



Photo: T Charles Erickson

Sunday In The Park With Jane

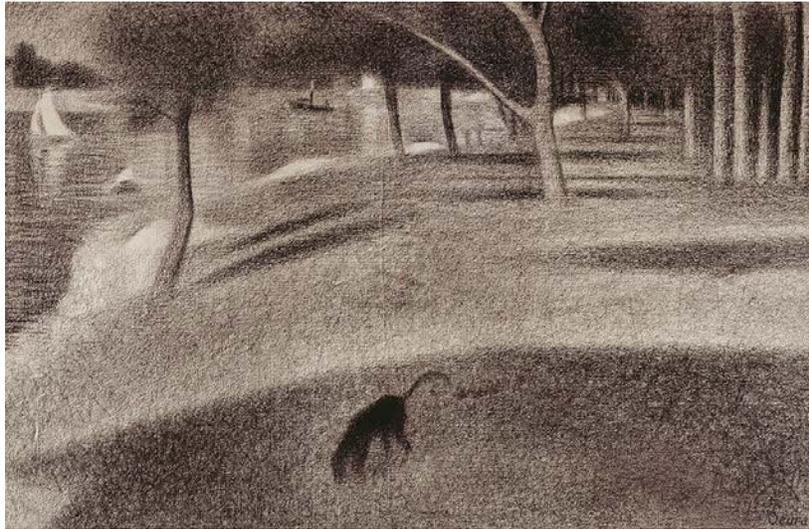
by Tony Award nominated Lighting Designer, Jane Cox

One of the pleasures of Sunday in the Park is that the piece is partly about the relationship of light to color and how that can be rendered in art. This allows the physical environment of this musical to be usefully re-imagined every time it's done.



White. A blank page or canvas. Jane's favorite.

For the Guthrie's production, the director, Joseph Haj, set our design team the wonderful challenge of putting a musical that is usually done on a proscenium stage onto a thrust space. Set designer Jan Chambers turned the Guthrie's gorgeous Wurtele Thrust Stage into a huge, warm white canvas for Caite Hevner, the projection designer, and I to play on. The set was a three-dimensional blank canvas consisting of a canvas colored floor, a frame on the vertical plane, and a canvas drape – all of which needed to be treated with light and shadow every moment of the show.



Conte Crayon Study For Sunday Afternoon On The Island Of La Grande Jatte, via FineArtAmerica.com

We got very excited about Seurat's extraordinary Conté crayon sketches, which have been described as "the most beautiful painter's drawings in existence," and how those sketches dramatize the relationship between light and shadow. Our simple idea was that the show would begin as if the audience was watching a huge Conté crayon sketch book - in whites, greys and browns; and that the light would build towards the rich, broken up colored light of his famous paintings by the end of the first act.



George & Dot (Randy Harrison & Erin Mackey) open the show with "Sunday in the Park with George"

As an all-female design team, we wanted to give Dot some extra attention, so we decided that Dot would be the first person to bring color into the stage world. As Dot escapes Toni-Leslie James' extravagant-yet-stifling dress and bustle in the opening musical number, Dot becomes enveloped in the first bursts of color in the show! Dot's costume world was in golds, purples and reds, so we gave her a boost using colors such as R37 Pale Rose Pink, R56 Gypsy Lavender and R4930 CalColor 30 Lavender when she steps outside of time and place (and her dress) to connect with her fantasy life.



As Dot emerges out of her stifling dress – color emerges onto the white stage

I needed to build a complicated light plot to create the journey from monochromatic textured paper sketches, to the color drama at the end of the act. Thankfully, not only did the Guthrie have the Roscolux and GamColor filters I needed, they also had an extensive stock of Rosco & GAM gobos as well! This allowed me to layer different types of colored templates on top of each other to create different effects throughout the show. Working with Caite Hevner’s palette, which came from Seurat’s actual paintings, allowed us both to create a finely textured world of color and light.



As Caite Hevner’s projections added more color & texture, so did Jane’s lighting design

To create the scenes in George’s studio where George is actually painting his musically depicted dotscapes, we started monochromatically in a softly textured white light of G327 Pale Sepia and G363 Sand... adding G548 Pointillism gobos in R13 Straw Tint... and then splashes of R78228 Irregular Dots inside color-changing ETC Lustr 2s to “dot” different colors onto the canvas. The R13, and related yellow and sand hues, created a base monochromatic color world that hints at the colors of Seurat’s yellowing drawings, and allowed us to create Act One in a distinctly different color world than Act Two, which needed to feel colder and crisper.



Irregular Dots gobos splash across the frame inside George's warmly lit studio

The biggest challenge of moving from this warm no-color towards the richly colored world of Seurat's paintings is that the eye doesn't perceive Seurat's paintings as they perceive gobos. Seurat intended the pointillist dots of color in his paintings to deceive the eye into creating rich vibrant colors, rather than perceiving them as broken up light. In order to accomplish this vibrancy and brightness using theatrical templates, we had to use a variety of tactics, with templates layered on top of each other to create the complexity and depth of color that we see in the painter's work. Working with Caite's greater control of scale in the projections, we were able to achieve a really wide variety of color worlds drawn from Seurat's paintings.



Bumbum bum bumbum... Bumbum bum... More red... More blue... More light!

To create the feel of his paintings in an ever changing colorscape, we combined a series of Lustr 2 downlights with R77570 Sponged gobos to lay down a base layer of texture. Then we added additional sidelights and front lights with color-scrolls and R78228 Irregular Dots to create a textured color palette layered on top of the Lustr downlights. The scrolls were made up of Rosco and GAM colors, relying heavily on warm yellows and straws like G395 Golden Sunset, R13 Straw Tint and G365 Warm Straw, as well as greens like G540 Pale Green, G570 Light Green Yellow and R370 Italian Blue. A layer of back diagonal R77405 Dapple (Small) templates in R88 Light Green and R72 Azure Blue gave a sharp burst of energy to the eye when we needed it. Finally, I used some blues and lavenders from the front to fill in shadows. These colors, including R4930 CalColor 30 Lavender and R65 Daylight Blue, also helped soften things as needed and boosted the hues of the vibrant costumes.



Dot & Louis (Max Wojtanowicz) give us a taste of the vibrant “Sunday in the Park” costumes

I relied heavily on Rosco’s beautiful Stippled Colorizer Effects Glass Gobos to add form, tone, and ultimately order, to the design by adding a soft wash of color. We used three Colorizers – R55008 Stippled Green Yellow, R55006 Stippled Blue Red Lavender and R55005 Stippled Amber Red. Thankfully we had two wonderful followspot operators who were also able to pick faces out of all that color and texture when we needed!



There’s no better tool for bringing Impressionism to light on stage than by using Rosco Colorizers

Working with the wonderful Guthrie programmer, Angelina Vyushkova, we put all of the scrollers, templates and the Lustrs through their paces – achieving a huge variety of color tones and fields. I’m extremely grateful to the extraordinary team at the Guthrie – Tom Mays, lighting supervisor, Ryan Conneally, resident lighting design assistant, Andrew Sullivan, their brilliant master electrician and all of the wonderful folks who work with them – for making all of this possible in their usual generous, intelligent and supportive way.



Cue by cue... Putting it together

*Jane Cox is a lighting designer for theater, opera, dance and music based in Brooklyn, New York. Jane has received Outstanding Lighting Drama Desk nominations for *The Color Purple* and *Machinal*, and Best Lighting of a Play Tony Award nominations for *Machinal* and *Jitney*. To see more examples from Jan Cox's lighting design portfolio, visit her website: janecoxlight.virb.com.*