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THEA 101-04

4/25/2018

### Feminism so Forced, I Swear Joss Whedon Wrote This

The set design of *The Heidi Chronicles* by technical director Andy Campbell was overall well done. They had set changes nearly every scene, which the run crew achieved during brief blackouts. They were well rehearsed and did their job very well. The wagons were secured in place via metal wedges which were kicked in between the wagon and the floor; only once did the run crew struggle using the wedges when, during the first act of the show, one person was unable to kick out the wedge quickly. It clearly took longer than expected, but the rest of the crew quickly moved the wagon into position. The set dressing was careful to abide to the decade and overall, it helped to place me into the scene better than if the set was more minimalist.

The lighting for the show was nothing spectacular. In my opinion, scenic and lighting director Scott C. Chapman used the lighting more practically than to add to the performance. When Heidi was at her podium, there was a spotlight on her. Lights were placed where action was taking place. The light was not white light, but there were not significant colors used, like different lighting used to reflect Heidi's state of mind. There were gobos for the lights on the window scenery but overall the lighting, while practical, was bland.

The costuming, by Leslie Cook-Day, like the set dressing, was executed so as to be reflective of its decades. Every character's costumes were very, very clearly reflective of their respective personalities. One of my biggest complaints about Heidi was the complete lack of subtlety in the show and the costuming choice was no exception to this. For instance, the character of Fran (played by Sammi Anderson) was a loud, brash, lesbian character. Fitting the perfect stereotype of a butch lesbian, Fran wore camo cargo pants and a jacket along with combat boots. While it is well within the realm of possibility that a lesbian in the 1970's may

have dressed like this, it was comically stereotypical along with every other character's costuming in the play. The costuming gave the play a melodramatic air, in that every character seemed more caricature than dimensional. The studio taping of "Hello New York" in Act 2 was a perfect picture of this: the arrogant Scoop Rosenbaum (played by Ryan Bultrowicz) was dressed in a suit, which showed his obvious confidence and cockiness; the preppy and annoying Heidi Holland (played by Mary Jo Corley) was dressed in a preppy, tweed skirt and jacket set, which followed the irritatingly snobby and rigidness example prefaced in the show; finally, Peter Patrone (played by Harrison Gray) was dressed in pastels, a short sleeved button down, a bow tie, and khakis which obviously reflected his homosexuality, clearly his defining characteristic rather than his success and intelligence. It is Peter's costuming in this scene that annoyed me the most. A basic search showed that gay men in the 1980's more likely wore crop tops or white tanks tucked into tight denim meaning that Peter's costuming was likely chosen not based on historical accuracy, but rather to remind the audience that Peter is gay by dressing him in a present day stereotypical "gay" outfit.

Overall, the entire production was unified in that it was bland while simultaneously being exaggerated and stereotypical. The costuming and acting were united in that they lacked subtlety. The lighting and set design did the bare minimum and did nothing to add or enhance the actors' performances. On my opinion, Campbell and Chapman did far better in this production than Speas and Cook-Day because I think it is better to be downplayed than to be so exaggerated as to seem comical. I do not think that this was a successful show for Longwood University because it was very elementary compared to their other productions. I have seen *Macbeth*, *Boom*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* during my time here and *The Heidi Chronicles* stands out to me as the least of these. All the other productions had more maturity to them whereas *Heidi* seemed better suited to a high school production level.

PS: At the end of the show, Heidi brings her adopted daughter onstage.