

This article appeared in the May 2007 issue of  
Lighting and Sound America magazine:

## The World is a Stage: Athol Fugard's *Exits and Entrances* Opens Off Broadway

With the end of apartheid, the subject that drove his career for three decades, playwright Athol Fugard has turned toward memory plays. His newest work in to be seen in this country, *Exits and Entrances* a memoir of lives in the theatre. It recalls the playwright's brief period, in the '50s as a dresser/supporting actor/all-around assistant to André Huguenet, the most famous and accomplished actor in South Africa. The play concludes with another encounter, five years later, when everything has changed. Huguenet's career is in eclipse; a closeted gay man, he is profoundly alone. Fugard, meanwhile, is married and about to father, with a budding career as a playwright. The actor is repelled by the writer's choice of material (the play under discussion is clearly *The Blood Knot*, about life under South Africa's mixed-race colored population). But, in truth, what he's really angry about is the fading away of the way of life that once sustained him.

*Exits and Entrances* has had a rather unusual trajectory. Having been successfully produced at the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles, the same production went to the Santa Barbara Theatre Company, Florida Stage, and New Jersey Rep. It currently played at Off Broadway's Primary Stages, with the same cast (Morlan Higgins and William Dennis Hurley) as before, as well as the same director (Stephen Sachs), but with a new set design by Charlie Corcoran and lighting by Brian Nason.

*Exits and Entrances* covers a fair amount of ground in 90 minutes, moving from the author's study to dressing rooms in two different theatres, as well as onstage. Therefore, the design was created to be as flexible as possible. Because the actors and director already had a long history with the play, Corcoran says, "they knew exactly what they wanted. We then brought our point of view to it." The script, he says, doesn't offer much in the way of specific details. "It describes the writer's table but nothing surrounding it." However, he adds, "Fugard's words are so descriptive that they create the places for you."

The designer did research on backstages and dressing rooms of another era, adding, "the back wall is an conglomeration of all the backstage walls I've ever seen," then specified a number of scenic elements--including a Wardrobe, a makeup table, a Captain's chair—most of which were on wheels, so they could be easily moved around, to reconfigure the stages as needed. Most of the pieces were built, except for André's chair, which the designer found in a warehouse in Red Bank, New Jersey. "I was searching for days for the perfect chair, something throne-like and majestic, that looked like Andre might have dragged it around from place to place. I found this old captain's chair; it was in a shipwreck in 1910, and there's a plate on the back with the name of the ship, *Die Vaterland*. That's a reference in the play!"

Corcoran adds that much of the responsibility for suggesting new locations fell to Nason, who, rather unusually for an Off Broadway theatre, used a fairly extensive rig of moving lights. “I had done the national tour of *On Golden Pond*, which I also did on Broadway, which was supplied by GSD Productions,” Nason says. “Glenn Davis [head of GSD] had bought some lights for the tour. When it came back to the shop, I made use of them for *Exits and Entrances*.”

The units included six Vari\*Lite VL3000s in upstage positions and a dozen VL1000s. They didn’t move during the show, Nason says; instead he chose them for their shuttering and iris capabilities—although, he adds, these effects had to be carefully planned, as they made a fair amount of noise. In addition, he had a set of 60 conventional units in boom positions, plus at set Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12s in footlight positions. Using the automated units Nason carved out different playing spaces for different scenes, and created highly theatre looks with saturated colors for the performance scenes. (The ColorBlasts provided helpful uplighting effects in the performance scenes as well.) The lighting was controlled by a Strand 520i console, programmed by Jason Jeunette.

These elements combined to make *Exits and Entrances* an evocative memory play, which moved from past to present, offstage to on. The production was critically acclaimed and, with performances added to its run, closed at the end of April. Simultaneously, Corcoran and Nason had another project running Off Broadway: *Defender of the Faith*, at the Irish Repertory.

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