

RUSALKA, AN OPERA BY DVOŘÁK PERFORMED AT CINCINNATI COLLEGE
CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC, MAY 10th – 13th, 2000;
A DESCRIPTION OF LIGHTING PROCESS, CONCEPT, IMPLEMENTATION AND
RESULTS.

Introduction

The director of the production was Malcolm Fraser, who is director of the opera program at CCM and who has directed many productions across the world with prestigious companies. Chia Patiño, a masters student with extensive experience co-directed. The set designer Thomas Umfrid, and the costume designer Dean Mogle, are both senior faculty at CCM and also work nationally and internationally. The lighting for this production was the culmination of two years at CCM for myself, and was the thesis show for my Masters of Fine Arts.

This opera was a joy to light because its music, libretto, and the production we created, dictated very clear moods for the lighting to mimic. Even in its most realistic settings, Act Two for example, it demanded stylised lighting rather than naturalistic lighting. Overall I styled my lighting by using two distinct sets of colour systems. Generally I painted large pictures on the stage, out of which I picked the singers with diagonal followspots. All this added up to a production that offered me many different lighting choices. I hope that I reinforced the artistic ideas of the director(s) and my fellow designers. This paper will describe what was a challenging and interesting project.

The Libretto and Music

It emerged early on was how important it was that we do not make the mistake, commonly made by many people, of comparing this opera with Disney's "The Little Mermaid". Both stories depict a cherished daughter who falls in love with a human in a "foreign" world. *Rusalka* is a dark tragic tale and it is better to look at the influences upon Kvapil's libretto: Motte Fouque's *Undine*¹, Gerald Hauptmann's *Sunken Bell*. In contrast to Disney's tale our heroine makes a large

¹ <http://www.operaonline.com> - There are many references I have read to these Internet sources most of which I believe must originate from the Groves entry. The acknowledgement from the first performance in the National

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sacrifice in giving up her voice, and one could say soul, to be with the Prince she desired. She found that humanity was an unattainable goal. Her love, the Prince, courted a visiting Princess betraying the Rusalka's commitment.

The name *Rusalka* is derived from Czech and Russian mythology, in which it means a "water spirit of vengeful nature"². One could characterise Kvapil's *Rusalka* as a Cinderella / Dorothy / Juliet figure who is plain, restless, and lonely, as well as initially ugly and handicapped in our version. She was for me an innocent *femme fatale* who like the mermaids would drag down sailors to the ocean depths expressing their love for them. I did not see her as vengeful because in the final scenes, when the Prince kisses her and dies, she did not want to kill him and had refused to kill him in an earlier scene to regain her soul. The Prince saw the consequences of his rejection of *Rusalka* and returned to her too late, for then they were both doomed. The opera has a very black ending with the rejections of all the main characters causing the deaths of first *Rusalka*, and then the Prince. I felt the story should be seen as a romantic fairytale tragedy.

The words *voluptuous*, *poetical*, *lyrical* and *sensual* have all been used to describe the music. The opera's popularity is due in large part to the flowing romantic nature of the music. This romantic grand and flowing style is associated with Wagner who Dvořák greatly admired. The similarity with Wagner's or even Liszt's³ work goes much further than my own general feeling about the style. Dvořák used many "Wagnerian techniques such as conservative usage of numbered opera and ornamental melodies"⁴. The compositional base is conservative in style but Dvořák keeps us enthralled by varying it regularly and sometimes rapidly. There are "classical procedures, motifs, forms of lied and arias which are synthesised through impressionistic tonal colouring and expressionistic gesture"⁵. The world of the Nymphs, where we hear "augmented triads, unusual progressions and highly colored instrumentation" contrasts sharply with the world of Men, where

Theatre in Prague in 1901 on March 31st was "a libretto by Jaroslav Kvapil after Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*".

² <http://gray.music.rodes.edu/musichtmls/Paper120/rusalka.html>

³ Andras Batta, "Opera" published by Koneman Verlagsgessellschaft Cologne 1999. p136

⁴ http://pages.pomona.edu/~elindholm/dvo_rusa.htm

⁵ Andras Batta, *Ibid.*, p136.

the orchestration is more traditional⁶. There is a large variety in the use of the orchestra; We regularly go from very intimate chords with one or two players to the very full grand sound.

Each character has different motifs that reappear to announce his or her arrival. Two examples are the horn introduction to the Prince, which is nearly grand but a bit desolate, and Rusalka's which we first hear in the prelude, which has been called Rusalka's Curse, but is better called Rusalka's Fate⁷. Generally the music forewarns us of impending joy or disaster and flows smoothly with the stage action. The passage which is best known from this opera, Rusalka's Ode to the Moon, is a good example of this. The many different harmonies blend gently to evoke the loneliness and beauty of singing to the moon and prepares us for the entry into the forest.⁸

The music, like the libretto, draws from Czechoslovakian traditions. It incorporates, as does many of Dvořák's other compositions, many Slovakian dances. The nationalistic feel to the music is heard particularly in "the more vigorous episodes with the wood nymphs at the beginning of Act One, the first act aria of Ježibaba and the exchanges between the Gamekeeper and the Turnspit in Acts Two and Three"⁹. These folk influences give the music, at times, a lyrical tendency and we can imagine the nymphs dancing around. For myself, it particularly evokes visits I had to the Slovakian Tatra Mountains where there is colourful music and dance occurring around every village corner. It also reminds me of Prague, with its street musicians on the bridge over the Danube and serious, yet lively, art in the theatres and concert halls.

Early Process

The design process started for Thomas Umfrid over the summer of 2000, and when he had concepts and meetings with Malcolm, Dean and myself from November onwards. These meetings produced major set changes as Malcolm explored various different ideas Tom generated. We were close to the final realised set in February. Although many lighting designers would be involved in the process after this point I appreciated being present in this time period because

⁶ New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Volume 7, McMillan 1978, p.789-90

⁷ John Clapham in "Dvorak" p159.

⁸ Made popular not only through many concert performances but in 1989 when it featured in the film "Driving Miss Daisy".

through the process I gained insights as to how Malcolm and Tom saw the lights working with their staging and set.

Given Circumstances

The Director's View.

Malcolm Fraser's view¹⁰ of this opera is complex, and cannot easily be summed up as much of it has been woven into my own view. By simplifying the staging, using an off stage chorus and off stage miking of certain lines, I felt Malcolm was concentrating on the main characters fears and feelings. Early on there was the possibility considered that this is all a set of dream views. This was not our final outcome, but I feel it may have influenced how one could interpret the final production. Malcolm's increased awareness through the rehearsal period of his own declining health and mobility may have influenced him in concentrating upon this early idea as one of the changes in the transforming of Rusalka when she moved between worlds the first time. I feel Malcolm would agree with a quote from Paul Stephan's biography of Dvořák where he states that there is "a harshness in the destiny, which inexorably holds sway in spite of the gentler emotions, and he (Dvořák) was especially tuned to the concept of Nature as a protective and consoling power"¹¹.

The Water Gnome's world Malcolm created was not an underwater world but a dark dirty swamp that had a decaying and oppressive feeling. Our Water Gnome was a grotesque figure who could be seen as a doting father figure clinging on to his precious daughter, Rusalka, yet when faced with her being forlorn he advises her how to attain her goal. When the Prince rejects Rusalka it is the Water Gnome who is most vindictive in his curses, predicting the Prince's downfall.

Malcolm's wood nymphs are the antithesis of Disney's mermaid sister figures being vicious, jealous, vindictive sisters who tease the Water Gnome and despise Rusalka. Ježibaba, the witch,

⁹ Jan Smaczny, www.operaonline.org

¹⁰ In expressing a director's vision of this production I hope I am not misrepresenting Malcolm. What is here is my own interpretation of what we saw in rehearsal and in the meetings leading up to the final set and costume concept some of which I was delighted to be present at. My co designers, Tom Umfrid and Dean Mogle, of course, have also influenced this interpretation extensively.

¹¹ Paul Stephan, Dvorak, Da Capo Press, NY 1971., p279.

is a powerful figure but also responds to Rusalka's charm. Ježibaba has a grand entrance accompanied by musical and lyrical indications of her power over the moon, but she comes down to meet Rusalka as a kindly grandmother-like figure.

The Venue.

The Corbett Auditorium where the production took place is a proscenium house with 50' x 40' of usable stage area, with the majority of the 800 audience seated on a gently raked orchestra level. The pit is large enough for the 62 players this orchestration of *Rusalka* required. The fly tower has one main limitation; it contains a concert shell that takes up many flying lines. The result was that there were restrictions on the positions available for scenery and electrics.

The Set

Tom's starting point within the space was to reduce the proscenium to nearly its minimum width and to insert a portal, which was even narrower upstage (38'). He added a pit extension of 6' to create a workable apron downstage of the proscenium, and placed all his scenic elements within black legs and borders.

The set consisted of amorphous black shiny rocks, scored with silver lines (one rock 20' x 10' x 5' which moved from centre to up stage, and four smaller ones 4' to 8' long), a similarly painted floor, a plastic curtain, a scrim, two painted drops, three moons (3', 8' and 18' in diameter, the latter two transforming into altered moons with webs and tendrils across them), and an upstage cyc.

The cyc's most important role was to provide the lit surface seen through our 18' moon cut out. This was to be seen through the plastic and a scrim so it was slightly diffuse and distant in feel. There were 3' and 8' moons which were self illuminating moon boxes, the smaller one very soft behind the cyc, the larger closer to midstage and designed with a large eclipse mechanism (the mechanism was cut during preproduction). In addition, there were the two painted moons, one on

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the Ruben's drop and one on the Act Two Scene One tower drop, which were front lit and back lit respectively.

Built into the stage floor were three lifts with trap covers (stage right, stage left and centre stage) which could raise and lower singers at any time, and one platform (mid stage centre) which could raise individuals from the understage to stage level or to the top of the centre rock. These were used as passageways to the Water Gnome's and Ježibaba's worlds.

The opening scene had the rocks set against the plastic curtain and I felt confident both scenic pieces would respond well to saturated colour in side light. We started in the world of the Water Nymphs and elements of the Water Gnome's world intrude. Midway through Act One we revealed the 18-foot moon where depth and shadow emphasized the mysteries and power of the witch, Ježibaba.

The final looks of Act One were achieved by expanding the playing area up to the cyc, and the lighting changed with it, so as to take us to a new place. From the dirty underworld we moved to a more open stage with a cleaner look, the plastic backing has flown away¹² and the Prince was introduced as if he was on the edge of Rusalka's old world (in the woods on the edge of the swamp). Enchanted, he leads her off and we moved onto Act Two.

Act Two opens with a painted drop hanging close to the plaster line of a tower with a translucent moon. This often-cut scene has the Gamekeeper and Turnspit (Cook in many versions) gossiping about palace affairs but, for myself more importantly, it showed the Prince as a loved and human leader. The subsequent scenes in Act Two all happened on a grand Rubens' inspired backdrop / floor cloth framed by large angled and panelled rich black walls. Based upon *Samson and Delilah*, this drop was richly painted in reds, oranges, and other warm tones, with shading which fades to dark tones. The original painting depicted Delilah and an attendant with candle looking down on a sleeping Samson whose hair was being shorn. The drop took up the centre half of the stage picture, and ran from the borders above down to the stage surface and then curved forward along the deck to the pit. This generally was part of the human world and contrasted with the

other two acts shapes, colours, forms and themes. The exception to this was when the Water Goblin appeared so we returned to his world, and when the Moonlight streams into the space along the walls, both of which are echoes of Act One.

For Act Three Malcolm and Tom created a world that (on the face of it) was a return to that of Act One but all had changed. It was more tragic and sinister. The large centre rock tracked downstage to define the space but we were left with a void behind. The use of the rock as a position of power over the stage was clearly seen in our closing scene with Rusalka appearing as an ethereal ghost-like figure above the grieving confused Prince. The rock, and lift behind it, placed Rusalka as a Succubus in the centre of the 18' moon. Tom intended me to silhouette and/or contrast her with it. This gave us another dimension of mystery to play with (similarly in Act One Ježibaba initially appeared from this position of power). For the final moment of the opera Malcolm had the Prince die in a similar position to the painting of Act Two.

The Costumes

The marvellous costumes Dean Mogle created differed greatly between acts. In Act One the feeling created was dirty and trampish, with Ježibaba more the grandmother figure than the evil witch. The wood nymphs were dressed in earthy colours with a slightly bedraggled look. Their hair was richly coloured dreadlocks in dull red / orange earth tones. Rusalka had a lighter coloured, but also ragged, costume and dreadlock wig. These contrasted with the period courtly styles, with rich, decadent, and intricate fabrics of Act Two that demanded brighter cleaner light to be appreciated.

There are two instances of the use of veil-like materials: the initial appearance of Ježibaba and Rusalka's last costume as a ghostly succubus. With these I sculpted a variety of forms and textures by using heavy top, side and back light.

¹² Originally the floor surface was covered in the same plastic and it was sucked down the hole at the same moment. This was subsequently cut.

The Lighting Budget.

The lighting budget for this show started at \$600, \$400 to be used in the purchase of colour and gobo's. I suggested the idea of using one to three moving lights to add flexibility and provide some effects, so Professor Jim Gage, generously found \$600 in extra funds to rent two fixtures.

The equipment available in stock.

I had the extensive stock of CCM's lights to choose from so the major limits were the time and people it would take to get the rig up and working. Jim imposed a limit of 350 instruments for the show based upon these considerations. I used most of CCM's lighting accessories and more specialised lights: seven of the eight scrollers, the eight gobo rotators, two smoke machines, the hazer, three sets of the aircraft landing lights (ACLs), and all four of the 5kW fresnels.

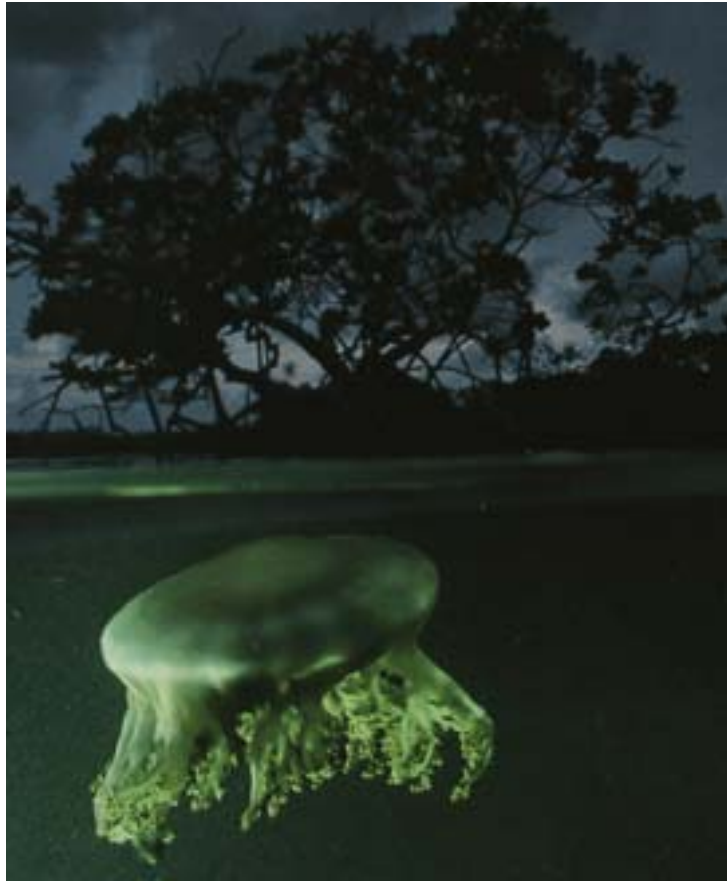
The development of, and thoughts behind, my lighting concept for the Opera**Initial Process**

I started my personal process by doing a scene breakdown, listening to the music many times and noting what indications there were in the libretto of mood and lighting. The immediate thing I noticed about this opera was the importance of the moon and moonlight. An early conclusion was that the dominant lighting angle and source for much of Act One and Three would be a moonlight or night feel of blue / steel whites.

My Visual Research

Some of the images that inspired me are included in the next section of this paper. These provided me with many of the colours, effects, and angles I wanted to see. I was particularly interested to see how Malcolm and Dean would react when I shared it at the first concept meeting. Their joint response was fairly positively.

My Visual Metaphor



This picture was chosen for my visual research and expresses the initial part of visual metaphor. I particularly like the contrasts, the blue greens, the light striking the jellyfish from below and the side, the silhouettes against the sky, and the colour of the sky. It is most appropriate for Acts One and Three.

As part of the process to put my feelings and research together I came up with the following visual metaphor for the piece. It was drawn from one inhabiting the eyes and feeling of someone / something swimming around in the Amazon River. Just below the surface are weeds, among which many microorganisms float and fish languidly swim, all seen in the bright blue-green sunlight filtering down from above. Viewed from underwater the world above seems bright, clean and clear. Then we crawl out onto the shore where there is the real sunlight, filtering through luscious vegetation, and the sun is burning bright. But one feels like a “fish out of water”; the contrast is painful, and the realities are all too

clear. This painful light chases us back so one dives (or possibly dies) back into the water and floats, feeling deceived about the world above, relieved to be back but now having a feeling that one is not at home here either. One floats listlessly around below the surface examining the world above with fresh eyes before sinking down to the dark depths.

My Responses to the Libretto –

I particularly like to consider how we should perceive the characters. This was part of my development of the building blocks the director had given me. I wanted there to be sympathy for

all the characters in different ways. For me Rusalka was not maliciously taking revenge on the Prince at the end (for she refuses the offer of redeeming herself by killing the Prince with the knife from Ježibaba). The Prince is bewitched, but frustrated at the lack of warmth and communication¹³ from Rusalka, romancing the Princess would have been the safe option. The Princess cannot understand the Prince's choice, or his being bewitched, and thinks herself as a much better suitor. The Water Gnome (Rusalka's father figure), or more caring sounding Water Sprite¹⁴, cares dearly for Rusalka but lets her go because he does care for her, then later guides her back and consoles her. Even Ježibaba understands Rusalka's need to meet her Prince and although she asks a high price from her, she does offer her other options later. I feel the humour in Ježibaba's exchanges make her a friendly witch overall. Her wrath was directed at humankind as a whole and like the Water Gnome she wished to guard her realm and charges. With her grand entrance, and then more human face / reactions we gave her, she could be compared with the Wizard in *Wizard of Oz*.

Our Maestro, Mark Gibson, felt the opera was all about transformations¹⁵. I felt that although these were grand moments, these moments were most important as indicators of the contrasting worlds and paradigms. Our characters were seeking love and acceptance, but not understanding each other. Rusalka was transformed by Ježibaba's magic when she moved from the initial realm of the Water Gnome to that of the Prince and it emphasised the contrasts of the worlds, eventually she was transformed into a Succubus by the failed love for the Prince. I saw the Prince himself as moving from world to world, which changed him.

I believe that in Rusalka's eyes this saga represents a romantic journey through different worlds, starting in the slightly decaying restrictive world of the Water Gnome, to the liberating beautiful world of the Prince, only to realise that this is not perfect (and that she does not fit in) so she is forced to return to the sad realities of the water world dragging her Prince down with her. Contrast this with the rich powerful Prince who is a swash-buckling playboy, who is being pressured to settle down and marry (although he still yearns for excitement). He likes to escape

¹³ A debate carried on, half in jest, between Tom and Malcolm was whether the lack of sex was also the root of the problems.

¹⁴ The translation from Czech to German to English gives us this less venomous sounding word - Andras Batta, "Opera" published by Koneman Verlagsgessellschaft Cologne 1999. p136

¹⁵ Statement made from the conductors podium to the orchestra during rehearsal.

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the court to hunt, enjoy the woods, and daydream. The mystery and challenge of Rusalka provides interest for him initially. He is tempted back to the known and safe circumstances when presented with the Princess, then he realises that he should follow his heart and has been cruel in rejecting Rusalka (and is put back under her spell). But all is too late, Rusalka cannot save herself, or him, from their common demise of being lost to both their worlds, in the way of *Romeo and Juliet* where the only consolation is shared death. It is then that she returns as a succubus and we see her final transformation in a sequence; originally the little cripple water nymph then to the beautiful woman on to the rejected water nymph and finally to the ghostly succubus spirit who is destined to drag her man down with her.

My responses to the music. –

Much of the theoretical reading only confirmed what I heard. The music flows lusciously, has themes, shows the emotions of the libretto and has obvious sections. This made the finding of cue points almost second nature when I listened to the music. I planned very few cues that were not related totally to the music because Malcolm's direction seemed to be very closely related to it. Any times the singers moved around the stage, the cue was taken by a change in the music. The lighting timings also came from the musical changes, as they seemed to flow into each other generally. The cue changes were usually five to fifteen seconds in length. The notable exceptions were the heralding of the entrance of the Prince and Princess in Act Two which was a very quick fade up; the fading up of the moon(s), and the fade with the Princes death, which were very slow.

My responses to the Set –

I felt that it was my job to ensure that overall the set should sparkle, show depth, show tension and mystery, reveal the story, and give a variety of looks. In aiming to do this I lit individually most of the set pieces often from the sides, or above, steeply, so I could isolate the look on that set piece from others or the acting area. When choosing colours for the set I was careful to look for ones which would bring out the depth and colours in each element. For example by experimenting in the Light Lab I found that the Act Two drop reacted well to blue light so I included it as one of the sets of wash lights on it, adding depth.

I felt Act Two was firmly placed in the light of the human world, the key angles being more frontal and the colour of the light more straw and less blue / green. Something we had to balance carefully as much of the opera is set at night was the use of some of the blue top light. The choice of the sketchy cartoon backdrop for the short scene of exposition at the beginning of Act Two was interesting. That scene had some comedic elements and reminded us we are not in a naturalistic world. But there was a realistic moon shining over the Gamekeeper and Turnspite that reminded us of the serious nature of the bartering of souls and lives.

The main Act Two setting that Malcolm and Tom created had cleaner lines than the organic feel of Act One. It had a very romantic tone to it but with the choice of Ruben's *Samson and Delilah* painting as the basis for the backdrop it foretold the doom ahead. The costumes, sets and direction indicated we were in a different world, yet when the Water Gnome pushed up through the bottom of the painting into this world he brought many of the feelings of Act One with him.

For Act Three I wanted the audience to know that the return to the swamp edge was not without major changes, for both Rusalka and the Prince are very different characters by then, so the lighting I chose was intended to reflect this and was simpler.

My responses to the costumes. –

I responded with enthusiasm to Dean's sketches of the costumes for they fitted well with my own vision of the opera. The fabrics I took to the light lab had not been painted or aged and I was nervous that they would be too dull for the mainly blue colours I was using. When I saw them on stage I was surprised how much of the detail was visible. The veils used by Rusalka as a Succubus and by Ježibaba caught the light wonderfully and reacted well when we wanted to silhouette them. The only problem I had was with Rusalka's pure white dress of Act Two as it stood out (by catching the white of the follow spots or the colours in the cross light) compared to the much darker richly coloured, and textured, costumes of the Prince and Princess.

List of Effects

Prior to drafting the plot I built a list of effects and looks, which I felt were essential: multiple swampy or water looks, the contrasting world of the humans, scary light for the tense moments, two moments of flashy effects (Ježibaba's entrance and the transformation in Act One) and one moment of power down fading down to a sad precise ending (for the Succubus and Death of the Prince).

I planned all of these effects using stock / inexpensive gobos. But when I went to the USITT annual trade show I met with Rosco, the gobo and colour manufacturer, to talk through a proposal to sponsor the opera. Their head of sales asked me to submit a wish list following the show and he would see what he could do. Out of this process came two sets of eight dichroic gobos (vibrant colours in moulded glass) to give one swampy and one water feel, and a set of dyed glass lavender / green gobos (cross light in Acts One and Three). The retail value of this sponsorship was \$1500.

Checking if I had it right

Having developed the outline of my concept I went to see Malcolm to check if we were on the same page. We did not talk in many specifics because the blocking was still weeks away (yet my plot was due soon after) and thankfully we were in general agreement. Following this meeting there were two sessions for me in the light laboratory when I explored and shared ideas. The first was combined with a demonstration of the changing of the moon mechanism (for Ježibaba's first appearance) when I showed most of the light systems against some examples of the fabrics used in the opera.

The second visit to the lighting lab was to test out how the set would react to light and so I set up single lights to duplicate the systems I intended and then photographed them. Some results are shown at the end of the visual research section. Thankfully neither session threw up any surprises and I was able to go on drafting comfortable in the knowledge that I had the tools to light this

show. Having completed the plot I could then concentrate on the rehearsals (where blocking was beginning) and revise any concepts, uses of lights, and change subtly the intended outcomes.

Practical decisions

For the **act openings** I wanted to give the house curtain an appropriate treatment for the lead into each act. We started with a traditional flat red-orange wash from the front. I then moulded the curtains folds from the side in colours appropriate for the act opening. This came from two sources, the CF7 moving lights on the apron boom that could change to any colour we wanted and a blue wash from the Box boom that was our stage blue wash. With the decision that the audience would return after the first interval to see the drop for Act Two Scene One preset, I only used this concept for Acts One and Three.

The first function of lighting is often said to be **visibility**. In this opera the visibility should generally look after itself by the lighting creating mood and focus for the stage picture. This is a dark opera: about struggles and murky underworlds so overall the light levels were not very high. The objective was to highlight individuals but accept that sometimes, when they were not singing, they would be moving in and out of light. At such times I hoped we would be painting with light on a larger palette letting light flow with the music, all the while focusing on the singers using silhouette, halos, sculpting side light, spooky up light and isolating top light.

The main role of the **four followspots** was to provide visibility to the singers' faces, so we could see the casts sing and act. The front pair were always soft focus and to the sides, being located in the Box Boom position. The rear pair were located midstage on a lighting bridge, to provide isolating backlight downstage, as well as to catch people upstage enabling the beam not to show so much on the cyc and to provide dramatic angles midstage. The follow spots were paired on one singer so they were lit diagonally from the front and behind. Very often there were only two singers on stage at a time and then the spots helped indicate that they were from different worlds by having a contrasting diagonal quality to the light, their different worlds only coming together when they were face to face. Generally the spots were in slight colour correction tones, popping out the singers from a saturated background.

For **the set pieces** I had four sets of strip lights or floods that lit the cyc, the plastic curtain, and the Rubens drop. In addition there were break-up washes across the plastic, cyc and scrim from the sides, and from the front on all the drops. I pulled out two scenic elements, in the Ruben's based painting I added a soft spot focused in a straw and a green colour on Delilah (representing Rusalka). The moon on the Act Two Scene One tower drop was backlit so it can glow in this night lit scene.

The cyc had the option to be lit in blues or steels from the top. We used no scenic ground row as it would break up the clean lines of the stage picture. I placed cyc flood units on the big moving rock to allow additional silhouette work and have a sunrise. In order to not have our 18' moon much brighter at the top, I intended originally flying in four floods to wash the bottom of the cyc. However this was replaced in the production by a groundrow that was wheeled on/off.

The use of **silhouettes** was an important tool in my repertoire of available of lighting looks. The centre of the 18' moon was the most obvious place, with the upstage lift delivering Ježibaba or Rusalka directly into this position. When they were in this position I added various side, top and foot lights so I could subtly edge the image, particularly when they had translucent shawls. A silhouette can be a powerful and mysterious form. (See visual research images 2 & 12).

I saw one of my purposes was to provide **sculpting light** from every direction. In this I mean the lighting must feel organic. Very little of the light was straight from the front. The majority was from the sides and behind. I provided layers of light receding with the set from the apron to the wide-open cyc. I tried to provide some texture on everything. Across the stage I provided broken light from above, with the drops raked with light from break-up or streak templates. The framing of the walls and shapes of the rocks were emphasised by using side and high angles on them. Many of the surfaces took colour well, particularly the plastic. By using colour from different angles, and from the front and back we created a wide variety of looks. Some examples of the different looks were the way the plastic curtain went from green to blue, to a broken white, then to translucent with the moon in Act One. Another example was when the rocks in Act Three caught

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the deep lavender when Ježibaba entered, then were lit in a deep blue and blue green when the Nymphs entered.

I was keen to leave our **options** as wide open as possible. By choosing to use the scollers on the plastic drop I gave us 10 x 10 different mixing options (front and back light), which could also flow from one colour to another. There were also four colours of top light and three colours of bottom light for the plastic drop. With the use of the four followspots and the three moving lights I had hoped we could isolate individuals anywhere on stage as the show evolved. I had a number of lights that I could refocus and recolour as needed through the process. Of course the items that gave us the most flexibility were the colour mixing, template changing and remote focusing abilities of the moving lights. I placed the Comar CF7 units on the apron boom because they could cover most of the down stage area effectively, project patterns across the stage and also zoom down to a body shot.

I had two distinct sets of **colours** in use for the two contrasting act looks. A blue / green / lavender in the Nymphs and Gnomes world with a steel light added in for visibility – to obtain a cold and clear feel to these scenes (see Visual research image 1). For the human world of Act Two there was a straw, pink, and rose palette, which gave it a feeling of warmth and cosiness (see Visual research images 3, 4, & 5). Both these sets of colours were not naturalistic light. The coldness and unreal world was to be starkly contrasting to the lavish and bright palace of Act Two. Within these sets of colours there were variations for the Water Gnome (deeper green), for the Princess (more opulent pinks and richer yellows), and for the desolate Prince (steels).

Overall the **angles** were steep with the lowest beams coming from the side and pit rail where there were kickers with a break-up gobo (in green in Acts One and Three, changed to pink in Act Two). Another strong side light system used the powerful 5000w fresnels on booms at 8' in bay one and bay two with four 2000w fresnels across the apron. These I hoped would give the opera a dance like feel and ensure the separating of the singers from the background and floor. This saturated colour from the side was in deep lavender in Act One and in Act Two was changed for a straw colour. I had intended to use these to show the decay in Act One and the stark brightness in Act Two.

Effects. Because moving lights slow the process down and are expensive, the question should be asked why did I choose them? They are not just as a new and essential element to much of the modern lighting happening in North America today but, more importantly, potentially very useful for this production. The moving lights gave us a variety of saturated colours, plus gobo washes that rotated, adjusted focus (ripple), and changed. As used they did not flash around but gave us *moveable* rather than *moving* specials. At other times these lights also gave us an intense colour in one tight place. The time when the look of the light changed rapidly in colour and gobo was when Ježibaba appeared for the first time in Act One. This moment needed to be flashy, a moment of power (if not awe). The Cyber light that hung directly over the large rock, if well programmed, had the potential to do what 20 or 30 conventional lights might achieve, and was placed there to assist with the transformation scene of Rusalka at the end of Act One.

There was a definite need for a swamp-like feel to Acts One and Three and I aimed to achieve this using our twin spin rotators. I installed a blue / green dichroic glass gobo, which rotated very slowly through a break-up pattern. Also in a side light position I had a cyan ripple glass gobo. I hoped to create a very eerie feeling by using these two types of dichroic gobo with their richly coloured and textured light. Combined with these lights the plastic curtain evoked a watery feel. To this end one suggestion from Malcolm after our lighting lab demonstration was slowly scrolling the colours across the plastic curtain drop.

Another set of gobos that was used to give a very unusual effect as people moved through them was the sets of colorizers (colourful dyed glass swirling coloured gobos from Rosco). I placed these as sidelight at head height. They gave a dappled effect to the colour across the singers and set. I wanted to have very contrasting feels to these in each act and have one in lavender / blue / green and another that was pink / yellow swirls. This helped to give a jewelled quality to the light particularly in Act Two.

I was very fond of the idea that for the whole of Act One and Three there would be a layer of ground hugging **mist** across the stage. I axed this idea on grounds of cost and a personal worry about using dry ice when there were so many people in the pit and understage (CO² is poisonous and heavier than air so it sinks and ventilation becomes an issue). Instead, we used the Hazer

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throughout Acts One and Three to give a heavy and moulded atmosphere in which the beams showed up. I had intended there to be puffs of smoke from the traps with entrances and exits via them, while the large centre trap had a fogger that would put wisps of smoke into the air until the plastic flooring goes. To mask the transformation of Rusalka the set had a fogger built into the large rock.

To get the feeling of the swamp which was our under stage world I explored the idea of getting a mercury vapour lamp which would be bright and give off the sickly green colour for the underwater world. As dowsers (mechanical dimmers – these lights cannot be dimmed conventionally) would be awkward I hoped to place them under the traps so when they opened up one saw this sickly green shimmer light leaking out. Nothing came of research into obtaining this light on campus so I used some conventional theatre lights with close colours. On a similar vein I considered getting sodium yellowed colour discharge lamp for Act Two. Instead I used a bright fresnel cross light with a yellow / orange colour to it in Act Two to follow through this colour concept. One can get close to these colours with gels but not always achieve the edge, flicker, or intensity.

Implementation**Discoveries at load-in, through the rehearsals, and focus.**

Generally the lighting load-in went as planned. There were some changes to trim height and set positioning, which resulted in a small number of lights not being able to focus where I intended but in all cases I was able to substitute other lights or use them differently. The purchased gobos did not arrive prior to load in, and subsequent confusion as to where things were, was a problem that continued through the following week.

The lights and smoke on the central rock had to be modified to help the cast move around safely. Eventually the smoke here was cut because the singers complained it irritated their throats. The lights in the pit were relocated and subsequently under used because they could not light the entering singers and the centre trap was closed after the floor plastic was cut.

Problems with technology.

We had many problems with the technology, minimal and basic as it was at times, which took away from my own concentration and the time available for cuing. The board was put in a different mode (from Cue Only to Tracking) so all my precuing was overwritten. One of the rented moving lights had to be exchanged so all its positions and lens / gobo presets changed. We had many problems with our scrollers breaking. In the end I cut three of them to ensure we had two spares for the run of the show. One of our followspots produced small amounts of light, which until trimmed properly prior to opening was a problem. They never were as efficient as I believed they could or should be. One gobo rotator had to be repaired as it shorted due to a faulty cable. And finally the Hazer broke down for the last two shows so the smoke machine from the rock substituted it.

The final outcome.

When I was slowly building lighting states, cue after cue, starting at the beginning of the opera, it was frustrating and hard to see the final result. When I first saw the cues that Malcolm and I had created in context on the tech dress Sunday I was elated, as there were many very excellent looks and sequences.

The act I felt most uncomfortable with was Act Two, particularly the first scene in front of the tower drop. I could not get a feel as to how to light it.

The lighting outcome is a collaboration, and not the result of solely the designer's, or director's, vision. I am certain that we came out of the process with something neither of us fully expected but one I hope will reflect well upon my own work and the abundant talents of the designers, directors, and performers.

An Assessment

I was happy with the design generally and there are few things I would want to change. My favourite element was one of the simplest, the Lee 707 “ultimate violet” side light in Acts 1 and 3. Despite our problems with the moving lights they were excellent tools. The L117 green steel side light for when the stage opened up gave the scene more of a desolate feel than I intended but one that grew on me as I saw it in context. The blues I had from above and the front were very effective when mixed with the blue greens from behind in the Water Gnome’s scenes in all three acts.

The top lights on the Ruben’s drop were too close to the painting for Malcolm although there were no alternative positions for them. The lights across the plastic were used in only three of their ten colours and possibly we should have experimented more but then we would have relied on our failing equipment. The light steel down light and gobo break-up when showed to Malcolm in possible cues did not appeal and were under utilised. I should maybe have changed these colours early on, but for what I am not sure. I had gobos on the cyc from the front and sides that I wish I had experimented with more. The colorizers in Act One and Three were not vibrant enough to be as special as the ones in Act Two were, and in retrospect maybe I should have asked for something more adventurous from Rosco.

The process was at times slow and painful for all involved. I was not as organised as I might wish given all the problems we were having with the moving lights and their operation. I fear I gave Malcolm too many options and too little guidance as to how and when to use the many different elements. Inevitably there were some things we both liked, some looks I liked and Malcolm did not, and *visa versa*. I greatly admired Malcolm’s judgement on lighting looks and believe I as a lighting designer should aim to provide looks / feelings the director wants. It would have helped if I were more resolute and confident in my abilities.

Overall there were only a few cues I would have liked to rewrite, particularly the Gnome's exits and a couple of the dimmer scenes in Act One. The cuing session on Act Three was with Chia that produced a slightly different, but bold, style. Sadly that afternoon we also overwrote some

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cues in Act Two that Malcolm particularly liked and we spent a long time trying to recreate what Malcolm remembered.

Words and even the accompanying pictures cannot give a true view of the outcome of the lighting of this show. I am too close to the process to objectively assess what the show looked like, and I always will believe I could do better. I was heartened to hear many audience members and colleagues comment positively about the lighting.