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Emotional Hangover
What Are the Symptoms?
How Can Actors Avoid It?
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PHOTO: 2010 Production of Machinal by Sophie Treadwell, Directed by Heather May.

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*The Academy’s alumni have received nominations for these and many other awards.
Ellie Hanson and Kenneth Hopkins fly from airline cable and harness during an indoor rehearsal for an outdoor aerial dance performance 60 feet in the air on the Washington and Lee University campus in Lexington, VA, in 2009. Just before the photo was shot, Hopkins grabbed Hanson's cable and pulled the two of them close together, then released her and she spun away from him as he flew backwards. Flying effects for the rehearsal were provided by D2 Flying Effects; flying effects for the outdoor performance were by ZFX. (Photo by Kevin Remington; cover design by Deanna Thompson; Photoshop work by Garland Gooden)
Musical Theatre Requires New Styles of Voice Training

Classical voice training alone is no longer sufficient for today’s musical theatre majors. In 2008, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing issued a statement in support of this position, citing differences in spectral output, vibrato rates and amplification.

Our current system of classical training has been in place since the 19th century and was designed around European ideals. In 1892 Louis Lombard, director of the Utica Conservatory, wrote an article outlining those ideals. He stated that a conservatory exists to preserve compositional forms, glorify the nation and contribute to the moral and intellectual improvement of society. Those concepts have very little in common with shows such as Spring Awakening and American Idiot. Bel Canto style, which pedagogue Lilli Lehman called the expression of the “cultivated people,” also seems contradictory to modern musicals.

For example, Lehman suggests “expression must be sacrificed, partly at least, to the beauty of the musical passage” and expression should be conveyed through “crescendi, points of breathing and the endings of phrases.”

Things have changed. Cast recordings now use standard recording studio techniques including Auto-Tune. Live musical theatre productions use sound systems that rival those in use by leading rock bands. Even the Metropolitan Opera uses equalization, reverb and compression in its live broadcasts.

These changes affect the way we hear the voice. In traditional classical training, we prepare students to project in a theatre that will hold 3,000 audience members. However, when we are training singers to work with a microphone, we only need to train their voices to carry one to three inches. Of course, we still want the voice to be strong and healthy. However, the forward placement that makes a voice carry acoustically can often negatively affect text intelligibility and dramatic nuance — and is unnecessary when using a microphone.

This is not to say that singers should forgo all classical vocal training. In today’s market, performers must be capable of switching between classical and contemporary styles with ease. However, expecting singers to handle the transitions on their own, without professional guidance, could set them up for vocal damage down the road. With a wide range of non-classical approaches to vocal training now available (e.g., Estill, Popeil, LoVetri and Saunders), I’d like to urge you to consider the options and think outside of the box. Your singers will appreciate the specialized training, and those casting them will also take notice.

Have an opinion you would like to share on a topic related to theatre? Send your column of 400 words or less to deanna@setc.org.
Theatre as an art form is unique in its collaborative nature. Directors, designers, actors and technicians all must work together to create the world that audience members enter when they walk into the theatre. This issue of Southern Theatre celebrates that collaboration with something for everyone!

If you’ve ever thought about adding flying effects to a production or considered flying as a performer, you won’t want to miss Celeste Morris’s featured story in this issue. She not only explores the growing fascination with flight onstage, but also offers options for adding flying effects, discusses safety concerns, and outlines cost and benefits. Several theatres that have used flying effects are featured in sidebars, explaining how and why they added this feature to their productions.

Have you ever had trouble leaving a role on stage? Or perhaps you’ve known someone who did? Monique Sacay-Bagwell explains what an emotional hangover is and how it can cause problems that spill over into an actor’s personal life. She also offers tools that actors can use to prevent or overcome this problem.

Those working in the design-tech area will find helpful advice in our regular “Outside the Box: Design-Tech Solutions” column. Rick Mayfield details how you can create inexpensive prop iPhones by combining materials you may already have in stock with bumper-style phone covers.

In this issue’s “400 Words” column, Matthew Edwards makes the case for why classical voice training isn’t sufficient for today’s musical theatre students.


Whether you are a director, a designer, an actor, a technician or a musical theatre enthusiast, I am sure that you will find something within these pages to spur your collaborative nature. Enjoy!
Prop iPhones

Update Onstage Phones to the 'Latest Technology' Inexpensively

by Rick Mayfield

For a recent production of Gina Gionfriddo’s Becky Shaw, the director asked for three contemporary iPhones, rather than the dated cell phones currently being used by the actors. My first thought was to contact a friend who repaired phones, thinking the dead phones would be easy to acquire. Not so – the phones are kept for parts and are valued by repair facilities.

We needed these phones as soon as possible. I discussed this with the production team, and we all agreed that a phone built from a piece of ¼” medium density fiber board (MDF) in a cell phone case was a good start. However, this would not provide the shiny glass front of a smartphone. We happened to have lots of scrap gray mirror Plexiglass in stock. This was the perfect solution to this appearance problem.

Building our Prop iPhone

I cut the ¼” MDF and the mirror Plexiglass to what I thought was the correct dimensions based on information gathered on the Internet. Then I used spray adhesive to affix the MDF to the Plexiglass. The edges and the back of the MDF were painted black and then gloss-coated. A silver Sharpie was used to detail the edges of each phone, although this step may not be needed depending on which case is purchased.

The Plexiglass reflects the surrounding light to give the appearance of the glass front of the actual phone. These look pretty good as is, but the phones appear much more realistic when fitted into bumper cases. We purchased bumper-style cell phone cases made by “Bestcase” at Target.

Tips from Our Experience

1. Purchase the cases first and then cut the materials.

The length and width dimensions I gleaned from the Internet were incorrect. Additionally, my prop cell phones were a tiny bit thicker than a real iPhone 5 so I had to adjust for this. Luckily my assembled MDF and Plexiglass phones were too large rather than too small, so I was able to cut them down to fit the purchased cases.

2. Choose a bumper-style case with enclosed silver button covers for best appearance.

I recommend a bumper-style case over a hard case because the hard phone cases often do not have button covers – an issue you will need to address if the prop is used in close proximity to the audience. For those of you who don’t know, a “bumper” case is a single-piece, flexible wrap for a smartphone made of silicone, vinyl or other flexible polymer. A “hard”case is made of hard plastic, sometimes with bumper material attached, and usually comes in parts that snap together around the phone.

3. Lighting effects can be added if needed.

There are several ways to add a lighting effect to this prop if that is important to a director or a designer. However, we did not find it necessary. In our production, the audience was closer than usual, but it was never an issue that the phone did not light up. The actors did a great job of making the prop seem “real” to the audience.

Check Your Stock

We had the materials I needed to make our phones in stock except for the cases, so our cost was low. Be sure to check your stock before purchasing the materials listed. You may also be able to fabricate these
phones from stock props inventory.

The beauty of this project is that you can create the look of a high-tech gadget using simple low-tech methods at minimal cost.

DO YOU HAVE AN ‘OUTSIDE THE BOX’ STORY IDEA?

Send a synopsis of your idea via e-mail to “Outside the Box” Editor Larry Cook at lcook@ung.edu.

Or come to the “Outside the Box: Design-Tech Solutions” workshop at noon, Friday, March 8, 2013, in the McCready Room at the Galt House in Louisville, KY, during the 2013 SETC Convention. All are invited to this workshop to share ideas and learn from others.

LOOKING FOR MORE TIPS?

Visit the Publications area of SETC’s website (www.setc.org) to order our book of previously-published columns, Outside the Box: 25 Design-Tech Strategies to Save You Time and Money.

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We had all items in stock, except for the bumper-style cell phone covers.

**Total cost for the University of Memphis’s 3 iPhones:** $53.97
“How is that?” Tracy Nunnally asked as he cinched the harness another notch. “Um…a little tighter,” I responded, my voice tinged with uncertainty. I was about to fly – not through the wild blue yonder, but across the salon of the Chattanooga Convention Center at the 2012 SETC convention. This workshop, presented by Hall Associates Flying Effects featuring the aerialists from ImaginAerial, was my first foray into the world of theatrical flight. On my nod, I was hoisted off the ground and my adventure began. The bare convention hall melted away as I soared through the air, flipping and turning – channeling my inner Spider-Man. I was challenged and abused by the lovely lyra (a continuous hoop of aluminum or steel that is suspended by a single point) and found grace and elegance in the folds of the hammock, a circus silk that is folded in half with one hanging point. By the end of my session, I was disheveled, aching, exhausted and helplessly in love. I am not alone in romancing the fancies of flight.
Since the 5th Century BCE, theatre artists have been experimenting with overcoming the laws of our natural world. The great Greek playwright Euripides is even known for his excessive use of the mechane (crane), as he continually called for the flying in of the gods to resolve plots. Even the Dark Ages boasted the use of the “glory” or “paradise” as a means to fly performers or effigies into the playing space.

Over the past 20 years, flying effects and the aerial arts have had an explosion of interest and popularity. Prior to the 1990s, these elements were reserved for circus acts and the occasional performance of Peter Pan, but today they are included in mainstream productions at every level. There are now a number of companies that assist theatres with flying effects, including Hall Associates Flying Effects and D2 Flying Effects, both of which did presentations at the 2012 SETC Convention, and ZFX, which is presenting a master class on the Wednesday prior to the 2013 SETC Convention in Louisville.

Flying truly is the new “frontier” for the stage. After all, performers from Broadway’s Spider-Man to aerialists in Cirque du Soleil to singer Taylor Swift are taking flight.

Why Fly?

Flying brings a new level of art to the theatre, a new “movement vocabulary” not experienced before. Nunnally describes this phenomenon as the “third dimension” available to directors of theatre. It is the beauty of perceived danger that takes the breath away.

Laura Witwer and Angela Jones of ImaginAerial, a cirque-style flying effects company based in New York
City, offer another reason for our current captivation with flight.

“Our culture is always looking to push the envelope,” says Witwer, “and we want to see it on stage.” In other words, she says, “people want to see us take the dare.” Audiences are willing to go on this thrill ride with us because, to a certain degree, they are hungry for the experience.

Another element flight brings to mainstream theatre is a new direction for storytelling.

“Flying is a unique and exciting way to support storytelling,” says Emily Ballou, producing manager at ZFX, based in Louisville, KY. “We help to bring the minds of the audience inside the artistic intention of the production by physically enacting magical, dreamlike or other metaphysical ideas.”

Others suggest that we, as a culture, are not just looking for that which pushes the envelope, but that which actualizes the stories in our heads. Take Spider-Man, for example. Our first introduction to this mighty hero in 1962 was in comic book form. Our imaginations transformed us to superhero status as we climbed the great skyscrapers with our arachnid friend. As technology progressed, so did our desires for adventure. The 1970s moved Spidey from the printed page to live action, but nothing prepared us for the amazing adventures that we’ve had with Spider-Man in the 21st century. It wasn’t enough for us to soar with Spidey on the big screen – we had to see it live. This experience has brought “spectacle” in theatre to a new “high.” It only makes sense that this desire would move from Broadway to your front door. After all, flight is something we dream about. “It’s the superpower that everyone wants!” says Delbert Hall, president of D2 Flying Effects, with offices in Hanover, MD, and Johnson City, TN.

The growth of flight in theatre also is related to budgetary changes. As the “flight” industry has grown, flying has become a more affordable, feasible option for many theatre companies. Just 40 years ago, flight was dominated by a single company, Flying by Foy, headquartered today in Las Vegas. Since the 1980s, the world of flight has changed tremendously. Today there are a number of professional flight companies, and many offer competitive pricing that enables more theatres to fit flying into their budget. The growing technology has also made it possible to install flying equipment into the most unusual of
spaces. Simply put, the qualified flight director often sees possibilities where others see only problems.

**Two Types of Flying**

How does a theatre company go about incorporating flight into a show or a season? First, one should understand the two worlds of flight – theatrical flight and aerialist or cirque-style performance. These two areas are often confused but actually have distinct functions and sensibilities.

Theatrical flight most closely relates to the tradition of flying people and objects within a theatre.

In recent years, Hall Associates has flown everything from “Christmas angels” to a jalopy full of children. ZFX has coordinated Taylor Swift’s soaring through concert performances.

The aerialist, on the other hand, has more of

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**Flying Effects in ... Professional Theatre**

*Our audiences love the effects we use*

Mitchell L. Critel, Technical Director
Barter Theatre
Abingdon, VA

**How have you used flying effects?**

Typically we have one or two productions a season that will need some sort of flying effect. Some recent productions that used flying effects are Disney’s Beauty and the Beast (Summer 2011), 9 to 5 (Spring 2012) and Disney’s Tarzan (Fall 2012).

The flying effect in 9 to 5 at Barter Theatre presented a few challenges. The first challenge for us is placement of the effect around the other infrastructure of the theatre. We have a unique set of circumstances here at Barter because we do rotating repertory year round, so we not only need to take into account the show in which we are using a flying effect, but also the other one or two shows in the same theatre at the same time. After we get that nailed down, we go onto discussions with the director and flight director on the details of the effect. This particular effect, we just wanted a simple lift with the ability for the performer (Nick Koesters) to swing a little bit as he is bound in a mail bag. That part was fairly simple to figure out. The real challenge came to light once the director said he would like to see the chain and a big hook used to hang Mr. Hart. We finally settled on two separate systems. The first was the system to suspend the performer in a harness. The second system was only to make it look like the chain and hook were doing the lifting.

**Are the results worth the time and money?**

The results are worth the effort. Our audiences love the effects we use. Often, when I am approached by patrons, they will quickly address the set and then spend the majority of our conversation on special effects. Any chance I can use an effect that I have not used before, or expand on an effect we have used in the past, is worth the time and money spent.
a relationship to cirque-style, gravity-defying demonstrations. These are the rope dancers, the silk and trapeze artists. These acrobats rely not on the mechanics of a harness but on precise training, accurate movement and incredible physical strength to stay in the air. Aerialists have moved beyond the big top to provide entertainment at almost any venue imaginable. Popular arenas for aerialists include corporate events, parties and similar extravaganzas. The integration of this type of movement into traditional theatre is actually very new. Companies such as the Firefly Theatre of Alberta, Canada, are utilizing circus skills and artistry to create a hybridized form of theatre. The mission of this theatre is to use circus as the vehicle for the most important element of theatre, storytelling.

More mainstream theatre companies, such as the Gainesville Theatre Alliance (GTA) of Gainesville, GA, also are using cirque elements to elevate the sensory experience of performance. In the fall of 2006, GTA used cirque skills to actualize the mythical battle between fire and ice in Gay Hammond’s play The Snow Dragon. Using silks, the actors swirled around the space in a flurry of movement and magic. Once again in 2011, silks were introduced but used as a playground for faeries in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. For both of these performances, the focus was not on the cirque performance, but on using these elements to enhance the production.

Who Can Fly and What’s Involved?

The creativity of flight managers and the growth of technology can make just about anything possible today. That wasn’t always the case, notes Hall of D2 Flying Effects, who has been involved in the flying business for more than 30 years. He describes the early days of theatrical flight as being limited to set tracks and mechanical assist pulley systems that required the strong arm of a flyman. Harnesses for human flight were bulky, uncomfortable contraptions. These two aspects restricted flight to lighter objects and people – maxing out the systems at about 120 pounds. When asked about today’s limits, Hall replies with a laugh, “We can fly an elephant. It may not be fast, but it will fly.”

Part of the change today is in the availability of lighter, stronger materials, such as steel cable, Kevlar rope and nylon webbing, which provide

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"We can fly an elephant. It may not be fast, but it will fly."
greater flexibility and more options. Tracy Nunnally, president of Hall Associates Flying Effects, with offices in Dekalb, IL, and Barcelona, Spain, has used these technical advantages to fly larger and heavier objects. In 2011, for example, the company was approached by a middle school theatre working on a production of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. The director not only wanted to fly the car, but the car loaded with actors – adults and children. Hall Associates came into the theatre and assessed the situation. With careful planning and engineering, they were able to safely fly the actors and the car. A fully automated, four-dimensional flying system enabled the car to lift, travel, pitch and yaw.

Newer technology also is making flight a more comfortable, dynamic experience for fliers. Each of the primary flying companies in the U.S. has its own proprietary designs for flight equipment and

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**Flying Effects in ... College-University Theatre**

*The first moment of flight always – always – produced an audible gasp*

**Jonathon Taylor**  
Scenic Designer/Technical Director  
University of Nevada, Reno

**How have you used flying effects?**

In October 2012, we mounted a production, *The Tragical Story of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus*, in which we incorporated flying effects. The flying added for us another dimension to the piece – another layer and literal and figurative space for telling the story.

We flew three actors. There are two angel characters in the play – a Good Angel and a Bad Angel – and Cornelius, who was playing a Houdini-like magician/escape artist. The flying was used to accent moments throughout the play. The scene in which Faustus writes out the contract, for instance, can be difficult to stage in a way that engages the audience. We discovered that we were far more involved when we used the Good Angel to highlight the text through movement – somersaults, hovering and so forth. This kept us in the story and kept the action moving forward.

The technical elements were all specialized and carefully configured. In our case, the track was secured to a batten, which was anchored via span sets and ratchet straps to the grid. We rented two tracks, which ran laterally across the stage from stage right to stage left. In addition, we rented three somersault harnesses and invited a ZFX flight director to assist in the initial set-up and choreography. We had nearly a month with the equipment before opening the show. For that and for travel expenses for our flight director, we paid $9,000.

**Are the results worth the time and money?**

Did the flying pay off? Of course, it’s hard to measure impact or to isolate exactly what draws an audience. We were essentially sold out every night from opening through the final show. The first moment of flight always – always – produced an audible gasp. I think that’s a clear measure of impact. The campus and local papers were also very curious about the production. Flying people, even in Reno, is not an everyday occurrence, and it’s a draw.

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Scott Davis as the Bad Angel (left) and Ashley Gong as the Good Angel (right) are flown as Dr. Faustus, played by Ethan Leaverton, watches. (Flying effects by ZFX)
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harnesses. Reputable flight companies use only harnesses that are rated to a tensile strength of 2,000 pounds. The considerations in building harnesses are: first, safety; second, mobility; and third, comfort. The advantages to modern harness design are plentiful. Fliers have a much greater range of motion (this is dictated by the type of harness and the rigging system) and the “ride” is much more comfortable. This is not to say that harnesses are comparable to your favorite slippers, but care is given to alleviate irritation to pressure points and adjustment locations. Finally, because of the 21st century materials, harnesses have become much smaller. This aids in the illusion of flight because, with a carefully designed costume, the harnesses all but disappear.

Flying companies also are perfecting motion controlled by computers, which adds precision and complexity to the playbook. Ballou suggests that this is the future of flying and the natural progression of flight technology. Though the price of automated flight is higher than manual operation, this has not limited the technology to any particular users. Automated flight has been used in settings from high school theatres to Broadway and from arena sports to pop concerts.

Getting Started

Whatever your individual purposes or goals, the inclusion of flight in your company’s production should be an exciting, challenging and rewarding experience. Flying effects companies offer the following advice for smooth flying:

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**Flying Effects in ... High School Theatre**

'We played to four nights of packed houses, and the flying was the highlight of the show'

**Sharon Morrow, Director**
**Parkview High School, Lilburn, GA**

**How have you used flying effects?**

We flew four actors (Peter, Wendy, John and Michael) for our production of *Peter Pan*. Working with D2 Flying Effects was one of the high points (pardon the pun!) of my career in educational theatre. Delbert Hall came in the week before our tech week to supervise the installation of the hardware and to train the “flight crew.” Mr. Hall spent two days training both the actors and the flight crew. A side note: Being IN the harness is pretty easy, but actually getting the actors in the air ... that’s the magic! He quickly assessed what our actors could do (”Peter Pan” was a very accomplished ballerina. She looked fabulous in the air!) and how complicated our flight choreography could be. He completely blocked all the flying in the window scenes and the flight to Neverland. Mr. Hall also made suggestions about the placement of our props and set pieces to create the most effective entrances and exits.

**Are the results worth the time and money?**

We played to four nights of packed houses, and the flying was the highlight of the show. Our investment of $7,000 was a little terrifying, not knowing if I could possibly recoup the money, but once we made it known that there would be FLYING in the play, the tickets themselves were flying out the door! I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and my students will never forget being part of that production. Our audiences haven’t forgotten either. Now, I want to have flying in EVERYTHING!
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1. Plan ahead.

Although some companies can stop everything and address your “rushed needs,” this will definitely be reflected in the cost of the project. In general, your fliers prefer to have about three to six months’ advance notice. Additionally, Hall Associates notes that the holidays are the busiest season for flying companies. You should add an extra week to your schedule if you are interested in flying in November and December.

2. Know your space.

Flying is not about buying a product, but investing in a process. Many elements must be evaluated to design the appropriate system for your individual theatre. Your flying director will want to know precise information about your structural supports and the height and depth of your performance space. Each company has an online questionnaire, on which you will need to record the type of theatre you are using, describe your structure and give data on the height, width and depth of your space, as well as the length of your battens and electrical positions.

3. Involve your flight director.

A good rule of thumb is to consider your fliers as

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**Flying Effects in ... Aerial Dance**

*I had students literally painting on the walls with their bodies*

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**Jenefer Davies**

Assistant Professor of Dance

Director of Dance Program

Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA

**How have you used flying effects?**

I offer aerial bungee, rope and harness, and silks as part of the “technique” requirement for the dance program at Washington and Lee, although many nondancers take the class because of its physicality and inherent challenges. We have performed inside a black box theatre rigged to a catwalk and in a traditional theatre rigged to the grid, as well as outside on walls, rigged to the roof of a building on campus. Last year I created a performance in which each choreographer linked aerial dance with a visual art form of his or her choice. I had students literally painting on the walls with their bodies. Art images were projected onto the walls, and students danced “inside” the art. I am inspired by the freedom that aerial affords the traditional dancer, as well as the opportunity to be part of a developing vocabulary and a growing art form.

**What costs are involved in flying dancers?**

Since I am on the faculty, there is no extra cost for developing/running this type of program. However, rigging is quite costly as are some other requirements that we needed in order for the university lawyers to sign off on our classes and performances. Liability contracts, as well as classes in safety for students, safety testing, rigging performed by certified riggers, specialized mats and helmets and new equipment are part of the expenses related to the program.

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*Above:* Aerial dancers create artwork, using paint to trace their movements and create a visual representation of the dance’s “footprint.” Other pieces from this 2011 Washington and Lee concert involved live music, artwork projected onto the wall and danced within, original movie footage projected and danced within, and art created in the air with special lighting. (Flying effects by D2 Flying Effects)

*Left:* Dancers perform 60 feet in the air on the side of a campus building using aerial ropes and harnesses rigged to the roof. (Flying effects by ZFX)
an integral part of your production team. Every aspect of your production will be affected by the addition of flight machinery. From costumes to set to lighting positions, adjustments must be made to accommodate the equipment required for successful flight. You may find it helpful to involve the flight director in your production meetings so he or she can advise you on the nuances of the instruments you will be using. You will also want to keep the flight director up to date on any design choices as they are being made. Utilizing the expertise of your flight director to address issues on the front end can ultimately save you from having to make late-stage alterations or even rebuild a set or costume pieces. For example, Delbert Hall recalls a theatre that designed the set for Peter Pan without taking the advice of the flight director into consideration. When D2 Flying Effects came to do the installation, the magical flight was impeded by set pieces. As a result, technicians found themselves cutting down the set in the eleventh hour.

Taking Performers into the Air

Once you have your production designed and your build in progress, your attention will likely turn to the actors or performers. How do you best prepare them for the air? Understanding that movement in flight is completely different from movement on land is crucial for the performer and the director. In my brief flying experience at the 2012 SETC Convention, I found that some movements, like somersaulting, were blissfully easy for me. Others, such as rotating from right to left, seemed nigh unto impossible. However, with serious coaching, I was able to make the moves. Some companies will offer the services of a flight choreographer who will work with your performers to understand these complexities.

In general, you can expect to spend a minimum of $2,000 to add flight to a production.

How should you cast actors for flying roles? Jason Whicker, a flight choreographer with Hall Associates, says that dancers usually make the best fliers because they have a keen understanding of their bodies in space. However, most performers who are committed to working and learning can become beautiful fliers. Overall fitness is important, but strength is key for elegant flight. The flight choreographers interviewed recommend push-ups, pull-ups and sit-ups for developing the muscles most utilized in flight. My personal experience at the 2012 SETC workshop demonstrates this fact: Flying requires incredible core strength (as evidenced by my aching abs) and a willingness to leap outside of your comfort zone.

Aerial Dance and Cirque-Style Performance

Incorporating aerial dance into a production goes beyond traditional theatrical flight in both training and equipment. For theatrical flight, tracks and mechanical advantage pulley systems typically are installed in the theatre. Artists are flown in harnesses and, with practice, should be able to master basic moves without extensive training. Aerial dance requires a greater investment of time and energy on the part of performers. The equipment should be rigged by a qualified company that specializes in theatrical flight, and the performers should commit many hours to guided instruction and rehearsal on the equipment. Aerial work will challenge everything you thought you understood about your body and movement – and training can be intense.

The “danger” aspect is not just perceived, but very real in aerial dance or cirque work. The performer is not protected from the possibility of a fall with harnesses and cables. Instead, the apparatus (be it a trapeze, a cube, silks or other materials) is rigged from above and the artist uses his or her physical strength and intellectual knowledge of the equipment to stay in the air. These elements, combined with the art of dance, create the illusion of effortless movement through the air.

Is it Safe?

The many headlines about injuries at Broadway’s Spider-Man have put safety at the forefront of many people’s minds. The safety of any performer in flight is dependent on two primary variables – the equipment and the operators. The key to a successful flying effect is the “appearance” of danger, not the real thing. So how do you ensure that both the equipment and the operators will fly performers safely?

Resources

Listed below are some of the major flying effects companies in the U.S.:

D2 Flying Effects: www.d2flying.com
Flying by Foy: www.flyingbyfoy.com
Hall Associates Flying Effects: www.flyingfx.com
ImaginAerial www.imaginaerial.com
ZFX: www.zfxflying.com

Organizations providing training or rigging certifications include:
North American Association of Flying Effects Directors:
www.naafed.com
Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP):
http://etcp.plasa.org/candidateinfo/rippingexams.html

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1. Go to the experts.

Theatrical flight is not a do-it-yourself project. Seek out a company that specializes in theatrical flight, that employs riggers certified through the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP) and that has commendable references from previous clients.

2. Insist on communication.

This is an area where you need to know the details – from the installation to the functioning of the harnesses. Make sure that you communicate with the flight company about each step. “If a flight director refuses to explain his choices and says, ‘Trust me,’ RUN!” says Laura Witwer of ImaginAerial.

3. Invest time in training.

A well-rigged system is not likely to have mechanical failure. The safety of your performers rests in the hands of the operators – literally. Make sure the performers and operators are trained sufficiently. Most flying companies will send professionals to run your show if you do not have time to train your own technicians. “Most accidents are due to operator error,” says Delbert Hall of D2.

What Does it Cost?

Ask any theatrical flight company about price, and the answer you will receive is, “It depends.” And, no, they are not just being vague or cagey. The price of incorporating flight into your production includes a myriad of variables:

- What type of space do you have?
- What are the flight demands of your show?
- What, who and how many will be flown?
- Are you looking for a simple up and down type flight or will the performers be moving across the space?
- What is your timeline?
- How long will you need the equipment installed?
- Will you be hiring professional operators?
- Where will you need equipment shipped?
- How much travel is required?

Fortunately, professional flight companies are committed to making this process as painless as possible. Most companies have online forms to get you started in bidding the job. After you have answered the basic questions, a representative from the company will contact you to determine the details of your production. Frequently, you will be able to give them an estimate of your budget and they will work to give you the biggest bang for your buck.

In general, you can expect to spend a minimum of $2,000 to add flight to a production. As you add elements, the price increases. For example, a production of Peter Pan can be approached minimally for $3,000, but can easily grow in price to more than $10,000. Literally, the sky is the limit.

So Is Flying for You?

In today’s world of economic and artistic challenges, most theatres are drawn to intimate productions with small casts and limited sets. So how do you weigh whether to add flying effects? The impact on audiences seems to be the major draw.

Mitchell Critel of Barter Theatre says audiences are fascinated with flying effects, making them worth the investment even though they are more challenging to accomplish in Barter’s theatres – repurposed historic structures – than in many newer theatres.

“We have to get more creative in our effect designs, but that really just makes it more fun,” he says.

Jonathon Taylor of the University of Nevada, Reno, and Sharon Morrow of Parkview High School also note the “gasp” factor experienced by audiences and say the end result was well worth the investment for their shows. Taylor’s production of The Tragical Story of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus sold out each night, and Morrow’s Peter Pan had record-breaking box office receipts.

In addition, Taylor notes that theatres looking to attract new audiences and engage existing audiences in new ways may find benefits in using flying effects.

“The script for Faustus sort of falls flat in a way – there’s a lot to navigate with only moderate returns,” says Taylor. “By flying three characters (the Good Angel, the Bad Angel and Cornelius), the magic of the piece was heightened, engaging the audience in a new way. Characters hovered and disappeared, making Houdini-like escapes from straitjackets. The inclusion of flight made Christopher Marlowe’s classic play accessible to a new generation.”

In the end, the decision on whether to add flying effects is about the balance between spectacle and story. The first goal of theatre is to tell a story. Will flying effects enable you tell that story in new or better ways? Remember, special effects or no special effects, “The play’s the thing.”

Celeste Morris is an assistant professor of theatre, resident designer and recruitment chair for the Gainesville Theatre Alliance (GTA), a collaboration between Brenau University, the University of North Georgia, theatre professionals and the northeast Georgia community.
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Many years ago, when I was a graduate student working on my master of fine arts (MFA) degree in performance at Ohio State University, I played the lead role of Hedda in a challenging production of *Hedda Gabler*, by Henrik Ibsen. Because this production was specifically selected for our MFA company as part of our senior year company project, I felt a great deal of pressure to make sure I was well versed in the character of Hedda. I immersed myself in the process and spent many hours, both on and off the stage, preparing for the role. To help myself understand Hedda’s spirited nature, I even went as far as taking horseback riding lessons and learning to shoot a pistol, as these activities were a passion for her.

Despite the fact that the production received favorable reviews, I fell into a bit of a depression when it ended. Chalking it up to post-production blues, I ignored my state. Soon I noticed that my relationships with others seemed to be strained. I was often tense and moody for no apparent reason. One day, the director of the show expressed his concern: “What has happened to you? You used to be a lot of fun.” This comment struck me as odd since I did not notice my behavior had shifted since *Hedda Gabler* closed.

After some soul searching, I came to the realization that I had been carrying over the emotional state of the character Hedda. Residues of her character were infecting my personal life. Aside from general advice on how to relieve stress in my life, no one was able to give me any specific technique I could use to leave the character onstage. Eventually, after several months, I moved on when I refocused my energy on new projects. But even to this day, I have a dark memory of that time period.
Emotional Hangover Defined

The condition that affected me has a name – emotional hangover – and it is a surprisingly common problem for both professional and student actors. A survey of professional and educational theatre participants through Survey Monkey in August 2012 found that 80 percent of respondents had witnessed or experienced a form of emotional hangover. While this survey only scratches the surface of the theatre population, previous studies conducted over a period of 20-plus years by researchers in psychology and in theatre, such as Richard Schechner, Richard Owen Geer, Mark Cariston Seton, Suzanne Burgoyne, Susana Bloch and Anna Kurtz, have made similar conclusions. Due to the nature of acting, performers are inherently vulnerable to emotional hangovers.

The term was introduced in 1993 by Chilean neuroscientist and psychologist Susana Bloch, creator of the Alba Emoting technique, in an article published in Theatre Topics. Emotional hangover is a condition that actors experience when they are unable to leave behind the emotional connection they created with a character on the stage. It implies something more than just feeling blue or exhausted because a production has ended. When an emotional hangover occurs, you unconsciously carry over into your normal life the emotional state of the character you have been portraying.

Signs of Emotional Hangover

When emotional hangover occurs, an actor’s personal life becomes altered. Many experience long-term effects such as changes in their relationships and personality, and many have disturbing dreams. In the August survey, a number of respondents described the symptoms they experienced.

A professional performer, who asked not to be identified, shared a troubling experience she had after a production of the play Proof. She wrote: “My mother died just prior to tech weekend, and I had to push all of my personal issues aside to get through the production of Proof, which dealt with the death of a parent. Thus, once the show closed, I fell into a deep depression and kept reliving the play in my dreams, possibly as a coping mechanism. It took about six months to fully shake off the problems that arose, and I still consider it the worst experience I’ve ever had doing a play.” The actress in Proof had not been taught any releasing techniques prior to Proof, until she studied Meisner and learned how to, as she states, “turn a performance off upon its conclusion.”

Another respondent, who is a student pursuing a bachelor of fine arts (BFA) degree in theatre at a prestigious conservatory in the Midwest, experienced emotional hangover after working on a production where he played the role of an “epileptic boy with multiple speech disorders.” He states that, he had to “self-induce four seizures a show, which was extremely taxing on my body, mind and emotional sanity.” He said he often had “disturbing flashbacks about my character and the show for many months afterwards. I had a slew of panic attacks during that time, along with an overall rise in my anxiety. It was hard to be around people for a while as a result.”

Adam Kissinger, a professional actor, recalled an example of an actress who was playing the role of Madge in William Inge’s play Picnic, and ignored the symptoms of emotional hangover. In the survey, he writes: “This actress believed she had great difficulty approaching the role, but I believe she got too close to the character and what she perceived as inability to step into the character, was actually her inability to step out of the character. Because she stayed in character during the entire run of the show, she felt no different onstage than she did in her daily routines, which made her constantly miserable. So, someone who was normally effervescent and social became reclusive and hid away from everyone after rehearsals and performances.”

These performers’ stories, along with my own experience working on Hedda Gabler, illustrate how intense emotional hangovers can be. In these situations, the experience becomes “tonic,” a term that Bloch uses in her book, The Alba of Emotions, to describe “experimental subjects” who were working on her training technique, Alba Emoting. She distinguishes between a “chronic state” that is “phasic” if short-lived, or “tonic” if maintained over time. The “tonic” state can have serious consequences for the actor’s mental and emotional health.

Techniques to Overcome Emotional Hangover

Theatre training programs introduce a variety of acting techniques to help actors learn how to get into character, but few also teach a releasing technique. Yet, based on the experiences of participants in the August survey, emotional hangover is a potential occupational hazard for many actors.

How can actors avoid or overcome it? The following are a few character releasing techniques shared by survey respondents, student actors and participants in a recent master class I led at the South
Carolina Theatre Association convention:
• **Putting the character away.**
  Mel Shrawder, a teacher at the Michael Chekov Acting Studio in New York City, shares a simple approach he has used: “Having items of the character in your dressing room, and simply turning them over, or putting them away for the evening.” Shrawder notes that the difficult part of an emotional hangover “happens AFTER the production has closed, rather than night to night.” By putting the character “away” each night, the actor grows accustomed to leaving it behind.
• **Decompression sessions.**
  Nicole Halbeisen, the director of a secondary school drama program, says she helps her actors step out of character with “decompression sessions.” These are post-production discussions where actors share their experiences about the production. This gives them a reality check, helping them to understand that the process they went through is now complete and that they can move on, she says.
• **The mirror.**
  A student who participated in my master class at the South Carolina Theatre Association convention shared a technique he was taught by a director. The students were told to imagine themselves looking into a mirror with their character looking back at them. Then they were to turn around and wave goodbye as they stepped away. This imaging work helped them to leave their character behind, in another existence that is represented by the mirror.
• **The cell phone bag.**
  Anna K. Kurtz detailed a releasing technique, “The Cell Phone Bag,” in her 2011 thesis, *Completing the Circle: the Actor’s Cool Down*. During a production of *Apartment 3A* that she was directing, Kurtz would withhold all cell phone use during rehearsals, even during breaks. This would force the performers to stay “rooted to the rehearsal.” But when the rehearsal was finished, they could immediately use their cell phones. This helped them “transition from the acting space back to everyday lives,” she said. Kurtz was able to capitalize on the appeal of cell phones for students and use it to her advantage.
• **Miscellaneous techniques.**
  Students in my acting classes have shared other techniques such as Tai Chi, focusing on upcoming projects, or using their skills as writers to “move
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[their] mind frame from one character to another.”
The common through line in all of these techniques is that they rechannel their focus away from the production or situation at hand that appears to overwhelm them.

The techniques students suggested are similar to older techniques of directors and teachers that were shared by Richard Geer in a 1993 article in Theatre Topics titled “Dealing with Emotional Hangover: Cool-down and the Performance Cycle in Acting.” Included are “rituals of eating and drinking” after the performance, or “group breathing” and “quietly talking about the performance.”

**The Step-Out**

The Alba Emoting step-out is the technique I find most useful in helping students avoid emotional hangover. Several years after my Hedda Gabler emotional hangover, I was exposed to this method at an Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) convention. The step-out is an intrinsic part of Alba Emoting, the physical technique developed by Susana Bloch for releasing, maintaining and controlling emotional states on stage.

Actors learning the Alba Emoting technique – including the step-out – are first introduced to the “neutral breath” pattern. The “neutral breath” consists of using deep abdominal and thoracic inhalations and exhalations of equal length. The posture is tall and balanced, with head floating on top of the spine. The face, eyes and jaws are relaxed,
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with the eyes soft and focused out on the horizon. Once the actor has learned how to connect to this neutral state easily, then the step-out process is introduced.

Following is a detailed description of the step-out process:

1. Stand with feet shoulder width apart with toes facing forward.
2. Arms should be relaxed, by your side.
3. Look out in front to a horizon point. (Photo, previous page)
4. Begin the neutral breath pattern of deep, even inhalations in through the nose and out through the mouth – creating a circular breathing cycle.
5. Once this breathing cycle is established, bring your hands together, softly intertwining fingers, and float your arms over your head while inhaling. Synchronize the arms rising with the tempo of one inhal. (Right, top photo)
6. Once you reach the top, bend your elbows and lower your hands behind your head. (Right, middle photo)
7. Slightly squeeze your hands as the breath begins its exhalation cycle. Using the same count, float the intertwined hands back to the starting position.
8. Repeat this series three times.
9. At the conclusion of the third time, release your hands and gently wipe away the "cobwebs" from your face. (Right, bottom photo)
10. This is followed by a series of shaking movements and sounds that break the linear posture in order to throw off the axis. (Photo, next page)
11. Actors may repeat the steps several times if needed, depending on the strength of their emotional connection with the character.

**How Does the Step-Out Help?**

Actors who have used the step-out technique say this breathing pattern creates a sense of calmness and neutrality. Michael Newberry, a student in my master class at the South Carolina Theatre Association convention, stated that “combining the physicality with the breathing was very effective” and that he felt surprisingly more alert when we finished.

Students in my undergraduate acting classes at Lander University also have found the Alba Emoting step-out helpful. As one student, Stephanie Conley, put it, this technique “allows me to relax and release my character.” Several said the horizon point is especially effective in helping them to maintain focus and push all the stressful thoughts out
of their minds. Others felt the breathing and arm movements helped release the excess tension they had been carrying around.

I also used the technique with actresses involved in Lander University’s recent production of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, by Notazake Shange. Given the strong subject matter in this play, the step-out was a particularly helpful releasing technique at the end of each rehearsal and performance. Like the master class and undergraduate acting students, the cast members noted feelings of calm in their feedback after the step-out was introduced to them. The actress who played Lady in Orange said that the step-out helped her release the emotions she was carrying as a result of her role.

Roxanna Rix, an associate professor of theatre at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania and a certified Alba Emoting teacher, notes that the “neutral breath” in this technique helps bring the body back to biochemical balance. This is a natural effect of the movements involved in the step-out, according to Oscar Ichazo. In his book, *Master Level Exercise: Psychocalisthenics*, he notes that exercises which involve raising the arms over the head engage the three segments of the lungs. This in turn helps sustain the “ratio of the pH (acid base relationship) in our blood.” Ichazo says this helps in “cleansing our organism and intensifying the absorption of pure vitality and energy.” This is why actors feel a release and rebalancing of their entire being when they execute the step-out correctly.

**More Training Needed**

Although emotional hangover was introduced as a common problem for actors 20 years ago, many performers are not aware of the term – and have not been taught techniques for dealing with it.

“It is interesting that one arrives at a theatre with an hour or half-hour call, and gets dressed with plenty of time to get into character, but when the play ends, actors rip off their mics and clothes … and can’t wait to get out of the theatre,” notes Shrawder, an actor who teaches at the Michael Chekov Acting Studio in NYC. “So stepping in seems fine time-wise as a presentation will follow. Stepping out demands more discipline to do, as we take for granted we know who we are, and we don’t need a lot of touchy, feely nonsense. Let’s get a beer. We’ve got friends waiting, … When I finished Jaime in *A Long Day’s Journey into Night*, I could intuitively feel I needed a little recovery time.”

Similarly, Laura Facciponti Bond, chair of the Drama Department at the University of North Carolina Asheville and a certified Alba Emoting instructor, notes a lack of training in techniques for dealing with...
with emotional hangover – and says it is important to offer actors help.

“Before learning Alba Emoting, I did not have any tools available to me to keep from experiencing emotional hangover,” Bond says. “People would conduct warm-ups, but never ‘cooldowns’ and certainly the idea of neutralizing after a performance or rehearsal was never introduced.”

Whether using the step-out of Alba Emoting or another method, it seems clear that some type of character releasing technique should be included in training programs so actors learn not just to step into a role, but to step out of the role when they step off the stage.

Monique Sacay-Bagwell, chosen as Outstanding Theatre Teacher in South Carolina by the South Carolina Theatre Association in 2011, is a professor in the Mass Communication and Theatre Department at Lander University in Greenwood, SC. She is certified at the CL2 level in Alba Emoting technique.
Words, words, words … [Hamlet II,ii] reviews books on theatre that have a connection to the Southeast or may be of special interest to SETC members. Scott Phillips, an associate professor at Auburn University, edits this regular column. If you have a book for review, please send to: SETC, Book Editor, 1175 Revolution Mill Drive, Studio 14, Greensboro, NC 27405.

Fundamentals of Theatre Design
by Karen Brewster and Melissa Shafer
2011, Allworth Press
www.faber.co.uk
ISBN: 978-1581158496
Pages: 256. Price: $27.50 (paperback)

by Cliff Simon

The first thing the reader may notice about The Fundamentals of Theatrical Design, written by Karen Brewster and Melissa Shafer, is its compact size, relative light weight and large type. Normally books about design for theatre are physically substantial and have a mesmerizing collection of glossy color photos of set, costume and lighting designs.

This wonderful book, though, is not meant for the coffee table or for the mahogany shelf, as much as it is for the backpack. It will be of use to teachers and theatre professionals certainly, but the focus is for students, for young minds hungry to learn how to go about understanding the method, meaning, whys and hows of designing for theatre. And because of its simplicity and its analytical straightforward lack of pretense, it’s a reliable and valuable learning tool for beginning designers.

Given the book’s emphasis on education, it’s not surprising that Brewster and Shafer are professors as well as designers. Both teach at East Tennessee State University, where Brewster also is resident costume designer and costume shop supervisor and where Shafer is technical director, as well as a scenic and lighting designer.

In their book, Brewster and Shafer take readers step-by-step through a design process, right up to and including approaches to finding work. They even include sample letters to potential employers. Brewster and Shafer do their level best to make this complicated business of designing accessible, and not a stone is left unturned. There is a lot of information, but they’ve broken it down into manageable and focused sections. If your reading is interrupted for lunch or class, it can be resumed later without missing a beat.

This book is not, nor does it try to be, a groundbreaking text. It gives a solid and comprehensive overview of – and methodologies for approaching – the myriad issues that designers deal with on a daily basis. There is even a small discussion on “Gender and Communication” that talks about some differences in the perceptions (and personalities) of men and women in the context of aiding collaboration.

In the book’s section on design basics, photographs of different assemblages of wood blocks explain what balance and rhythm look like as visual metaphor, with an effective and unassuming clarity.

Throughout the book, no matter what the specific topic, Brewster and Shafer return our minds to what is most important: telling a story. Along the way, they tell us the story of why we do what we do as designers: “At the heart of making the art of theater is the excitement that comes from this collaboration, and the realization that this art form is indeed ephemeral – no two productions, or even performances, of the same play will ever be exactly alike.” That’s enough for this designer to want to have a life in theatre and this book in my home.

Cliff Simon is an associate professor and head of design and production at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he teaches scene design, painting and Photoshop rendering. He designs at several regional theatres around the country each year. His website is www.cliffcakes.com.
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