a show that I wrote in my senior year of high school that I wrote book, music and lyrics for and directed and played the piano that got picked up and produced professionally in Los Angeles right before I went to college.

**Gordon:** At Yale.

**Landau:** Yeah.

**Gordon:** But you were in L.A.?

**Landau:** I was in L.A., I was living in L.A. It was my senior year in high school at Beverly Hills High School and at that point I was as seriously interested in being a composer as anything else. Through Yale too; I wrote two original pieces at Yale where I wrote the music as well and then just realized there were people in the world who far surpassed my limited capacity and that if I wanted to really be rigorous at something I had to focus a little more. But anyway, I’ll get you stuff on that. That’s really interesting because that’s the earliest me. That’s when I had no idea, I just did it, and when I look back on it, it was just insane. But I got an agent.

**Gordon:** On that show?

**Landau:** Yeah. I was seventeen and…it was too much for me. I mean I didn’t know how to handle it well, but... God, I haven’t thought about that in a long time. Anyway, we don’t have to talk about that now.

**Gordon:** Do you approach musicals differently than you approach plays? I know, I caught you with a mouthful [of lunch]. I do love your work. I think it’s so interesting. I came to it in a roundabout way, but I really think it’s interesting.

**Landau:** You don’t know how much this means. Because one of the things—and Ricky and Adam struggle with it also—is sort of a big old, “What’s the point?” and “Why are we doing this?” and “Does anyone care?” and “Are any of these pieces are going to last?” And just that there’s one person every once in a while who comes forward who says “This is interesting and important to me and I’m going to write about it.” It gives one hope. It does! Alright, well what was the question? About approaching directing plays and musicals, is that it?

**Gordon:** Yeah, do you approach them differently or do you think about them in the same way?
Landau: Well, my first response without thinking is I don’t really direct plays, which I know isn’t true, which I guess is a backwards way of saying maybe I approach them in the same way in that maybe every play is a musical to me. I think, yes, there are certain logistics when you do something like a *Bells are Ringing* or my Disney project, with the sheer scale of what you’re doing and who’s involved and a choreographer and an orchestra... But I think *Floyd, Dream True*, and let’s say here *Time to Burn, Berlin Circle*, a little less *Maria Arndt*, but *Space*, any of those I would say I pretty much approach in exactly the same way. I’ve never thought about that until you just asked me that. I mean, yes, of course there are different things, like you have musical rehearsals, but in terms of the level of work I like to do with the actors, in terms of my commitment to Sourcework, exploration time at the beginning of the process, generating a lot of images and physical vocabulary and trying to focus that better, completely the same.

Gordon: That’s why I ask, because I see that. Your plays have a very musical sensibility, with the choreography, the use of music. Even with *Maria Arndt*, the transitions seem very choreographed to me.

Landau: The transitions are probably the closest thing in this to what is truly representative of my work, and maybe some of the lighting because I work with Scott a lot. But it’s interesting because a number of people on *Floyd* used to talk about it as a play and it was like, “A play! What are you talking about? There’s all this—” “But it doesn’t feel like a musical,” they would always say.

Gordon: That’s what’s interesting about the musicals for me. There’s so much to them. I like *Bells are Ringing*, but it’s fluffy. There’s serious story to *Floyd*. That’s what’s interesting to me about *Floyd*.

Landau: I was surprised about *Floyd* because I thought of *Floyd* as I was working on it as the most narrative and traditional piece I had done, and I went to see it a year ago in Weston, Connecticut—a production that was done actually at Malcom Ewen’s theatre, a fantastic production. Adam and I had seen a couple and this one was truly excellent. The thing that amazed me is that it actually is nowhere near as traditionally and dramaturgically structured as I had thought. I think of it as really straight storytelling but when I went back I realized, oh no, it kind of does all these little weird shifts into dream or out of dream, or the ways scenes are sort of— There are jump cuts, but I guess because it is in the guise of naturalism, of something real that happened, I always place it there in my brain. I was actually surprised when I went back to realize how kind of musical the piece is in its structure, not just in its music.

Gordon: Well, it’s built in a narrative way. There’s forwards and each piece builds linearly, which isn’t the same in *Stonewall*. *Stonewall* is more of a collage—it’s all around the same idea. You developed that using Composition?

Landau: No.

Gordon: Oh, it feels like it to me, and so does *Space*. But I’m not sure I understand it well.
**Landau:** 1969 I decided to do in preparation for Stonewall. It was just a piece I wanted to do because I knew I was doing Stonewall and I was like, “Well, then I want to learn about the year.” It was like I’m going to just go and get to know the year that Stonewall took place in, and it ended up that a character that became the center of 1969 follows through.

**Gordon:** Howie.

**Landau:** Yes, exactly. That’s right. Barney O’Hanlon. For that, I was brought to Actors Theatre of Louisville, I think for three months, with a group of actors and we created that from scratch.

**Gordon:** And that’s using Composition like you describe in the book *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*.

**Landau:** Composition, yes. Actually I’ve never done straight improvisation, I think, until this play, until Maria Arndt.

**Gordon:** Really?

**Landau:** Yeah. We’ve done a couple of improvis just around scenes, which I’ve never done before.

**Gordon:** Are you talking about what I watched you do with Chris and Maria?

**Landau:** Yeah. Out of that, that is a way that one could write scenes. But I’d never done that before. So yeah, Composition work and 1969 was a lot of cutting and pasting stuff from other sources, a lot of which was true in Stonewall as well. Stonewall, I don’t know quite how it happened but I did write Stonewall—I did go into the first rehearsal with a script. Somehow how I got there is eluding me at this moment. I don’t remember doing it; I think I did it in two weeks or something. Because I was approaching it very conceptually and I knew there was going to be a lot of throwing this out and putting that in in rehearsal. Space I went to the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge and was given same thing, an acting class of students and a room for two months and I came in the first day and I said I don’t know what’s going to happen but I want to do a piece around one word and that word is “space.” That was pretty much all I said and we started. I left there with about an hour long (which I can also show you) kind of performance piece around certain topics and an idea of story, but then I went on eventually and wrote from that.

**Gordon:** There’s the narrative throughline, which was probably put in after, but the idea of the three different kinds of space which you explore is what felt very Composition-based for me.

**Landau:** Exactly. Ding-ding-ding! That’s right!

**Gordon:** Would that be the same project that was referred to—there was a commission at ART by the Mellon Foundation for something called “Freud,” or what they were calling “Freud”?

**Landau:** Oh, no, that’s Actors Theatre of Louisville.
Gordon: That went to Humana?

Landau: No. The Mellon Foundation commission was for the Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville. *Freud* was Actors Theatre of Louisville, not ART. That was the first time I went to ATL (not ART but ATL), invited for three months, five actors, choose a topic, create work from scratch, and I chose Freud. The most extraordinary work was made in about three or four weeks. I had this outline developed—Anne Bogart was there with me—that was so complex and outrageous and exciting. I started getting sick and I didn’t know what was wrong with me. I finally came back to New York—I ended up leaving. I have a hard time doing things moderately. I remember when I was in college, I was freaking out once. I had gotten interested in something and I had gone to the library and gotten 45 books and a therapist said to me, “Go back to your room, choose one book, and take the other 44 back.”

Gordon: Oh, I have a shelf like this [gesturing] full of library books right now.

Landau: Exactly. That was a little bit what happened on *Freud*. It was like opening Pandora’s box, and my desire to create something was a little out of proportion with the reality and the logistics I had. I was just overwhelmed, I think, in retrospect.

Gordon: Did you leave it behind once you walked away? You never came back?

Landau: Yeah, but you know what? I have more unfinished projects, and I tell you, one day I want to do the Freud piece too.

Gordon: So *Freud* and 1969 were the only projects you’ve done at Humana?

Landau: And *Cloud Tectonics*.

Gordon: Oh, that was there?

Landau: Yeah. First there, then LaJolla, then New York.

Gordon: Jose Rivera was at Humana the same year as *Freud* was there, I think. You were listed together—

Landau: Yeah, that’s probably true.

Gordon: —in the article I found on the piece.

Landau: I don’t think I knew him then. I think Marcus Stern maybe directed *Marisol* that year. I don’t really remember, that might have been the year before. Oh, George Wolfe was supposed to direct *Marisol* for La Jolla Playhouse—

Gordon: And backed out for *Angels*…

Landau: Exactly! And they were looking for a director, and I flew out to La Jolla to interview with José and we just hit it off.

Gordon: I love his work. Actually I saw *Cloud Tectonics* at school. I got to pick a piece to direct for this fall so I started looking at all his work. I read *Marisol*, which I loved, but our space, our budget couldn’t handle doing that the way it wanted to be done. I
looked at *House of Ramón Iglesia*, which was his first piece. It was very straightforward and I had just done *House of Bernarda Alba*—

**Landau:** One of my favorite plays.

**Gordon:** Oh, *Bernarda Alba*? I loved it. And then I found *Giants Have Us In Their Books*.

**Landau:** Yeah, I don’t know that piece.

**Gordon:** It’s six one-acts, and it’s so unique. I read it and I loved it as soon as I read it. I tended toward the very literal and this was my first foray into the non-straightforward, -linear, -literal, so it was really exciting to do.

**Landau:** Did it go well?

**Gordon:** It went very well.

**Landau:** Oh good. Is it published in that book of José’s plays, do you know?

**Gordon:** The one you wrote the foreword to?

**Landau:** Yeah.

**Gordon:** No, it’s not. I wanted to ask you, can I have even just the chapters [of yours and Bogart’s forthcoming book] that you wrote about using Viewpoints?

**Landau:** Well the entire book is that. We’ve alternated chapters but we don’t credit ourselves, we pretend that every chapter is written by both of us. The whole thing is about using Viewpoints, it’s Viewpoints in rehearsal. I can give you a couple of chapters. I can give you Viewpoints in rehearsal and Viewpoints with an ensemble and then there’s a whole chapter on creating new work and there’s a chapter on Viewpoints and music.

**Gordon:** Do you use the Viewpoints in rehearsal still now? I asked the understudy [for *Maria Arndt*] and he said “She started it here and didn’t use it, but she said this is the first one she’s done without it, ever.”

**Landau:** Correct.

**Gordon:** You use it for musicals too then?

**Landau:** Oh **yeah**. I would have thought a few years ago if someone had asked me, yeah, I might grow out of Viewpoints, and the opposite has happened. I have become increasingly convinced that it is a portal for magic.

**Gordon:** I’ve read what you’ve written about it, and I’m trying to look for how it shows up in the product. Obviously it’s a lot in the process, but I’m looking for how it shows up in the product. It seems to me always you use your space very well, what you have in terms of the height and the levels and using space that people don’t always use and the timing, the choreography of the movement. It seems like that’s where it shows up in your work.
**Landau:** Yes. However, it also shows up in anything that's ensemble, like *Time to Burn* here, *Floyd, Stonewall.* It has something to do also with the way the actors are listening onstage. For instance, in *Stonewall,* which you probably didn’t see, someone might be working off of someone else seventy feet away. It teaches an awareness of an ability to be in a large ensemble and really be listening through your back so when that happens over there this person falls. Actors have found it invaluable because so often actors come off stage and they’ll say, “You know, when such and such happened.” “That happened? When did that happen?” This is a way of actually being onstage where you ask all of them every night to work off each other, and a lot of times you can’t tell that they’re doing that, but that’s what they’re doing. The other thing is, on a very practical level, if you look at the reporters in *Floyd,* if you look at all the whatever numbers there were in *Stonewall,* I never worked with a choreographer until a year ago. So that stuff was all made out of Viewpoints.

**Gordon:** Really?

**Landau:** Yeah. Yeah, that is Viewpoints. Like the reporters doing dah-ti-dah-ti-dah, that’s all Viewpoints. The carnival in *Floyd—Viewpoints.*

**Gordon:** How exactly did that work? My understanding, without having experienced Viewpoints, just trying to read about it—I don’t really get it.

**Landau:** I know, it’s hard.

**Gordon:** It seems like it encourages you to be aware of—instead of just be aware of movement, it’s be aware of this part of movement and that part, shape, gesture, time, tempo... Be aware of all these things...

**Landau:** Yes. I have to give you the book, which will answer this in better detail. It’s a nuts and bolts type of book. But for instance, in *Floyd.* Let’s say we did basic training. Then I might have had the three reporters get up and do an open movement improv focusing on tempo and floor pattern. So for 15 minutes they might just—do they walk on a grid? We would just play around and we would find a thing and discuss it. Then I might give them pencils and say, “Create a story using the tapping of pencils.” I create some assignment or I send them into a room and I say, “You’re from a southern newspaper, you’re blah blah. Each of you has to come up with a walk, a shape, two behavioral gestures, blah blah, and show them to me.” And we just start piecing them together. It’s truly just cut and paste.

**Gordon:** How do you generate the questions for the assignments?

**Landau:** I think hard. I try to find a seed that will open up a sense of possibility. I don’t know, it’s like looking for the fire, or looking for the match to strike to throw into the fuel. And the beauty of it is that you don’t have to be right or safe, because you try this and if nothing happens, you try another thing, and you make a mess. And then you say, “Remember that one thing you did three days ago in the first mess? Well, if we put that together with this thing that just happened by accident over there, and then you were
crossing slowly in the back as that happened.” And then suddenly there’s—I don’t know.
That’s how you do it. I love it! It’s fun!

**Gordon:** It creates interesting work.

**Landau:** I wish I talked to you sooner. I would have had you to come here to watch
Viewpoints. I would have done training for you.

**Gordon:** I wish I had. What are you doing next?

**Landau:** Disney.

**Gordon:** I’m curious, because I read about Julie Taymor doing the Disney thing—did you
know, by the way, that you are the next Julie Taymor?

**Landau:** Oh yes I do, believe me. Julie is actually someone I know, and have known for
a while through ART and we just have mutual friends. I don’t know her well, but I know
her. The Disney folk, a man named Stuart Okin first saw my work here. He saw the
original *Space*, and he started talking to me and kind of seeing everything and then
brought his boss Tom Schumaker to see *Dream True*. They eventually said to me, “Why
don’t you look through the canon of Disney material and see what and if you’d be
interested in working on.” So I spent several months doing that, and I came up with two
titles I was interested in working on. One was “Pinocchio” and the other was something
called “Something Wicked This Way Comes.”

**Gordon:** Oh, the Gene Wilder movie, with the merry-go-round; it was live action?

**Landau:** Yeah. Spooky. They said no to that. They were like, “Umnnnn, we don’t
think so.” “Pinocchio” they described as their jewel in the crown and said I’d have to
have a strong idea and that they’d tried creating it with other people in the past and it
hadn’t worked out. They were like, “We’re proposing that you go into a workshop and
do your version of Pinocchio and then we’ll decide if we want your version,” but I didn’t
want to do it that way. So then we went through a long process of well, what else would
I want to work on. I really couldn’t find anything, and at one point they came to me and
said, “What if we give you access to the entire Disney catalog of songs and music from
all time to put together something new of your own?” At first I felt like I was being
demoted to a theme park revue, but they asked me to think about it, which I did, and I
finally got so excited because it’s actually the perfect project for me. Martha Leavey
[artistic director of Steppenwolf] said to me the other day, if I could direct anything in the
world, what would it be? And I said I’m doing it. It’s my Disney piece. It is completely
accessible, and it is the most out there thing I’ve ever done. In terms of what you’re
writing about, this feels like my life which began as a kind of artistic schizophrenia, like
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and both were in the closet to the other. It’s like when I’m
hanging out over here with my “avant garde friends,” I’m not going to talk about
musicals, and when I’m over here doing “a-one-two-three-four!” I’m not going to talk…
My track in the last eight years has really felt like a synthesis, like I’ve been getting
closer and closer to being able to figure out how those two things live in the same
moment, exactly, and support each other, make each other better. The Disney piece feels
like—if I’m lucky—it will be the first piece where I really manage to do both at once. It’s because if you think about some of the Disney stuff like *Fantasia*, they’re really out there, they’re trippy, they’re hallucinatory, they’re magic, and yet, in this piece we’re telling a very sort of mythic, universal tale. So it’s something old and very accessible but cast in a very new light, I hope. Anyway, I got really into this, and the fact that I was told that I could go through all of Disney’s music from anything—from theme parks, records, whatever—and piece it together in any way I saw fit to make a narrative and characters of some kind was just a gift. I’ve been working on it for two years and I’m so excited about it.

**Gordon:** Is it structured the same way they did with Julie Taymor: “Okay, we’ll get to this stage of the project and then either one of us can walk away, and then we’ll go to stage two…”

**Landau:** Yes. The odd thing with Disney is it’s both the greatest thing and the most terrifying thing. They’re very serious. We’ve already done two workshops. This spring we’re doing a six-week workshop which is designed. They really put the resources in, but at any point, it’s exactly that. It’s each time, you have to get green-lighted again. This is the last hoop that I’ll be jumping through, meaning it’s for Michael Eisner. And he could say no, but I’m hoping and assuming that he’s going to say yes, in which case full steam ahead. But it’s definitely like that. My agent said to me, “The thing you have to know about working for Disney is you could invent Mickey Mouse and you’ll never see a penny for it because Disney is very up front about saying, ‘We own what you create and in exchange for that we’ll pay you a lot of money to do it, but you are not going to own it’,” i.e. I’m doing this piece, I’m writing it, I’m directing it, they could kick me off it and give it to another person. That’s Disney!

**Gordon:** But they give you lots of resources, which must be nice.

**Landau:** That’s the risk you take and as far as I’m concerned, well worth it.

**Gordon:** I have a couple of quick little easy questions.

**Landau:** Easy, okay.

**Gordon:** In the preface to *1969*, you said you did several projects creating a piece from scratch with actors. What were they?

**Landau:** The first one I ever did was called *Modern Fears*, which I have on video tape. It was at the American Repertory Theatre in the Institute. I had just met Anne Bogart and I decided to do this model of five actors, three months, one room. And it was great because I did it and as soon as I left ART, I started getting offers to do exactly that model. That was the first one. *States of Independence*, when I first got to New York, I invited a group of twelve actors to meet with me every Monday in the basement of St. Clements church. I’d gone to Europe with Anne Bogart the summer after she left Trinity and I was so blown away by talking to—we hung out with a lot of Europeans, but in particular French people and Greek people, and I was really blown away by their passion and knowledge about their own history, politics, culture. I started realizing that there was
very little that I cared about or knew about in terms of American history and politics. Out of this kind of self-loathing of a black hole of knowledge, I became obsessed with the American Revolution, and I invited these actors to come into a room with me every Monday and just make stuff. I gave them assignments and they brought stuff in that had to do with our own relationship to American history. There were phenomenal actors: Steven Skybell, Cherry Jones, Henry Spran. We all just hung out every Monday, and I started generating stuff that eventually I took to Philadelphia and did similar work on *States of Independence* and then eventually wrote it from there. So that piece. Wait, before what show? Before *1969*.

Gordon: Yeah.

Landau: I guess *Freud*, although it didn’t happen. Those are the two I’m thinking of at the moment. I’m not sure if there are others. *Modern Fears* and *States of Independence*.

Gordon: It’s so hard to tell sometimes, because all I really have to work with is reviews, and there’s lots of holes to fill in.

Landau: Yeah.

Gordon: This is another silly question, but for *Stonewall* I saw just the video, which directs it.

Landau: I know.

Gordon: What it looked like to me is that it was—the best way I can describe it is, like it’s a landscape—

Landau: Mmmm hmmm.

Gordon: And the focus is directed by light—

Landau: Mmmm hmmm.

Gordon: Everything’s lit, but then some things are more brightly lit to direct the focus within this landscape—

Landau: Mmmm hmmm.

Gordon: But I wasn’t sure if that’s the way it appeared an audience, or if it was just because the camera was directing my focus.

Landau: I think that is the way it appeared. I mean, sometimes focus was directed also in movement or whatever. But that’s what it was. It was a live panorama where it’s almost continually 65 people onstage.

Gordon: It seemed like even though the focus was here, I could see somebody over there doing things.

Landau: That’s the way the whole thing was.

Gordon: This is *Floyd*. [showing notes] It’s the silhouetting and I was trying to remember the levels and the angles, and I was trying to sketch it out, so I’d remember.
Landau: So you could see some of the silhouettes on the tape?

Gordon: Oh, you totally could see the silhouettes on the tape. It was beautiful. You do that a lot, actually, use a lot of silhouettes.

Landau: Yeah, yeah, I don’t know why.

Gordon: This is another quick question. In the Entertainment Design article on you and Scott [Zielinski, lighting designer], Scott says that you cut a character to be able to have the sound designer in rehearsal. Is that true?

Landau: Yes.

Gordon: What show was that?

Landau: *Space*. I’m really big on—I will chuck anything out. Scott was reminding me of that the other night, of how many things I’ve just thrown out. But it was a character that was cut I think between the workshop and going into rehearsal. It was for here [Steppenwolf], it was for rehearsal here. I decided that I needed a big sound setup in rehearsal every day from the beginning [sound effects].

Gordon: Well, there’s sound the whole time except for—

Landau: There were 500+ sound cues. It’s scored. I mean it’s really scored. I can’t remember. I think I probably cut another abductee. It was someone who clearly didn’t feel necessary to me and I felt like sound was a character. I literally thought of it that way. I was being told, “You can have x many characters in your play for budgetary reasons,” and I was like, “Well the sound character is very vital, so we don’t need this other little one.” So yeah, it’s true.

Gordon: The only major changes that I could pick up just from the reviews: the character, one of the abductees changed, the woman—she was a grad student, then she was a wife and mother.

Landau: Yeah. The truth is the Steppenwolf version was kind of a mess, but had something that was really raw and exciting. The L.A. version was not good. I don’t know why, except I was trying to fix things and it just— I think the best text version is what we ended up with in New York, when I finally felt like I got close to what I wanted, but by that point, three years had passed and there was something about that piece. Both George Wolfe and Gordon Davidson thought it was a good idea to do it at the millennium. It was such a bad idea. Basically the bulk of the reviews were like, “Well, seen it, seen it, been there, done that, Contact,” a lot of like, “This is old.” When I did it in 1996 or -7, whatever it was, it was pre-turn of the millennium. By the time we were doing it three years later, I think it felt old. But I do think the text was strongest in New York. It was about twenty minutes shorter. The big change was in this character of the singer who here was a kind of campy jazz singer and eventually became Terri McCarthy who played Nellie in *Floyd*, who did it in New York.

Gordon: And she was in *Stonewall*.

Landau: Yeah she was, and she was in *States*, she played the lead in *States*. 
Gordon: And she was in your workshop of *Dream True*.

Landau: Terri McCarthy, as far as I’m concerned, is the goddess of the new American musical theatre.

Gordon: I just love her voice.

Landau: Did you get a CD of Ricky’s called *Bright Eyed Joy*?

Gordon: Uh-huh.

Landau: Terri sings this song on Ricky’s CD called “Runaway.” Do you know that one? [singing “Runaway”].

Gordon: Okay, well, that’s the stuff that I needed for today.
APPENDIX B
Interview with Theresa McCarthy¹
Monday April 8, 2002
By Phone

Gordon: I’m looking at Tina in the context of— She’s doing avant garde work and musical theatre work and I think that’s really interesting. I’m writing about that, plus the smart musical idea. I had actually interviewed Tina in February—I flew out to Chicago to talk to her and she said, “Oh, you’ve got to talk to Terri—she’s so great!”

McCarthy: Yeah, we’re really good buddies. She’s fabulous. She’s really, I think, the most inspiring single person I’ve ever worked with really in the theatre. She really lets people do what they do and she’s so good. She has a way of letting you think you’ve come up with everything yourself so it feels really good and right and the commitment is that much stronger because it really feels organic and like it’s from you. But she’s that way with everybody, from designers to writers to everybody, actors.

Gordon: Do you think that that’s mostly because of the Viewpoints or just her personality?

McCarthy: I think the Viewpoints have a lot to do with it but the skill that comes in with editing what people bring to the Viewpoints because the Viewpoints just opens it up so that anything can happen and a lot of times it does.

Gordon: The first question that I wanted to ask you is, you’ve worked with Tina on musicals and nonmusicals—do you think that she approached them differently or did they feel like the same kind of approach for you?

McCarthy: No, it does feel the same to me. It doesn’t feel any different. We start out both processes working through the Viewpoints and training and making compositions. And—gosh, I can’t even think if I’ve done anything that hasn’t been a musical with her because everything, even the nonmusical pieces, have music involved in them.

Gordon: Especially for your characters.

McCarthy: Yeah, and I always play the musical one. But yeah, there’s always music involved. I did a show called The Almond Seller and there were a lot of Romanian folk songs in that and Stonewall had some songs in it too and Space had some songs that kind of came in. No, it’s the same, it really is.

Gordon: Now you’ve done Floyd, and those three that you just mentioned, and the workshop of Dream True.

McCarthy: Right, and another musical that she wrote called States of Independence which was fantastic, and then I did Christmas Carol that she did.

¹ This interview has been edited.
Gordon: Up at Trinity Rep?

McCarthy: Right. I mean everything on my resume basically is with her. Almost everything. She’s on there a lot. I just love working with her. She’s the best.

Gordon: That’s great. How did you meet her?

McCarthy: I knew Anne Bogart and worked with her. I did my first professional show with Anne in, I think it was ’86. And shortly after that Anne and Tina started seeing each other, they knew each other and that’s how I met Tina. She was more of a friend and then I worked with her at Trinity for the first time on Christmas Carol and from then on, I just always wanted to work with her. Because she does what she loves to do—she’ll take on these big projects. She’s inspiring. She has this positive attitude and she makes everybody involved feel that it can be done no matter how big and unwieldy and out-of-control the project. She is a true leader and inspires people to do their utmost.

Gordon: I got to watch her in rehearsals for Maria Arndt. She was just so fun to watch, even in those rehearsals and that was a “play play” (that’s what she calls it) but she enjoyed it. It was really fun to watch her work.

McCarthy: Yeah, she is a bright soul. I miss her so much, not being able to see her and work with her every day as I have been for the last few years.

Gordon: Will you go back and do another show with her if she has something coming up and a role for you?

McCarthy: Yeah, I mean if it’s going to work out. I think I’ve got these little kids and I’m going to do that for a while but my husband and I both feel we can see ourselves going back to it sometime once the kids are older and we can do it as a family, that kind of stuff.

Gordon: That’s great. I wanted to ask you too, was her approach—I think I already know the answer, but I guess I want you to more expand on it—was her approach to doing musicals different from that of most directors of musicals that you’ve worked with?

McCarthy: Yeah, definitely. Her approach to doing everything is totally different from most directors. There’s a similar inspiring feeling when working with Anne Bogart too, and it probably has something to do with Viewpoints, but I think both of them really love performers and really love what performers bring to—what any artist brings to—the project. And—how can I describe it? The last big musical I did was Titanic and it was with a really great director named Richard Jones. He’s wonderful and he’s visionary in the same way that I think that Tina is, but he just goes about it in a completely different way. It’s more the kind of old-fashioned “we build it”. Kind of you’re doing what everybody would expect you to be doing, you know what I mean? Nothing is way out there. And then he tweaks it by the visual—the set combined with the costumes and the way that people are moving does seem to be more kind of extended and not necessarily so naturalistic, but it didn’t feel as organic and kind of as “anything goes” as with Tina. And when I say “anything goes,” I don’t mean that you can just do anything because I
don't like it when people just do anything so that they keep getting attention. I mean, I think that there's a real deep—oh, God, I don't even know what word I want to say—like methodology or there is a deep connection to what you're doing no matter how out there it is. There has to be or else it just reads as hollow—as hissing and spinning is what some of us would call it. It just looks like, "Oh, there's someone who's doing something weird for the sake of being weird," and I don't think that pays off either, but when it works right, it's organic but it's not necessarily what you'd expect people to be doing. Does that make sense?

Gordon: It does. I got to see the tape of Floyd (but not the live production). I think that's what's striking to me, is that it feels very real but there's something unique about it, just unusual, and it's that combination that I really like. But I think that was true of the characters too, and I wanted to ask you, playing Nellie, did that feel like a more three-dimensional character to you than most musical characters, more complicated?

McCarthy: I think that a lot of musical theatre characters are more complicated than we're used to seeing them be portrayed. I haven't seen the Oklahoma! of course in New York, but from what I hear them saying, it seems like they worked on it in a different way than usual and it's not the usual kind of popular musical theatre acting style. There's a style and it's very— you can really point to it when you see it. It's broad and it's not rooted in reality and a lot of the audience really likes that, so that's really a choice, that kind of style in American theatre and probably it is so other places too, but... There wasn't a lot to Nellie when it first started because there wasn't a lot written about her, but I think that both Adam and Tina had a really strong feeling about what she was and what she meant to the story and that inspired me to discover some things. If you really look at it in the script, she has a few songs but she doesn't say very much, so most of what you see is a person kind of standing there waiting and sitting there waiting and longing and I think that—I don't know, I'm not answering the question.

Gordon: No, you are.

McCarthy: I don't think that it's more complicated than other musical characters. I think that it's as complicated as a human being should be— I think that it is human and wonderful and I think that all musical roles should be like that, whether you're playing Hello Dolly or Nellie or Floyd or something like that. I think that everything should be—I wish that everything was more personal and kind of deeper.

Gordon: Yeah. I think maybe the difference for me—I just watched South Pacific last night, the old one, and I was comparing all the characters from Floyd to that and thinking they feel so much more complex. Maybe it's more in terms of the actors' work on building character?

McCarthy: I really think it is. I really think that it's a style that people have gotten used to and it's a skill to be able to do that, to put it across, to sell a number. I think that there's a new style that's coming into acting that's maybe more filmic. Not that what we did with Floyd Collins was very filmic, but I really tried to bring a lot of subtlety to my
work, and I think that I try to bring a lot of me to my work too so I never feel like I have
to put on a façade. I really try to bring as much of myself to it as I can. I think that’s
more of the way of the filmic way of working than a lot of theatre where people think
they’ve got to put on the fake hair and the nose and all that kind of stuff, the makeup. I
just think that there’s a new way, other ways of approaching character that are just more
interesting to me than the kind of standard musical theatre style. Although I enjoy
watching it, when I see it really well done. I love it.

Gordon: I love the old musicals, and I think maybe I like them more as the redone
versions than I do watching the stuff that took place in the fifties and then coming back to
it. But... I had read this dissertation a woman had written about Tina and Anne and
Floyd Collins, and she described some blocking moments that came specifically out of
Viewpoints exercises. I was wondering if you could remember any for you from Floyd
Collins or from anything, just a blocking moment that was specifically from a
Composition exercise.

McCarthy: Oh, sure. A way that Tina would work would be, she might say, “Go away
and come back with seven postures that mean a brother and sister relationship.” So Jason
Daniely and Chris Innvar and I would go off and we would come up with some
positions like sitting in a car or hugging or something like that. Then we would come in
and do that without words, and then we might go through the song—“The Dream Song”—
together, and without talking about it too much, we would find ourselves moving into
different ways and then that would be how it was done. Or I remember another great, a
really interesting blocking time with Tom Nellis, who has done a lot of work with both
Anne and Tina. We would just go up to a rehearsal room together. He and I both had
fiery tempers at this time, and he was playing Tom Paine and I was Polly in States of
Independence. We had to block our scene, which is this big song in which he’s telling
me to take dares and to question and things like that. So basically she just told us to go in
another room and do it and we were getting mad at each other working because—well, we
just weren’t cooperating very well. And we were kind of throwing furniture around a
little bit and we realized that that was kind of like that, and that became the blocking for
that number and it worked really well. It didn’t have anything directly to do with the
lyrics or what we were saying, but both Tom and I really embraced the idea that Anne
and Tina tried to get across. In other words, if you can close your eyes and listen to the
people and know exactly what they’re doing or if you can watch them and close your ears
and know what they’re saying, then there’s not enough going on onstage. So we like to
get some different opposite things going. It’s exciting and it’s a good challenge. So yeah,
tons of blocking moments that I can remember with Tina.

Gordon: What do you think—and actually, for any of the characters, I’d ask
specifically about Nellie or the workshop when you played Madge [in Dream True]—but
what was the most challenging part for you playing that character?

McCarthy: Let me think. The most challenging thing about playing Nellie was having
to stop playing it, frankly, because it was such a wonderful role and I really mean that. I
hated it when the show ended, it felt too short, and I usually am fine to go on to the next thing. With Madge, I did struggle a lot with the stuff about space, and I wanted to know what she really means to Peter, so sometimes I struggle with the story where it is at the time. Back in my younger days, I would get really kind of vocal and go to Tina and say, “You’ve got to change this, I can’t do this,” and she was always amazingly patient with me. I don’t know how she could stand it, to have someone criticizing your writing that way, but she pretty much prevailed. She would change some things, but she was really right most of the time with, “just go with it, go through it and see what happens.” So I learned a lot from her in that way. And working on Madge was one of those experiences where I kind of felt like, “Ugh, something’s wrong, it’s just, it’s not—” I felt it wasn’t there in the text, and I was wrong. It was a wonderful challenge to discover how a person that seems meek, that seems like they give up, or how that person really is that anchor for Peter, and she is the lighthouse for him really. So that was one of the challenges for me.

Gordon: Did it seem like a very big stretch to do Stonewall and then do Floyd? Did they feel like very, very different projects to you or did there feel like there was a sort of interconnectedness in the way she approached them, and that made it simpler to do both? Because they seem very, very different to me.

McCarthy: They are so different. Well, Stonewall had about 70 people in it I think.

Gordon: Yeah.

McCarthy: That was really interesting and difficult too, because it’s hard to do anything with that many people. And also, it’s En Garde Arts. They do everything very frugally, so that was difficult too. I felt Stonewall was probably my most difficult thing to do with Tina, that was the most difficult project I did with her. I don’t feel like I really ever got my character. I didn’t understand her enough, and I wasn’t able to really open up my heart to understand her, I think. So I grew to love the play, and I did love the people, the feeling that the play brought for the audience, because I think the audience really really got into it a lot, but that was a tough one.

Gordon: I’m curious because I saw, again, the video of that at the archives—do you think the audience really connected to it or did they seem to not quite get it?

McCarthy: I think people got it. That’s my impression. It was out there, but it is New York, so there are a lot of out there people in New York. I think people that want to come see a play that’s called Stonewall on a pier way down by Stuyvesant High School, they pretty much know what they’re getting into. They’re there to be a part of it, and I think that’s what happened. I think that people got it.

Gordon: Do you think that Tina set out trying to specifically connect with the audience, or did she try to just say, “This is what I’ve done, get it or don’t get it, it’s up to you.”?

McCarthy: I think she always hopes that she will connect with the audience. I think that she really really wants people to get it, and I think that’s it’s gotten easier for her over the
years to accept that people often don’t get it. I think enough of the people that matter get it, and I also think that more and more people are beginning to understand what she does.

Gordon: It seems like her aesthetic is changing too, that she’s taking on works that are a little—literal is not the right word, but maybe—It’s easier to grasp Floyd than it is to grasp Stonewall, and it seems like her work is moving in that direction, though. Do you agree?

McCarthy: Possibly. Stonewall had a real deep meaning for her. It’s the whole idea of those guys being beaten up just for being in that bar, and it was the anniversary of that event. That really meant a lot to her, and I think it was a kind of a time for her to say, “This is who I am.” She never has been one to talk about her sexuality and pat herself on the back and all that. I really felt it strongly throughout Stonewall. I think whatever she does, she feels that it’s clear and accessible, and I think it is accessible. It’s just a matter of—I shouldn’t say that audiences need to open up their hearts, but for me her work is so accessible and loving and beautiful. She cares so much about every detail. She cares so much and she puts so much time into everything, so much thought. But possibly, I don’t know what her latest work has been, I know she’s doing a few things for Disney, and if you’re going to be working for Disney I think you’re going to have to do something that at least the Disney executives can get it.

Gordon: Yeah.

McCarthy: That might be pointing her in a slightly different direction. I did another one with her on the pier, a big extravaganza, all those pier plays.

Gordon: Orestes?

McCarthy: Yeah, Orestes. Those are all just—it’s such a great, cool experience, I would think, to be in the audience. I also went and saw Trojan Women that she did. It’s just so much fun. It’s such a huge spectacle. How can you not like it? I just think it’s great. If people didn’t get it, I don’t care. It’s fun, it’s just fun. It’s raw, raw theatre. It’s beautiful.

Gordon: So if you were going to categorize Stonewall, would you categorize it as a musical or a play?

McCarthy: Um, I guess it was a play. I suppose that was a play with music. Because the songs—well, there may have been a couple of songs with words—but most of the songs that were put to it were songs that existed already, so they were more appropriated for that.

Gordon: So what Ricky [Ian Gordon] wrote were more instrumental sections?

McCarthy: Well, he wrote some vocal things news, but some of his songs that he’d written already existed, like “Prayer.” That was a song that he set to lyrics by Langston Hughes, and that wasn’t for Stonewall; he’d already written that before. And then there were the pop songs she put in, the big dance ones, stuff like that.
Gordon: What’s your favorite piece that you’ve worked on with Tina?

McCarthy: Well, Floyd, definitely, and it’s too hard, I liked them all, but Floyd, Orestes, States of Independence were really great, and the Christmas Carol was amazing. I loved The Almond Seller too.

Gordon: The Almond Seller was one of her first plays, wasn’t it?

McCarthy: Well, that was one of the first things she did in New York, I think, but she’d been doing stuff at Trinity before that, and up at A.R.T. too. I think she might have even gone to Yale to do something, but yes, that was one of the first things she did in New York.

Gordon: I actually have a purely technical question that I just don’t know the answer to. With Stonewall, do you know, in the carnival preshow, if the audience members got to go through in the same order?

McCarthy: They could go in any order they wanted.

Gordon: Oh okay. I thought someone said something about there being a yellow brick road, and I didn’t know if there was actually something that guided you in a certain direction, or if it was just—

McCarthy: I guess there is, but it was happening all at the same time, so people might stay at Barney O’Hanlon’s little pen for a while, and they might wander over to the drag queens. They didn’t have to follow the yellow brick road, but they could if they chose to.

Gordon: Thanks, that helps. I think that’s all I wanted to ask you specifically. Is there anything that you can think of to tell me that I haven’t asked you about?

McCarthy: I’m sure there’s so many things, but I’m basically just gushing because I love Tina. I think she’s great, and the people that she works with are fantastic. She has the best designers on her team, always, and the best stage managers, and it’s just always a complete pleasure to work with her, and I can’t say that for everyone, I really can’t. But for Tina, and for Anne, it’s just sublime.

Gordon: Well thank you so very much for your time.

McCarthy: You’re welcome, Wendy.
WORKS CITED


Clippings/Programs.


Dream True (musical) – Clippings/Programs. Clippings file in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Performing Arts Research Center, New York Public Library, New York.


Floyd Collins – Clippings/Programs. Clippings file in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Performing Arts Research Center, New York Public Library, New York.


---. Interview with Katherine Rodda. Rodda 292-310.


---, and Adam Guettel. Interview with Dana Williams. “An Interview with Adam Guettel and Tina Landau.” Playwrights Horizons. Floyd Collins – Clippings/Programs.


Lauren, Ellen. “Seven Points of View.” Dixon and Smith 57-70.


Landau, Tina – Clippings.


