

DIRECTOR'S CONCEPT: ONCE ON THIS ISLAND

Once On This Island is set on the island of Haiti. Rife with racial struggle, this island has maintained "two different worlds" for generations. Although I plan to direct the show as "two different worlds" separated by class and poverty, rather than race, I feel the same themes and setting will shine through this beautiful tale.

My Director's Concept for *Once on This Island* (in one sentence): *Once on This Island* is a tale about "two different worlds" which collide to show the power of love over death.

SETTING

I plan to recreate the world of the island through set design and props. The set is a multi-level curved stage design which will be painted in swirled shades of blue to represent the ocean which dictates the lives and futures of the peasants in the story, and which is also a constant reminder of the location where TiMoune first began her life's journey (having been rescued from drowning by the god of the water, Agwe), and met her true love (who crashed his car at the ocean's edge).

In addition to the set recreating the world of the island, I've chosen props that will do the same. Because this show is a tale told by peasants, each prop used will be made of materials that could be found on the island: bamboo-style mats (which represent the peasant's huts), bamboo rain sticks (to which "rain" is fastened to recreate the swirling rainstorms), large bamboo with thick hemp netting tied to it (to recreate TiMoune's hut), etc. Large pieces of silk fabric will also be used and manipulated by actors to make story "suggestions", such as recreating the ocean when young TiMoune is drowning, and recreating the tree which TiMoune is turned into by the gods.

ACTORS AS STORYTELLERS:

Each and every prop or set suggestion will be designed to be manipulated by the storytellers (i.e. peasant characters) or the props/set will be pantomimed or recreated by the ensemble's compositions. The storytellers will "become" the huts, the rain, the tree, the storms, etc., and will even "become" the various characters in the story they are telling (the gods, the GrandHommes, Daniel, etc.) In staying true to the rich tradition of oral storytelling, which I feel is what this musical does so beautifully, I will stage the production to ensure the story is told by "storytellers" and not by set changes, special effects, different characters, etc. Therefore, there will be no set changes, little costume change, no "pauses" in the production, and no breaks in the action or story. The story told by the peasants will be the focus of the theatrical experience.

COSTUMES

The costuming for *Once On This Island* will reflect the poverty yet the pride of the people of the island. This will be accomplished with brightly colored torn garments that give the show the "island-feel" but also reflect the colorful story that the characters tell. I don't want to focus solely on the peasants' poverty in costuming (i.e. dull or drab tattered costuming) but rather on their pride as a people. Also, the "characters" in the story will be represented by the storytelling peasants taking on additional costuming pieces (such as the gods' headdresses). The only exception to this will be when the story crosses over from storytelling to "real-life" (to blur the "line" for the audience) with the introduction of Daniel and Andrea, both of whom will both be dressed entirely in white. This symbolic color will represent their world which is untainted by poverty or affliction, thus making the difficulty of a love between Daniel and TiMoune a constant visual reminder through costuming. Additionally, when the peasants play the role of the grandhommes, they, too, will take on white masks to represent "the other world".

THEME:
(WHY I'VE CHOSEN *ONCE ON THIS ISLAND* FOR BYRON CENTER)

The themes of this musical are what make it one of my very favorite shows. Themes of love, belief, social prejudice, and the power of love over death, all speak powerfully in this tale. In staging this show, I plan to accentuate those themes through costume (the gods) and blocking.

Beginning with an Audition Workshop, I will have the students physically recreate these themes and will discuss and “workshop” with students the messages of this show. A Musical Retreat (which is planned for one week into production) will also be instrumental in not only discussing and staging the show according to its themes, but also in living out those themes as a community of performers who will be together to work on this show for an entire weekend. During this retreat, specific team building exercises (Challenge Course) will be used as a springboard (and metaphor) to discuss the musical's themes and how we can best portray them to an audience.

I am thrilled to finally be directing this show at Byron Center. It remains one of my favorite shows of all time. And although my concept for the story involves simplicity of set and costume, I believe that it will be anything but simply told. Using actors to their full storytelling potential, I believe, will be a beautiful portrayal of the themes in this musical...themes that are common to the human experience, and themes that, when creatively shared, will surely move an audience.