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Big Apple on a Small Scale

ANDREW BROOK

The get-in weekend but a week away, a final production meeting was called to make sure properties, stage manager, set and lighting had no last-minute problems. All hire orders had been confirmed and an outline of the get-in weekend was handed out. The production, Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park*. The month, April 1982.

The plot revolves around the hectic life of Paul and Corrie Bratter, and all the mishaps that happen to them when they rent a top-floor apartment in New York. Perhaps before looking at the lighting we should wander onto the stage and accustom ourselves with the set.

It is a one-room apartment on the top floor of an old brownstone in the East Forties off Third Avenue. The set, designed by Kenneth Hardy, is some thirty feet across the proscenium and sixteen feet in depth. The room is dominated by a skylight upstage centre, to the right is a smaller window. Outside the skylight is a ledge backed by a cyclorama. The main door is downstage right and opens onto the landing. Upstage left are two more doors, the other to the bedroom. Above the bathroom door is an upside down radiator. Downstage left is a small combustion stove and a telephone. The kitchen is upstage right and consists of a sink, an old gas stove and a battered refrigerator. The room has been freshly papered and painted, but not carefully. This is how we find the stage in Act 1. It is about 5 p.m. on a February afternoon. Act II takes place four days later and is divided into two scenes, one set at 7 p.m. and the second at 2 a.m. the same night. The apartment has been furnished and though a pot-pourri of various styles, periods and prices it is tasteful and comfortable. The final act is set the following afternoon and takes place at about 5 p.m.

The power distribution is located in the stage left wing and is single phase with a

loading of 18kW. A consultation with my script and rehearsal notes showed that only two lighting states were required outside the skylight, that of afternoon and night. The story was much the same inside the apartment, this time three lighting states were required. Late afternoon, moonlight and lamplight. To save on lanterns and circuits it would be possible to rebalance and drop circuits from the afternoon state to give lamplight for Act II. Specials? With a location like New York and the thought of a skyline sent me scurrying to locate the latest gobo lists. Another look at my rehearsal notes and the set plan showed that it would not be possible to project a gobo skyline. The main problem being that in both Act I and III the ledge outside the skylight is used by two members of the cast, so putting an end to gobo projection from the front onto the cyclorama. Even the most optimistic estimate only gave six inches behind the cyc, so back projection was also ruled out. In the end I settled for a cold wash in cinemoid 69 (ariel blue) with four circuits of 73 (straw tint) giving the impression of a winter sunset over the city. Act II was set at night and the sky had to be heavy with snow clouds, so a bright blue wash would have been very unwise. The most obvious answer, short of leaving the cyc dark, was to use a moon, a simple case of a circular mask in a pattern 23. One thing to take into account was that the mask would have to be pre-distorted to compensate for the projection angle. Nothing worse than bringing up the cyclorama lighting in front of the designer and director, only to have to explain away the egg shape outside the window! The moon was given cinemoid 17 (steel blue) and the hint of blue around it was 19 (dark blue). The dark blue was frosted to soften it out and the whole thing was very effective. The only thing I overlooked was that the moon was in the same place at both 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. in the morning, it did not move an inch! Oh well,

