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PERFORMING FREDERICK FELLOWES IN "NOISES OFF"

An honors paper submitted to the Department of Theatre and Dance of the University of Mary Washington in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Joshua T Culhane
April 2016

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Joshua T Culhane
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Performing Frederick Fellowes in Noises Off

submitted to the Department of Theatre & Dance in fulfillment of THEA 482: Senior Project

http://friendlyfellowes.umwblogs.org/

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Gregg Stull, Project Advisor

AWARDED HONORS IN THEATRE, 2016

Gregg Stull, Chair
April 22, 2016
An Exciting Start

Noises Off has been one of my favourite plays since I saw my high school's performance of it my freshman year there. When I heard we were going to do it here at UMW, I was both thrilled and surprised. The play is challenging on many levels, especially technically (what, with all the doors and sardines everywhere), but it is easily one of the funniest plays I have ever seen or read. I've wanted to be in this play for years, and finally having the chance is quite literally a dream come true for me. However, I will admit that I'm more than a little nervous about the now less than four weeks we have until the show opens. I'm not saying I don't think we can do it – we all just need to be on top of our work.

The two things that I’m most worried about as of right now are memorization and dialect. I've always been best at memorizing lines through rehearsal with some outside of rehearsal reinforcement. This process will have to be quite the opposite. We don't have the time to be rehearsing with our books in hand for very long, so I will need to spend much more time outside of rehearsal with the lines, while having (I assume) only a handful of rehearsals on book as reinforcement. I don't have an issue with this, it just means I need to work hard. The issue with the dialect is one that Helen mentioned at our dialect rehearsal last night, and is something I've been thinking about since a short time before then: I can't have people hear me and see me as Lord Darlington. My RP dialect in Lady Windermere's Fan was very heightened. Lofty, even. Now I need to forget much of what I learned for that play so as to sound more casual. The trilled Rs are what's throwing me off at the moment, but all-in-all, I’m not too worried. I think I’ll be able to adjust accordingly and sound differently enough that audience members aren't simply picturing me as Darlington in another setting. If I can consistently get rid of the lofty aspects of the dialect (the trilled Rs, the short "ih" endings), then I should do just fine.

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on August 28, 2015.
The Readthrough: Fear and Determination

Maggie summed it up pretty well yesterday at the readthrough: this show is a scary monster to be put on in three weeks. It will take some serious work and determination from all of us to make this production what we all know it can be.

The readthrough was probably one of the best I've ever been to. Everyone was hilarious, even just sitting there reading their lines. Jamie Broadhead probably read more than anyone else with the stage directions, which really got me thinking about the nature of this show. Noises Off is a brilliantly written show. The dialogue is funny, modern, and easily enjoyable. But the dialogue is only a portion of the comedy in this play. The exuberant amount of stage direction is something that can't just be ignored. Almost the entirety of Act II's comedy is silent, as it takes place backstage during a performance. This is something that makes me slightly nervous, but more excited than anything. I have often struggled with physicality more than vocalization, and this is a show that relies heavily on physical comedy. Normally this would probably frustrate me, but not with this play. This has just made me excited to delve into Freddie even more. I have an awesome opportunity here to strengthen myself as a physical actor. But what everyone keeps reminding each other needs to happen first: I need to get this damned script out of my hands. Otherwise, how can I deal with doors AND sardines?

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on August 29, 2015.
Arab Dialect

An “Arab” dialect can refer to many different dialects, generally including most of the countries in the Middle East. An Egyptian dialect, when speaking English, sounds remarkably like a British dialect, with some noticeable differences. There are definite similarities between many Arab dialects and the British, but I decided that the Sheikh is Saudi, and therefore needs a Saudi dialect. Helen and I listened to some of the examples on the IDEA website, but many of the examples were difficult to get a feel for because the people on the recordings did not seem to be fluent English speakers, and their reading of whatever copy they had was generally slow and somewhat broken up. I generally didn’t think I was getting a particularly good example from the website (although it was a good starting place), so I went to ask my friends over at Baba Ganoush in Eagle Village. Romeo, the guy I know there, is actually Pakistani, but he asked his Saudi friend how to say the words I need to, and was able to get me a recording of the lines. Phonetically, the first line, “Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!” should be “Ach! Uh houze of heavenli bease! I rend eed!” I was told that making the “Ah!” into “Ach!” wasn’t necessary, but I had mentioned that the character doing the accent wasn’t necessarily good at it, and Romeo said that adding that little bit of “C” in the word would be a clearer stereotype. The word “house” would have the “S” sound changed to a “Z.” The “y” buzz on the end of “heavenly” would be a shorter vowel, though not quite a neutral vowel. I was told that an important distinction for the dialect is the lack of a “P” sound, and that all “P”s are “B”s in most all Middle Eastern dialects. The ending “T”s on “rent” and “it” (as well as my “What’s”) would all be made “D”s, and the “I” in “it” would be slightly elongated. There is also a certain quality that the dialect has that I can’t quite seem to capture. I’ll continue studying it to try and better these lines, but I think that it’s more plausible that Frederick just isn’t very good at the dialect.

This entry was posted in Research on September 9, 2015.
Today will mark our fourth consecutive day making sense of Act II. It's gotten much more understandable these past few days, but there is still more that we could add to keep the act moving forward a tad more logically. All-in-all though, it's going well. I feel much better about the act, and I'm looking forward to doing the entire thing this evening to help really solidify it. The only major issue I'm having in this act as of now is that I know I'm putting too much strain on my voice when I'm onstage for Nothing On. The second act is so high energy that my voice starts to naturally rise in pitch as things get crazier, but I was feeling the effects of that high pitch at the end of rehearsal last night. Gregg has talked to us about keeping our pitch low and in tone as much as possible, and that's something I'll have to work on more. I've been trying to call as many lines as I can for Nothing On in the second act, but sometimes I forget to or it just doesn't come out the way I want. Hopefully this will improve in the coming days, as I'm going to really focus on staying in tone, keeping my voice healthy, and not screaming my lines from backstage.

The one thing that we have been doing the past couple nights that I've really appreciated is that we've gone back at the end of rehearsal to rerun our work for the evening. We hadn't really done much of this before restarting work on Act II, but it's something that I really appreciate and enjoy. Generally, this helps me make sense of how everything is connected and flows as the action proceeds, but it also really helps me remember everything we've done over the rehearsal. This is important for this show (and really important for this act) as it is easy to lose track of the action when most of your cues are offstage and somewhat difficult to hear at times. The action is starting to feel more natural though, and I think doing the entirety of the act tonight is going to see a big improvement in our work.

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on September 12, 2015.
The Ending Second Act

And as of yesterday, we have added much in the way of detail to Act II. It seems like a new entity compared to when we first started it. The moments are starting to connect more and more, and it no longer feels like every few minutes is a new crisis, but rather that this act is one long, increasingly absurd crisis. I don’t think we’re quite there yet, but the act feels so much better than it did when we ran it at 6 on Saturday. I’m still having a few moments where I don’t have anything specific I need to do. I’ve just barely started messing around with some warm-ups while waiting for Nothing On to start, but they don’t feel like a complete thought yet. They need a little more development. The moments while I have nothing to do on stage and the performance is going are giving me a bit more trouble. There are only a couple, one of which is when I come to after fainting. The way I’ve been playing it is that I wake up, confused about what’s going on. Then I see that everyone is searching for Brooke’s contact, which I think is something that Freddie would immediately understand, as it happens often and is an easily recognizable action for him. I then help, realise that Selsdon needs to make an entrance, give him his props, and start searching Dotty’s clothes for the contact lens. I think I could better this moment some by starting to help Selsdon look in Dotty’s clothes, or asking him what he’s doing, before he has to make his entrance. My searching of her clothes feels disconnected from Selsdon, but it is a continuation and escalation of the joke, as it is more significant when Garry sees me searching her than when Selsdon is.

It was a productive weekend and the monstrous second act feels closer to being tamed than it has yet, but the work goes on. There is much more that could be added in the little moments, and I need to figure out how I can use these moments to better convey the sense that we need to perform a play, especially at the beginning of the second act. The vocal warm-ups are a good start, and I’ve been doing a bit of stretching, but I think that I could do something else along with these. Maybe I could check my props are all in order, or that my hair is alright (if there are actually backstage mirrors as the script suggests). I know there’s more that I can do, I just need to be highly analytical of what I’m doing now so that I can find each and every moment to add something, and to figure out what the most logical thing for me to be doing in each moment is.

This entry was posted in Response on September 14, 2015.
"A Cuckoo in the Nest" and the Tropes of the Farce

I just finished watching the 1933 film A Cuckoo in the Nest, a film that is generally considered a classic bedroom farce, and an inspiration for Nothing On. It isn't nearly as complex as Nothing On or Noises Off, but it is easy to see how this film (originally a stage show) was the seed of inspiration for these plays. The film is full of mistaken identity, comical alcoholism, and innocent comments mistaken as innuendo. What it doesn't have nearly as much of as the two plays contained within the script of Noises Off is doors. Almost none of the comedy in the movie involves going through or opening/closing doors. There are, however, several characters that are reminiscent of characters in Nothing On and/or Noises Off. The old alcoholic Selsdon-character is rather obvious, as are the Mrs. Clackett and Vicki characters. There isn't exactly a Philip/Freddie or a Roger/Garry character, but there is a character that is somewhat of an amalgamation of the two.

The similarities that I noticed made me wonder how I could best write about these stock ideas that belong to the bedroom farce. I found myself wondering what tropes belong to the bedroom farce, and which of those are present in Noises Off, so I went to look at the Noises Off page on TV Tropes (tvropes.org). While I realise that this website may not be considered a credible source, I used my judgement to take away what information I thought was useful. There were a few tropes that I think are especially prevalent in Noises Off, but I'm only going to discuss the ones that relate to me the most.

The trope that stuck with me the most is that Frederick fits the "Nice Guy" role in the play. Everyone starts out nice in Act I, but Frederick is a very genuinely nice guy who remains so, even when confronted by a supposed friend trying to kill him with a fire axe. He may become increasingly confused or nervous, but he always wants to make sure that everyone else is doing alright (he asks "Are you alright?" to three different characters in Act II). The TV Tropes website notes that the "Nice Guy" role is one of the most diverse roles, as the "Nice Guy" requires other characteristics to remain interesting and not just nice. Frederick has several, including his obliviousness and sensitivity to blood and violence. The "Nice Guy" isn't necessarily a trope exclusive to farce, but it's one that still fits Freddie quite well. Another trope that I've been noticing more and more during our rehearsals is the Rule of Threes. The play has three acts, there are often three variations of something happening on stage (Garry gives three excuses while trying to keep Brooke/Vicki in a room more than once), Gregg has just directed me to attempt to put the sardines stuck to me down three times, the Sheikh has three "What?" lines, Freddie attempts to close the front door three times during his first entrance… The list goes on. And of course, the three burglars in Act III are a direct reference to this, as Dotty says "They always come in threes." I think there are probably a few cases of the Rule of Threes that I haven't noticed, yet apply to Freddie/Philip. For the most part, I don't think this is a very complicated trope, it just requires varied tactics and action. I'm well aware no one wants to see the same action three times. That's why each act isn't identical.

The other trope I find quite amusing that Noises Off even pokes fun at (although it pokes fun at many of these tropes) is what they call "Acting for Two." Essentially, there is an actor playing two roles – Frederick plays both Philip and the Sheikh. What's more, the Sheikh is acknowledged to look identical to Philip, which is rather a coincidence, as Freddie points out. And the truth is, there is no good answer for why the Sheikh and Philip look identical (though Lloyd does a nice job pulling a reason out of his ass). There is absolutely no reason given by the script for Nothing On that justifies the Sheikh being Philip's double other than the plot requiring it. It's a contrived coincidence. Which is actually a trope that is almost exclusively accepted in farce, but rejected in other genres. When James Bond just happens to have that exact right gadget from Q at exactly the right moment, that might raise a few eyebrows, but in farce these contrived coincidences are often necessary for the humour, and so they are accepted. Which I'm okay with, as they help make Noises Off an outrageously funny play. So, now that I have a better understanding of these tropes, hopefully I can noticeably apply some of these ideas to my work. Generally these were things I already knew, but having some of these ideas in more exact words has helped me complete some unfinished thoughts I've had about Freddie/Philip and the play as a whole.

This entry was posted in Research on September 16, 2015.
Regaining Lost Ground

Last night’s rehearsal was less than the ideal any of us had in mind. It seemed to me that we were constantly missing entrances, props, and other action. I caught myself fixing and/or second guessing my blocking too often for a week out from opening. I can’t speak to everything that happened last night, but I know that for my part, the trouble stems from me looking at the script less often. I should know better than to stop looking at the text once I’m off book. Not only did it affect my blocking, but I found myself calling for lines or paraphrasing more often than I had been. As a cast, we’re all trying to run lines as often as possible and help each other in any way we can, but no one can learn lines for you. And you can’t hold another actor accountable for you forgetting a line. I need a few hours today just me and my script so that I can drill my lines, blocking, and other action. It feels silly to write about this here since it’s so basic, but I think it’s terribly important. I should be reviewing all my work every single day, and I should be reexamining it for missed opportunities and unnoticed meaning as often.

I’ve also noticed that the cast (myself included) have been jumping over other’s lines, especially the endings of lines. Hopefully running lines together can fix this. As far as my own lines go (aside from what I said above), I’ve been trying to create a more distinct vocal difference between Frederick and Philip. I see Philip as a more commanding, high status person that Freddie is, so I’ve been giving him a slightly deeper voice (I’ve been thinking of this as Freddie’s “actor voice”). I’ve been speaking as Philip in tone, but Freddie’s voice lives somewhere slightly higher in pitch, a little closer to my everyday speaking voice. I’ve been having some slight trouble moving to and from my tonal range, but it’s gotten better the past few rehearsals. I think it helps create a distinction between Freddie and Philip, but it’s also somewhat indicative of Freddie’s idea of acting, and that a deep voice that command attention is one of the keys to acting. I know this is something that probably won’t read to an audience, but it helps me differentiate the two to an extent, and it seems like a logical thought for Freddie.

The plan today is to treat my script with absolute reverence. It is my holy book, and I will be using it for meditation and prayer for as much time as I can muster these next several days. I need to know my lines to a point that I can keep things moving quickly and fluidly.

Which reminds me of something else: my change to the Sheikh. My understanding is that I’ll have a dresser backstage to help me get into the Sheikh’s robes, but doing it by myself last night was a trial. It took far longer than I expected, and I missed my cue initially because I couldn’t get the robes on in time. However, taking my trousers off at Lloyd’s command was much smoother last night. I had to take off my shoes in order to do so, but overall it was significantly better than the last time we ran the scene and Dre had to help me take my pants off. So there are some things that are clicking better, but there are other things that are slipping. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous about the impending opening night, but I still think we’re gonna pull this off. And of course, the beginning of tech rehearsals means the home stretch and a whole lot more work.

This entry was posted in Response on September 18, 2015.
The Only Thing I Like About Technicals...

I'm just kidding. I like lots of things about technical rehearsals. I got to use my actual costume, we're figuring out quick changes and some holes in my action, things are just making more and more sense. Now, on the subject of quick changes: I've never had to do a quick change like the one I do in this show before. In Sunday in the Park with George, I had to do a relatively fast change at the beginning of Act II, but I had something like three minutes to do it. I think I may have somewhere around one minute for this show, and in that minute I have to detach a bathmat from my head (though I'm sure this will be much faster now that I'm not using the toupee clips), take my shoes off, give Mic my props, hike up my pants so I can run to the other side of backstage, get my robes on, have my headpiece put on me, and reenter through the front door. It all felt like a bit much when we started doing it last night, but after running the change a few times and switching how the bathmat goes on me, I think it is much more manageable than my initial assessment. Actually, I think yesterday went pretty well. Sure, we held a lot and we didn't finish Act II, but every change just made things feel better and better. And I love getting to use my real costume. I'm always a fan of that. Doing hair and make-up and putting on the costume helps. It just helps me get out of my head and into my character's a bit more. I was thinking about something someone said yesterday about how for our characters, costumes are really just their clothes. But that isn't actually true in this case; it's my character's costume, which in turn is his character's clothes.

I also like that we're still receiving plentiful notes. I have much more to think about after yesterday, not only in terms of what I need to do technically, but acting as well. I'm trying to continue to bring new ideas and interpretations to the room, and I'm glad to still be getting feedback on what I'm doing well and what needs changing/work. I'm still unsure of the Sheikh's "What" lines, but I haven't received a note about them in a couple weeks, so I guess they're working. It's much easier to make sense of them with Lauren in her costume as well, as it gives me a more tangible circumstance to react to. Today, we'll keep on going with tech, and hopefully we can get a full run in like the schedule says.

This entry was posted in Response on September 20, 2015.
I guess I hadn't realized that we hadn't done a complete run of the show yet, but sure enough, last night was the first time. And all things considered, I think it went okay. It wasn't great, and there's a significant amount to improve upon, but nothing so severe that the show is doomed or anything. The first act went pretty well, but it was slow. The first act is slower in nature compared to the other two, as it's a rehearsal and the other two acts are performances, but there could definitely be increased energy. Fighting for the right to talk has been missing at points, probably in part due to slight line troubles, but if we can get the urgency in there more, I think the first act will be smoother and more engaging. There weren't any glaring errors from what I could see in Act I, but it didn't feel "all there."

Act II hardly even felt "there." I'm not sure exactly what happened that got us derailed to the point that our Metro train was suddenly in the London Underground. Or rather, the other way around. But I suddenly found myself onstage without flowers, a whiskey bottle at my feet, and genuine bewilderment filling my head. If yesterday's second act wasn't some kind of character work, I honestly don't know what is. I don't think any one person is to blame for how the act went, but it did seem like a bit of a domino effect. There isn't a prop on, there isn't a character on, there are suddenly two whiskey bottles (or so I heard, I actually missed that bit), and our train seems to be flying towards the end of the line without a chance for survival. And yet, somehow, we finished the act. Maybe not in the way that Frayn intended – though he may have appreciated the third level of farce that we as actors somehow managed into this play – but we all somehow ended up in the right spots for the final moment. And for that, I'm actually pretty proud of how the cast did. As everything went to complete and utter chaos, we did our best to keep going, and we did. I thought for sure that we would be calling a hold at any moment, but we just kept going. Which is what we would need to do during an actual performance. I'm surprised that Gregg was able to give notes with all the chaos, but thankfully he was still able to pick out things for us to work on.

The third act was generally alright. It was a bit slow for my liking, and there were still some hiccups since we hadn't finished tech-ing the act. Gregg informed us after rehearsal that it is the company's last performance, which I guess I hadn't quite connected before. I always thought of the third act as their first performance in their last tour location, but the idea that it is the final performance adds a different, increased energy to the whole thing. I like Gregg's idea that there is an urgency in this act stemming from the want to just be done with our final performance and the tour as a whole. Hopefully this will help the act move forward at a better pace. Again, I consider yesterday's run a general success, but we still have a good amount of work ahead of us if we want our production to be more than a "general" success. I don't want people to leave thinking that it was generally pretty good, I want them to leave unable to think of a dull moment in the show. And so we continue the work, and we'll work hard for these last 72 hours or so that we have.
A Little Better

Things are getting better each rehearsal. The one thing that still seems to be a hold up is Act II. I know that it needs this sense of urgency, anxiety, and anticipation that normally comes with the start of a performance, but I’ve been having trouble figuring out how to get that feeling into my body. It’s something that I feel before every performance in real life, so it perplexes me that it’s giving me trouble. I was talking to Noah last night after rehearsal, and he said something that I hadn’t considered before: this is the first performance of Nothing On that seems like they may not be able to perform. Yes, as Tim has noted, Dotty and Garry have fought before during the tour, but never to the point that they were in danger of not going on stage. I think that this is where some of this energy comes from. I’ve been trying to fight for the right to talk, especially in the second and third acts, but I guess it isn’t quite enough and needs to be stepped up. I am also going to make it clearer that I’ve had a bit of a fright in the dressing rooms having heard Garry saying suspicious things under his breath. I think that these, along with an increased energy should make the situation clearer on my part, and I’m trying to think of things I can do to create more urgency in some of the other cast members, especially Belinda, since she’s the one I interact with the most during the beginning of Act II.

I’m also enjoying the notes I’ve been getting. I got a note from last night about throwing my pants out the front door with “wild abandon” in Act I. I don’t know yet if this would stem from a place of silliness in Freddie, or just carelessness and disrespect for his costume, but it’s something I hadn’t thought to do (mostly in fear of Kevin). I think it has the potential to be a fun moment for me though. I also like the idea of all of us running around the sofa saying our lines during the end of Act III, and I think this is a fun time to allow Freddie’s state to devolve slightly. Nothing crazy of course, but I’ve been trying out something that Gregg gave a note to expand on slightly, which is that each thing that goes wrong in Act III bothers Freddie a bit more. The note was specific to the caught phone, but what I’ve been doing has been in regards to the ending and the different things the play is now about. Specifically, I’ve been forcing a smile through worry and fear, and I think taking Gregg’s note will give me more to work with this.

This entry was posted in Response on September 22, 2015.

← Our First Full Run       Yeah, We’re Ready →
Yeah, We’re Ready

Well, we are. These last two technical/dress rehearsals have felt really good. I don’t know exactly how, but so much of the show feels so much better than we did our first run on Sunday. And obviously subsequent runs should feel better than the first run-through, but I have to agree with Gregg, we’ve taken some impressive, large steps forward since then. From my perspective, this can mostly be attributed to hard work and incorporating notes. I think it can be difficult to incorporate a new note into the next rehearsal, but this cast has done a great job doing so from what I can see. And that makes it easier for the director to tell if his notes were worthwhile or not, and he can further change them if something isn’t working or if it needs embellishment. So we’ve taken the notes we’ve been given, we’ve incorporated them into our work, and we’ve grown. And I really feel like I’ve grown as an actor during this rehearsal process. Not to say that I’ve finished growing my skills for this show, but who knows what performances will bring? I do think I’ve made significant progress in my technique with this show though. I think I’ve grown better at analyzing a script, communicating with the director and other actors, and in basic technique like being sure my scene partner and I are sharing a plane and vocal technique. For as much “shouting” (really calling) of lines as happens in Act II, I feel next to no strain on my voice any given night. Occasionally the Sheik lines still bother my voice, but this has almost completely stopped.

And last night we had a bit of an audience! I always enjoy getting some fresh people in the audience for an IDR, and hearing laughter here and there (even if it was only chuckles sometimes) makes a big difference in a comedy. Something that I’ve been thinking about in regards to this is when an audience doesn’t laugh. There is plenty to laugh at in this show, but there are also plenty of jokes that I wouldn’t consider “laugh out loud” funny. It’s important to remember that people don’t need to laugh at something to be funny, and if they don’t laugh, that shouldn’t be taken as criticism of a bit. Different audiences will find different things funny, and that’s okay. I know I had a moment last night where I did a bit and no one laughed, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t reading. It might mean that, and maybe that means I need to change the intonation of that line slightly, but I won’t know until an audience responds one way or the other. And I suppose that’s how you grow from having an audience in front of you. You feel out what works and doesn’t work from night to night, and that affects what you may do the next night. To use computer science as an analogy, you get the audience input, you process it, and you change your output accordingly.

I’m terribly nervous for opening tonight, but I’m also very excited. This cast has put such vast amounts of hard work into this play, I know we’re finally ready. I don’t mean to say we’re done, because I do believe that the audience will further our growth, but I think we’re ready for the audience to enter the conversation. Alright, I feel a rant coming on, so I’m gonna stop here for now. I still have notes to process and lines to review (just for solidity’s sake), but I’m ready for something special tonight. To whomever’s reading this, I hope to see you there.

This entry was posted in Response on September 24, 2015.
I have never been so amazed by a performance as I was last night. I’m still not completely sure how we did it, but we did. The audience presence added so much to this performance that I almost wonder how we did the show without an audience. I’ve never before been in a performance with such a receptive audience. I can only think of a couple things that didn’t go quite right last night, and I don’t think the audience was any the wiser. I waited far too long in Act II for an entrance “onstage” because I was watching for Selsdon to go out a door he didn’t go out of and I couldn’t see him “backstage.” But I realised what had happened and went on, and while the audience may have noticed a slight pause in the dialogue, I don’t think that anyone noticed it as a mistake. I also entered in Act I expecting plates of sardines to be on the table waiting for me, only to find none there. We ended up working this in a way; since I told Flavia that there were sardines for us, they were put on the upstairs table and she grabbed them from there, which seems like a decent solution in my book. Hopefully they’ll be downstairs the rest of the run.

I don’t know how much more I have to write about this process. Hopefully there are new discoveries that I’ll make and write about, and I still need to post my handwritten notes and research that I’ve been doing, but I expect that the posts may drop off a bit here. I suppose I’ll continue to write about specific things that may happen in performance, but that’ll be about it. The show goes on, and so it goes.

This entry was posted in Response on September 25, 2015.
The run ended a couple days ago, and I've been reflecting on how it went, what did and didn't work, and my final thoughts on this whole process.

First of all, while it was something I already knew, this show was a great reminder to never wait for audience laughter. Our second night we were a bit guilty of this, as opening night had such a responsive audience, but we were left high and dry a couple times. This slowed things down a bit, but we were much better about this in subsequent performances. I also came to realise that I should be consistently reviewing notes and lines during off days. I reviewed both of these things once during our three days off between weekends, but I realised on the second Thursday that I could have done a touch more. The show wasn't a bad one, but it was likely our weakest performance. I couldn't quite explain why, but I found myself searching my mind for what was next more often than before. I somehow did much of that night subconsciously, as my body knew most of it, but I wasn't on my A-game. Again, not a bad performance, but I knew it wasn't my best.

Similarly, I realised I should keep reviewing my lines before performances. During the last couple shows, I found myself waiting for entrances with the wrong line in my head, and I would have to consciously tell myself that that wasn't what I was supposed to say and would need to find the right line to fit this god-knows-what-number entrance coming up. I also found myself hearing lines and thinking, "That isn't right. They said the line wrong." only to suddenly realise that I was thinking of another version of the line from a different act. More reason to review lines even when off book.

Overall I think this was the most fun I've ever had working on a show. Getting to try my hand at such a complex comedy has been a bigger undertaking than I expected, but I think I've learned a lot from it, especially in regards to studying a text for possible meaning. I think this show also helped concrete some ideas that I've known for a long time, such as countering other actors and not upstaging others/myself. Furthermore, I was quickly and efficiently able to get off book. If these had remained issues into performance, I suspect the audience would have lost large chunks of the comedy, especially in the second act. The final thing that I want to make special note of is that this show made me incredibly aware of good vocal technique. My voice would have been fried like a toaster in a tub if I didn't know how to stay in tone and call – again, especially in regards to the second act.

This was a great experience. I was able to make people laugh, I learned more about text analysis, I reinforced and adjusted my technique to make it better, and I was able to be a part of a company of actors who I now hold in the highest regard. This company did a fantastic job of playing off of each other, taking and incorporating notes, and constantly working to make a better play. Everyone's hard work compounded, and I think everyone involved in this production has come out stronger for it.
Those Notes from my Research

I mentioned I would upload these a while ago, and I finally have the time. These are notes from my research, much of which didn’t actually make its way into the play, but was a very helpful place to start the process. There are also several pages of a timeline I made for myself to help keep my action straight in my head. Again, the timeline isn’t necessarily the final list of action that happened, but helped me figure out what I needed to do and when.

This entry was posted in Research on October 6, 2015.
Frederick Lawrence Fellowes
42 Saw Mill Ln, Crawley, West Sussex
Wife: Matilda Fellowes (Separated)
No children
Father deceased
Mother lives in assisted living in childhood hometown of Bath
Two brothers: Norton and Sebastian
Norton, younger, runs family pasty shop
Sebastian, older, out of touch
Likes: dogs, they never leave you
Dislikes: - rodents - confrontation
          - beer - strip clubs
          - clowns - ambiguity
Politically unaware: hasn't remembered a voting day since 1967.
Raised Anglican Christian, non-practicing but considers self good Christian
Educated at Central Sussex College, Crawley
met wife Matilda there

no enemies - generally pleasant and easy to get along with
moderate television success has not gone to head
Failure of melodramatic "Trojan Women" lead to want for comedic role - conditioned for
Philip career started w/ several guest spots, lead to recurring roles, two pilots (not picked up)
one lead (cancelled in second series), and several stage roles

Act One: Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare
Monday, January 14th - cold, wet
~ Midnight

Act Two: Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne
Wednesday, February 13 - cold
1:55p at start

Act Three: Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees
Saturday, April 6 - chilled, rainy
8p (are Freddie and Belinda sleeping together at this point?)
Timeline
Act One

Before first entrance: lamenting over wife leaving / prepping for entrance
- enter through front door
- sit while doors are fixed
- exit and reenter through front (leave by step)
- before exiting, ask Lloyd about props
- exit into study and lament
- reenter when Lloyd calls for me
- exit into study feeling better
- Philip reads tax document, exclaims "Oh good Lord Above"
- enter from study w/said document
- exit into study
- attempt to reseal envelope w/super glue
- enter stuck to tax demand
- search for Brooke's contact lens
- nose bleed due to heads colliding (not mine)
- grow faint to blood in hand to chief
- exit to study
- enter w/tax demand & glue
- exit w/plate of sardines
- enter from study stuck to tax & sardines
- exit into downstairs bathroom
- enter for direction from Lloyd
- exit into bathroom
- attempt to use "poison" to undo glue, spill it on my trousers
- enter in holey trousers
- try to remove trousers
- talk to Roger
- exit out front
- try to listen for them leaving
- enter through front
- hide in downstairs bathroom (exit)
- Nicki throws her "dress" onto me
- enter from bathroom
- try to explain to Flavia
- Roger gives me sheet
- address burglar
- exit to bedroom
- How does bathmat end up on my head?
- enter, call for Flavia, exit
- enter looking like sheikh
- Roger mistakes me for sheikh, gives tour
- slip away into study (exit)
- change to sheikh, leave trousers on
- enter front
- Finally have chance to ask why I look like Philip while we're stopped
- take off trousers
- resume Nothing On
- wait for Lloyd & Brooke
- wait for Lloyd & poppy
- finish Act I of Nothing On
Act Two

Start off, pleading w/ Dotty to come out
leave when Garry passes by
Enter from dressing room
Talk to Belinda
Do Nothing (thanks Belinda...)
Be a flower middle-man
Wait for confusion to subside, try to be out of the way
Lloyd arrives
Take whiskey
give flowers to Poppy
talk to Selsdon
"Which poor halfwit?"
I still have the whiskey?
Dotty & Garry come up
try to console Garry
try to console Dotty
Make a speech - cut off by Selsdon/Lloyd
Play begins - put down whiskey on chair
Go to quiet Garry who...
Chases me
I need my handkerchief
Look at the handkerchief
Foot stamped AND nose bleed
Dotty is helping me
talk to Belinda
go to retrieve whiskey from Selsdon
Stopped by Belinda

- comfort Dotty
- remind Dotty of entrance (get her newspaper)
- take her sardines
- tell Belinda about Dotty
- caught between stopping Selsdon & helping Dotty
- reassure Dotty
- prepare for entrance
- where's Belinda?!
- give bag to Belinda
- exit through front door (onto set)
- carry out stage action until exit w/ clacker into study
- enter backstage through study door
- go to deal w/ Selsdon, stopped by Belinda
- sit and wait
- tell Tim about Selsdon
- remember line!
- hand Garry flowers & grab props
- exit onto stage w/ tax demand
- carry out stage action
- enter through study
- grab axe from Dotty, give it to Garry
- Perplexion
- retrieve flowers from Belinda
- Lloyd enters, try to explain situation to him
- hand Lloyd flowers & prep for entrance
- exit through study door w/ tax & glue
- re-enter w/ above and sardines
- Garry cut lines - where are we!?
get whiskey from Tim
"roar" of exasperation
get ready for entrance
still holding whiskey! (cry out)
I was supposed to cry out
put whiskey down
grab props
exit through study w/ tax & sardines
onstage action
- enter through downstairs bathroom
- re-cue Selsdon
- give flowers back to Dotty
- pulled between Dotty & Belinda
- shout Selsdon's line at him
- exit to dressing rooms
- smooth-talk Brooke
- victorious! Re-enter w/ Brooke
- get axe from Lloyd
- put back axe
- find whiskey in fire bucket
- take whiskey back from Brooke
- show Dotty that whiskey was in bucket
- help Dotty w/ sardines in her hair
- exit through downstairs bathroom w/ tax & sardines
- Roger falls down steps
- uh... Are you all right?
- enter through front door, needing handkerchief
  grow faint
- too faint to help w/ contact search
- lead Selsdon w/ props

- search Dotty for contact lenses
- exit onto stage through front door
- enter through downstairs bathroom
- exit after Brooke w/ previous props & bathmat
- onstage action brings me upstairs
- end up w/ bed sheet
- enter into bedroom
- exit onto upstairs corridor
- re-enter into bedroom
- put on bed sheets
- remind Brooke about sheets
- dress Brooke in sheets
- realize we're attached
- attempt to exit through bedroom door
- struggle
- take Sheikh sheet
- dragged onstage by Brooke while holding both sheets
- enter through study, dragging Brooke with
  realize real Sheikh sheet is onstage
- put on burnous (poorly)
- exit onto stage through front door as Sheikh
- act is ending...
- what about a baby?
before curtain; trying to calm Dotty and Belinda
enter through front door w/ box
- start line, wait for Barry to exit upstairs
- attempt to put phone back on table
- realise its caught
- take phone out front door and around to
  re-enter through downstairs bathroom
- pick up newspaper to be able to put phone
  on table
- become aware of newspaper's contents
  - put newspaper/sardines on sofa
  - slide on oily patch
  - need handkerchief
- woozy
- pick up bag & box and head upstairs for
  a "lie down"
  - put down bag & box at top of stairs
  - still woozy -> rush into bedroom
  - try to collect myself
- re-enter for line about letters
  - its too much -> re-exit into bedroom
  - "oh good lord above" & fall down stairs
  - backstage (how does this happen?)
- stunned -> someone bandages my head
- try to make my entrance from Study
  - not the right time; exit
  - try again -> still not right; exit
  - and again (this time I don't even

- I try my entrance once last time
- see Roger lying at bottom of stairs
  - handkerchief
  - look into it -> need a seat
  - remember line: open downstairs bathroom
  - and again. For Seisdon
- Lloyd enters, "social worker" bit
  - try to find something to do w/sardines
  - try to find something to do w/phone
- "bags and boxes!"
  - "wedding"... awww
- Play Ends!