

Robin Phelps

THEA 3050 – Theatrical Design Concepts

Prof. Scott Boyd

Sept. 20, 2026

Artistic Self-Reflection

My artistic discipline is technical theatre, specifically stage management, and, as of recently, lighting design. I have a deep respect and appreciation for stage management, knowing firsthand how much the responsibility for an entire show's integrity weighs on someone's shoulders. Lighting design is a recent artistic development for me. I am enjoying lighting design as a more traditional creative expression juxtaposed with stage management as a more formal and logical creative form.

I did not intentionally pursue stage management or lighting design at first. I started getting involved with theatre when I was cast in the ensemble of Annie Jr. at my elementary school in my fourth-grade year. Since I had such little stage time in the Warbucks ensemble, my director asked me to help with a small task backstage – helping make sure quick changes were completed on time. This simple task evolved throughout our production process, and I ended up being that department's first “student stage manager.” I tracked all the props, scenery, costumes, or anything else I could pour out of my script. I loved that side of the theatre so much that I asked to return the following year only as the “student stage manager;” I had no desire to be on stage from there on. Since then, I have spent the last ten years expanding my knowledge and skills as a stage

manager for multiple theatres across Rutherford County. In doing so, I have found a deep love for channeling my creativity into logistical analysis.

During my first few years exploring theatre, I struggled greatly with the typical design areas in theatre. I never considered myself creative in the traditional sense while growing up. When I found stage management, I finally felt like I had a creative outlet that allowed me to showcase my skills in management and logistics towards an artistic goal.

My inclination towards lighting design is a very recent development. I honestly hated lighting design for the longest time. However, taking the Lighting 1 class here at MTSU gave me an opportunity to explore lighting design at a reasonable pace under the guidance of an industry professional. That course gave me a new appreciation and a much better understanding of lighting design, and I now find myself enjoying lighting designing for shows and events much more. Since then, I have felt more confident and capable with my lighting design skills as I have designed a straight play and several musicals in the past few months. My first few weeks in the Lighting 2 course have now further solidified my aspirations to pursue lighting design professionally, alongside stage management.

Above all else, I obviously want employment after completing my degree program. However, I do not just want employment for a paycheck – I want to dedicate my early career years to learning from industry professionals inside and outside of the classroom space. My formal higher education in theatre allows me to gain real work experience and knowledge while building lasting connections with my faculty, staff, and fellow peers. Pursuing a college degree in theatre, especially the new Bachelor of Fine

Arts program, allows me to tailor my courses and experiences to my specific aspirations and career trajectory goals. While I am prioritizing classes in my specialized design focuses, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn about the other specialties within a theatre and to become a multi-faceted technician/designer. Training in the other production areas also gives me a foundational understanding of all the areas, ensuring I can effectively collaborate with other designers or team members.

My approach to stage management has changed drastically over the years while I have continued my professional training. As I have developed a better understanding of stage management both as a profession and an art form, I now understand stage management as a creative puzzle rather than a means of managing people. My job is not to manage people, rather I work to ensure each piece of a unique puzzle fits together to make a harmonious picture. With each new production, I assume responsibility for the image/vision the director(s) want to eventually create and ensure each designer's work can fit within that picture and the constraints of the project. In doing so, I assist with running rehearsals to ensure the director can keep creativity at the forefront of their mind instead of focusing so much on the logistics of rehearsals. Similarly, my job is not to manage designers and technicians. Rather, I coordinate between departments and ensure design work is completed within agreed parameters. I am not there to manage people – I see that the show comes together as close to the director's vision as possible.

While I have already seen improvement in my workflow and processes so far in my education in both lighting design and stage management, I still have a long way to go. I want to get better about being thorough and intentional about my work. Specifically, I

want to work on dedicating my time to more in-depth visual and contextual research on the show I am working on, whether I am stage managing or lighting designing. I also want to be more thorough in my prep work for each show. Currently, I tend to complete *some* of the tasks I prefer to have done before production starts, and this inevitably sets me behind in my workflow later on. Going forward, I want to be more intentional about setting time aside to set up paperwork, set up workflow documents, communication methods, etc.

I have enjoyed my time so far studying technical theatre in college, especially under the guidance of such knowledgeable faculty and staff. I look forward to continuing my education and job training at Middle Tennessee State University and am hopeful for potential employment and training opportunities that may come from my time within MTSU's Theatre and Dance Department.