

Prologue

[Jacksonville] is a horribly ugly village, composed of little shops and dwellings which stuck close together around a dingy square, in the middle of which stands the ugliest of possible brick courthouses, with a spire and a weathercock on its top.

William Cullen Bryant, 1832

Jacksonville, Illinois, sits on the fold of the map some thirty-five miles west of Springfield, the state capital. Interstate 72 races past, intent on reaching the Iowa border. Corn and soybeans dominate the landscape; the last vestiges of native prairie have long since been plowed under. Clusters of farm buildings hide among stands of aged oak and maple; silvery bullet-shaped silos tower on their flanks. The largest north-south route through town is Highway 67, connecting Alton, Greenfield, and Jacksonville with Beardstown and Macomb to the north. The town and the state have plans to expand the road into a four-lane limited-access expressway. The going, so far, has been slow. West of town, a new bridge has been built, but the entry ramps lead nowhere except back, like a chute, into the fields.

The town is old, founded in 1825. A surveyor by the name of Johnston Shelton laid out the plat, beginning with 160 acres centered on a 5-acre public square. The lone inhabitant within that incipient town boundary was Alexander Cox, a hatter whom

history has otherwise forgotten. One early settler, Mrs. John Tilson, wrote home to her East Coast mother: "I can stand in the middle of my one-room log cabin, take a cat by the tail, and sling it in any direction between the logs, out of doors."

Jacksonville's subsequent history comes laden with tales of temperance unions and the long, angry shadows of the Civil War. Governor Joseph Duncan lived here in the 1830s when Jacksonville briefly served as the state capital, and his house, the Duncan Mansion, is now a national historic shrine, owned and maintained by the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. More than a few of the grander homes on State Street are reminiscent of the Old South, vaguely antebellum and definitely wealthy. Around the edges of the town, however, the poorer side of the Midwest holds sway: Jacksonville has several trailer parks and each one seems full to the brim. Not that buying a house is an outrageously expensive proposition. In 1996, the last year that the chamber of commerce gathered such statistics, the average purchase price for a home was only \$85,000.

William E. Sullivan invented the Big Eli Wheel in Jacksonville, the world's first portable Ferris wheel. He founded the Eli Bridge Company, which continues to fill occasional orders for more. Fans of Drew Barrymore can watch her ride a Big Eli Wheel in the movie *Never Been Kissed*. For those who prefer to experience their amusement rides firsthand, Big Eli no. 17, well lit and beautifully maintained, stands in the large, wooded Community Park at the intersection of Main Street and Morton Avenue. On certain summer evenings, the wheel is open to the public and you can ride it, up and around, up and around, never quite topping the trees. You do, however, get a fine view of the passing cars because, for now, Main Street and Highway 67 are one and the same. When the bypass is complete, at least some of the traffic on Main Street will disappear.

Morton Avenue is another story entirely. The street is a mecca for shopping and eating. Every inch is lined with chain

restaurants, mostly fast food: Long John Silver's, McDonald's, Taco Bell, Wendy's. None of the stores pushing against Morton's curbs cater to the wealthy. Jacksonville has a JC Penney, four competing grocery stores, a Kmart, several car dealerships and of course, a Wal-Mart. The Wal-Mart lot is always twice as crowded as Kmart's. Corporate executives declared the local Hardee's to be the busiest in the franchise. It did so well that the company recently built an entire new building, just ten feet from the old one. When the new restaurant opened, the old facility was summarily demolished.

When Jacksonville residents want to eat out, they have few options besides fast food, pizza, a diner or two, and the buffet at Ponderosa. The classy option is Lonzerotti's, a popular Italian restaurant that occupies the old railway station. The tracks remain active and enormous freight trains rumble past at irregular intervals. The louder ones drown conversation and ripple the merlot in the wine glasses. El Rancherito, a growing Midwest chain, provides the other ethnic alternative, and their menu features all manner of muddy-looking Mexican and Tex-Mex fare. The prices are good, the margaritas both large and weak; the atmosphere, however, pales before the sometimes quiet, sometimes train-ridden ambience of Lonzerotti's. If an after-dinner movie appeals, tickets cost five dollars.

Industry provides jobs for those who do not farm. Wareco, a chain of gasoline stations and convenience shops, is based here. Tenneco (now Pactiv) makes plastic bags, notably Hefty OneZip bags. EMI presses compact discs on the northwest side of town. They remain infamous for asking employees to use clear plastic sacks rather than purses or bags prior to releasing the Beatles compact disc sets in 1995 and 1996. Not far away, Nestlé does a good business making Coffeemate. As alternative industries, Jacksonville boasts an area hospital, Passavant, and a prison. Some local realtors blame the prison for swelling the numbers of run-down homes and cheap trailers. Others claim that the prison

has brought a bad element into the area, but nobody seems comfortable defining or identifying what or who exactly this element might be. Jacksonville, despite its official status as a city (population 20,284), remains essentially a small town, and nobody wants to risk insulting someone who may have a relative—or themselves spent time—behind the prison's walls.

Then there are the colleges. MacMurray College and Illinois College are both small, private, liberal arts institutions; their coexistence in such a small community has prompted a popular rumor, possibly true, that Jacksonville boasts more Ph.D.s per capita than any other locale in North America. IC once enrolled only men, whereas Mac began its life as a women's college. Both are now co-ed, or to use the original term, coordinate. Each would like to have about eight hundred students, but Mac, the poor sister, is chronically underenrolled. During the late seventies and early eighties, Mac nearly went bankrupt thanks to half a century of deficit spending. A cycle of heavy borrowing resulted, both from banks and from the school's own endowment.

Meanwhile, IC became among the best-endowed small schools in the country, and its alumni revenues have helped construct a new library, a proscenium theater space, an arts center, and in March 2003, a new athletic facility. IC is thought to be the more conservative of the two institutions, something former graduate and trustee William Jennings Bryan would likely be proud of, but neither institution has a particularly liberal student body as colleges go. Both schools draw heavily from the surrounding community and both rely on church affiliation, Mac with the Methodists and IC with the Congregationalists. At times, and despite their differences, it is difficult to see why the two schools have not simply merged. Indeed, in the 1950s, when Mac was flush and IC was not, Mac's board did float such a proposal. The idea was to make IC the men's campus and keep Mac as the women's campus. Curricula, staff, and administration would have been combined. The schools' presidents held tentative meetings,

but when IC's board and alumni heard what was going on, they were, so the story goes, positively apoplectic. The merger quickly fell through.

Despite its recent monetary woes, Mac has proved a difficult beast to kill. It has struggled valiantly back from its former insolvency, and in 1997, Mac's trustees hired a new president, Lawrence Bryan, former head of Kalamazoo College in Michigan. Larry Bryan—unrelated, so far as he knows, to William Jennings Bryan—brought with him a sense of direction and optimism that has, by all accounts, been lacking amongst the school's faculty and staff. Mac, for the first time in decades, appears to be going places.

Concurrent with Bryan's arrival, Mac decided to revitalize a number of moribund programs, including drama. They hired Diane Brewer, a recent Ph.D. graduate of UCLA, and charged her with directing two productions a year, teaching all theater classes, and resurrecting the drama major. Diane is a small woman with small features, and during her first six months on the job, people frequently mistook her for a student. She has straight, brown hair that falls in a line to her shoulders; she prefers informal clothes and eschews makeup. She has no fear of telling offbeat stories in public or supporting these with elaborate facial expressions. If she can't talk with her hands, she often stops talking.

The overall impression is hardly academic, but Mac nonetheless entrusted her with both the job and a nearly abandoned dance studio for a performance space. In her first two years, she produced and directed Glowacki's *Antigone in New York*, Brecht's *A Good Person of Setzuan*, and Moliere's *Tartuffe*. She also brought in Stephen Buescher of California's Dell'Arte Players Company as artist-in-residence for the month of January 1999. Stephen, an ebullient, tremendously talented performer, turned out to have strong ties to the Deaf theater community (the capital D implying a cultural and political sensibility whereby the deaf person in question identifies himself or herself primarily with a community

of other deaf or hard-of-hearing people). In 1995, Stephen answered an ad in the magazine *ArtSEARCH* placed by Sunshine Too, the touring theater troupe from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, New York. As a guest artist, Stephen joined the company (typically three deaf and three hearing actors) and stayed for three years, eventually taking on writing and directing duties in addition to acting. Stephen, who is hearing, remembers most performances as being “very much in the variety show range,” and he worked hard to incorporate the physical techniques of clowning and commedia dell’arte with the equally physical work of sign language—a natural match. In *Laundry*, the vignette Stephen remembers best, he and the other actors portrayed the various stages of washing clothes, running through “rinse,” “wash,” “sort,” and so on. Other segments revolved around racism and Gallaudet’s Deaf President Now movement (see chapter seven).

Late in Stephen’s MacMurray stay, Diane has an idea—what she describes as little more than a spark, a flash—for the show she will do in the spring of 2000 (still a year away): *West Side Story*.

A musical, especially a performance like the one she envisions, will require a far greater commitment of time, resources, and logistics than any show she has attempted before. From the very beginning, Diane’s goal is not merely to put on *West Side Story*, the musical, but to build the show as a joint production between Mac and the Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD). The ISD campus sits on the far side of town, sprawling across fifty acres of residence halls, classrooms, and playing fields. It is the nation’s tenth oldest school for deaf students, founded in 1846. Enrollment hovers around the three hundred mark and includes both residential and day students. It boasts an accredited curriculum for kindergarten through twelfth grade, with an emphasis in later grades on vocational, technical, and college preparatory classes. ISD’s presence has given rise to a sizable Deaf community in Jacksonville, and for the most part, the town’s hearing

populace does not bat an eye when encountering a person whose level of hearing does not measure up to their own. Not surprisingly, ISD's proximity to Mac is a major reason why the latter school has had such success (and motivation) in developing its prominent Deaf Education programs.

For Diane, the notion of bringing the two schools together has been brewing for some time, born of watching her Mac actors use sign language to communicate backstage during past shows. Her immediate reaction is that the signing "should be onstage, not behind the scenes." Intrigued, she contacts Rod Lathim, a Southern California director whose mixed company of deaf and hearing actors she'd seen last as a grade-schooler. She asks him what pitfalls to avoid should she embark on a project with deaf and hearing performers, and he tells her to be certain, above all else, to make the work collaborative. If, says Lathim, all you as a hearing person do is direct, you won't achieve anything.

Closer to home, Diane has several reasons for thinking that stage work featuring deaf actors might be a success. First, Mac's Deaf Education majors include many of the school's finest students, most of whom have never shown much interest in theater, but Diane hopes that running a show in conjunction with ISD might give her sudden access to this heretofore untapped pool of talent. Second, strong ties already exist between Mac and ISD, which allows many of Mac's Deaf Ed majors into its classrooms as they prepare to take on classes of their own after graduation. Third, Stephen Buescher's commedia performance, although far from silent (he relies heavily on prerecorded swing music), is wordless. He does not speak, nor is he spoken to, yet he communicates brilliantly with the audience members, many of whom are deaf high schoolers from ISD, invited specially by Diane to attend Buescher's shows. Their enthusiasm, combined with Diane's own, cements her decision to work cast members of differing levels of hearing into an upcoming production.

The pressure for Diane to mount a full-scale musical has been escalating since her arrival, both among Mac's students and also its alumni. The feeling is that only a musical will establish once and for all that Mac theater is back to stay. Unfortunately, Diane herself has little respect for the majority of well-known American musicals and has no desire to involve herself with *Oklahoma!*, *Pajama Game*, or their ilk. *West Side Story*, however, with its gritty story line of young, thwarted love, seems to her to offer a dose of artistic integrity. The fact that its music will have to be at least partially delivered by deaf or hard of hearing cast members only fuels her interest.

Did Diane have any concrete reason for believing such a production could be successfully staged? Her answer, given in retrospect, is an unadorned "No."



February 11, 1999

At 2:25 P.M., the National Weather Service issues a tornado warning for Morgan County and Jacksonville in particular. A tornado has been identified fifteen miles southwest of the city, heading northwest at fifty miles an hour. Sirens begin going off as roiling clouds and fierce, gusting winds produce driving rain. Actual waves rise up on the larger puddles. Mac students in Rutledge Hall retreat to the basement under the supervision of their building resident assistants and they cower there, waiting for the alert to end. Many bring schoolwork, but they give up on this when the power abruptly goes out at 2:35. Mac is not the only site affected; most of Jacksonville loses power. The winds continue, tearing down trees, peeling the roof off Kmart, and knocking rural barns from their foundations.

The actual tornado never arrives, and the alert officially ends at 3:00.

However, with the power out, the tornado sirens cannot sound the all clear. This maroons the Mac students in the dark, increasingly stuffy basement. Across town, ISD suffers a similar fate, with the end result that a planned meeting between Diane, Bob Dramin, Cara Hammond, and Paula Chance (the latter two from ISD) gets postponed indefinitely. This would have been their second official meeting, but only Bob, an instructor at Mac in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Education program, makes it to Rutledge Hall, accompanied by an interpreter. Bob is a mild, thickset man with a heavy neck, his close-cropped black hair beginning to gray. In cool weather, he favors a teal Eddie Bauer jacket and blue jeans. Bob and Diane decide that there is no point in waiting for the ISD contingent, because the storm will force them to keep watch over their students. When Bob and Diane converse, Diane looks at Bob throughout, even when waiting for the interpreter to complete the process of signing what she has said. It is considered bad manners in the Deaf community for the hearing conversant to make eye contact or talk directly to the interpreter. (One is not, after all, having the conversation with the interpreter.) Bob, however, looks at Diane when he is signing and then watches the interpreter to see Diane's response.

Diane has opted to audit Bob's American Sign Language (ASL) course in preparation for the upcoming production. The class has been helpful, and today she finds that she recognizes some of the hand and body motions Bob makes, but not enough to comprehend their full meaning. This only serves to underscore the fact that, without the interpreter, the meeting could not take place, storm or no storm. The interpreter, however, has only been contracted to work until four. At four o'clock, she will head for home, and so, even if the ISD contingent were to arrive, the meeting would end abruptly with her departure. Nor is the interpreter likely to stick around out of some sense of altruism or

charity. Within the Deaf community, the dominant school of thought holds that interpreters should not lend their services free of charge. Thus, for the interpreter to remain of her own volition after four o'clock would be an ethical violation. Even if the interpreter wanted to stay—and had no other commitments—she would, in effect, be honor-bound to leave. Diane or Bob could offer to pay her for additional time, but given the weather delays and missing personnel, this seems pointless to everyone involved.

The meeting officially ends at 3:20. Later, using a still-working home phone, Diane manages to reach Cara Hammond, a Mac graduate, class of '95, currently employed as a speech pathologist at ISD. Cara reports that ISD's students are still in the basement and that Diane and Bob made the right decision. Cara, who is hearing, tentatively reschedules the meeting for the next week, but in the end, that meeting too is canceled, due to scheduling conflicts.

One meeting has already taken place, in late January of 1999 (a full sixteen months before the scheduled production run). Diane, Bob, and Ruth-Ann Hecker, also with Mac's Deaf Education Department, attend. This is the first formal meeting held on *West Side Story*'s behalf, and it serves as a springboard for ideas and hurdles that will later be dealt with in staging and performance. Diane lays out her basic goal of merging the talents of the Deaf Ed and Theater Departments with those of ISD, and Ruth-Ann reacts by flatly stating that *West Side Story* "shouldn't be a Deaf issues play."

Diane, who has no desire to deviate from the play's basic text (a violation of copyright law), agrees, but stresses that she does not want to produce a play featuring deaf performers that essentially ignores the presence of deaf actors on the stage. Connections, and people failing to connect, are ongoing fascinations for Diane in her theater work. With *West Side Story*, she wants recommendations from Ruth-Ann and Bob on how best to deal with interpreting onstage. Ruth-Ann and Bob describe two basic

and accepted styles of onstage interpreting, Simultaneous Communication (SimCom) and shadow (or shadowing).

An actor using SimCom signs and speaks at the same time. In addition to performing arts settings, SimCom is often used in educational settings, sometimes in conjunction with other manual and visual cues. Within the Deaf theater community, the general feeling is that SimCom, while easy on the eye, becomes in practice an inherent betrayal of the text. Because word-for-word translation between spoken English and ASL is not possible, the resultant signed message becomes an inexpressive shorthand for English, and the underlying meaning is lost. To further complicate matters, speaking and signing simultaneously drastically limits facial expression, which might be like skipping every fifth word in a speech. Finally, because spoken words flow off the tongue faster than the hands can sign, actors must slow down their oral delivery to use SimCom.

Shadowing has its own drawbacks, because it assumes that a given actor cannot sign and therefore must have a double following him or her around the stage. During a recent performance of Willy Conley's *Broken Spokes* at Chicago's Bailiwick Theatre, the interpreters remained seated downstage right throughout the performance, even when the rest of the cast had retreated to the opposite end of the stage, a technique known as stationary interpreting. Diane, who saw *Broken Spokes*, does not want to follow in that show's footsteps. She tells Bob and Ruth-Ann that she wants *West Side Story*'s interpretation to be integrated, to ebb and flow, to move in sync with the onstage action.

Even providing interpreters will be a challenge, because no one expects the interpreters to volunteer their services (except in casual conversation or with friends). Unfortunately, this has the effect of hog-tying *West Side Story*, because the budget of the show cannot absorb the cost of a full-time interpreter through the projected nine weeks of rehearsal. No one has an immediate solution.

Ruth-Ann, meanwhile, mentions another aspect of interpreting, and that is an interpreter's effective neutrality—sometimes tacit, often explicit—in any given situation. She brings up Stephen Buescher's commedia performance as an example, stressing that Stephen “violated [the interpreter's] code of ethics.” Stephen, playing a poverty-stricken clown named Arlecchino, chose to interact directly with the interpreter, thus dragging her, willing or not, into the performance. Ruth-Ann understands that commedia is essentially improvisational, but she stresses that the interpreter should have been left out of it, period. The interpreter ceased, at that moment, to be an interpreter and became instead a kind of prop, a situation that prevented her from being the unbiased conduit of communication, which is her sole function as an interpreter. As Mac's Deaf Ed Department sometimes teaches, interpreters are *equipment*. They should receive no more notice, when working, than their technological double, the telephone.

Bob and Diane point out that in a scripted production, such a violation would be unlikely to occur because the interpreters' performance, as with the actors', would be rehearsed in advance; the interpreters' neutrality could only be compromised if the actors broke character. Shortly after reaching this conclusion, the meeting ends. One week later, Ruth-Ann is fired. Her dismissal comes as a surprise to everyone, including Bob, and her involvement with *West Side Story*'s development ends with just that single meeting.



Ronald Dorn is new to Mac, but he is among the most powerful figures on campus. He oversees the business office and his department handles all financial affairs, from expenditures to paychecks. On February 20, 1999, Diane surprises him by

announcing that she needs his signature on a proposal directed to the Illinois Arts Council (IAC). On any other day, she would have approached Jim Goulding, the dean of the college, or President Larry Bryan, but both are out of town and the deadline for her proposed grant has arrived. Both Goulding and Bryan have been kept up to speed on *West Side Story's* financial needs, but few others on campus are even aware that the project, still a year away, exists.

Diane does not look forward to ambushing Ron, but she determines that she has no choice; he is the only other person on campus with the authority to sign her application. She locates him in his office and presents the forms. Ron, scanning the paperwork, quickly realizes that he is looking at a 60-40 style grant, with Mac left to pay for an estimated \$4,580 in production costs. Any overage in the budget will also be Mac's problem. For a financially strapped institution, \$4,580 is not an insignificant sum. Diane, with a certain amount of contrition, admits that she isn't giving him much warning. Ron's terse reply: "No. You're not."

Nevertheless, he signs the proposal. In doing so, he automatically becomes a member, however tacit, of the project's eight-person steering committee, as stated on the second page of the grant application. The active membership of the committee never rises above five.

An \$11,450 budget for a Mac theater production, however worthy, would have been completely unheard of just one year earlier. Mac's old theater building, last used as a temporary church, has been empty since 1984. The ministry that rented the building updated the electrical systems and the plumbing, but did neither to code, and when the ministry shut down, local fire marshals deemed the building unsafe and uninhabitable. Until 1997, Mac itself had not witnessed a faculty-directed theater production since 1982, when Phil Decker, professor emeritus, reluctantly allowed the Theater Department to merge with the English Department. Theater had been a three-person department for

years, but attrition and budget cuts left Phil as the last man standing, and he chose to discontinue the drama program rather than soldier on with no help and little chance of living up to his own high standards. It was not until the mid-1990s that a group of students, working with minimal funds through the student-chaired Student Activities Finance Committee, began to mount their own productions, including *Butterflies Are Free* and *Black Comedy*. Noting the resurgent interest, the Mac faculty, led by Phil Decker, decided to create a position within the English Department for an Assistant Professor of Drama. Not long after filling that post, Diane clashed with the students over the student-controlled budget and over Diane's choice of material. *Antigone in New York*, with its ribald language, offended many students from the outset, and several students refused to even audition. Later, with the atmosphere somewhat cooler, one student confessed to Diane, "We thought you were just here to sign our checks."

In lieu of an actual theater, Diane inherited the dance studio, lined on two walls with full-length mirrors and a companion barre, still solidly bolted to the floor. The heavily waxed hardwood floor sported green and red painted lines left over from fencing tournaments, and the room, at first glance, had the look of a mispainted basketball court. Unpainted cinderblock walls culminated in a sixteen-foot ceiling with two lateral skylight systems. These skylights worked so well that they made daytime and matinee performances all but impossible. The studio space also included a main entrance with wooden double doors, a fire exit, a demolished drinking fountain, a bright red fire extinguisher, and two closets, one of which had been devoted to props and doubled as a minuscule greenroom (the space that actors occupy when offstage during performances). The other closet, until the late fall of 1998, held outdated audiovisual and athletic equipment, after which it became an all-purpose dump for the theater's lumber and building materials.

Lumber has, unfortunately, been among the nascent theater's most difficult problems. There is no place within the education complex, the facility that houses the studio, to stash it. Past student productions tended to overbuy, leaving increasing piles of unused and esoteric wood lying around the studio floor. These piles, together with a set of poorly made flats—both wood-faced and canvas-covered—joined with bulky, heavy props like a refrigerator and a dilapidated sink to completely fill one end of the studio space. The single most important factor in determining both the stage space and the seating area for any given audience has become this heap of theatrical junk, and considerable time and energy is spent rearranging it with each successive production. Throwing it out en masse is not a viable option, since there is insufficient money to tolerate any waste.

Despite the room's eccentricities, progress has been made. The college painted the entire space black (walls, floor, and ceiling) before the fall 1998 production, creating a proper black box theater space. The same workers, employees of Mac's physical plant, also covered the skylights. They routed extra power to the room, allowing for more lights (which, during earlier productions had repeatedly overloaded the circuits and pitched the company into darkness). They removed or covered most of the mirrors, along with the barre. Using simple two-by-four frames covered in Duvateen, a flame-retardant black fabric not unlike thick felt, students and staff created a system of movable, modular walls. People entering the space to see *Tartuffe* could not believe the difference. "It's like a real theater," was by far the most frequent comment. Like but not, apparently, the same. The studio theater still lacked a proper lighting system (previous shows had relied primarily on rentals) and any sound effects or music had to be routed through a single-disc CD player hooked into two monaural public address speakers dating from the 1950s. Each successive production had to make a choice between two equally dubious seating options. First, a stack of small metal

chairs allowed for somewhat greater seating capacity, but the chairs were notoriously uncomfortable and many exhibited suspicious stains and obvious rust. The neighboring student union building housed a number of newer, more comfortable plastic chairs, but these had to be ferried over by hand on opening night and returned the night the show closed, a time-consuming and arduous project.

Thanks to a sizable donation from Amy Wolff Stein, a 1932 Mac alumna, the lighting system and the chairs were both upgraded in early 1999. A local company, Brent Lighting Systems, hung a proper forty-circuit lighting grid from the ceiling. They installed a forty-eight-channel dimmer board and a twenty-four-channel patch bay. New chairs arrived, padded and covered in purple cloth, just hours before the student-directed spring show of Moliere's *The Learned Ladies*. A technician added new speakers to the grid, together with the requisite amplifiers and a graphic equalizer. Going into *West Side Story* and its forebear, the fall production of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Mac had, for the first time in recent memory, a recognizably functioning theater, renamed the Marian Chase Schaeffer Studio Theater. While not overly large, the space is extraordinarily flexible and more than sufficient, especially from ISD's point of view: ISD has no theater space at all.



With other Mac theater productions, no more than a few months of advance planning have been required. *West Side Story* demands a longer horizon, both for logistical reasons and because of the show's unusually high budget. Diane has not attempted a musical before, and aside from the difficulties that the music itself poses, American musicals are an expensive breed to stage: the rights to the libretto and score alone will cost twelve hundred dollars. Given the large cast, costumes (especially shoes) will also be a

factor. The set, which ricochets from various streets to a soda shop to a dressmaker's store, in and out of bedrooms, and down to Manhattan's back alleys, will be complex. In a perfect world, money to pay for such expenditures would grow on every tree, but since it does not (at least in Jacksonville), Diane turns instead to the slow but rewarding process of applying for the IAC grant that she later presents to Ron Dorn.

The bulk of the IAC funding, which takes months to approve, is slated to bring and house Christopher Smith, a choreographer from the Chicago area. Christopher is a member of the Deaf community and is the only deaf artist that IAC has ever added to their list of eligible resident artists (which they did expressly at Diane's request). He comes highly recommended by Stephen Buescher, who met and worked with him while both were members of *Sunshine Too* at NTID. *West Side Story* will require nine weeks of rehearsals, and Christopher will need a place to stay during that period. The IAC grant is intended to cover these costs as well as his fee as an artist-in-residence. Diane has modified the grant application to cover one other position: an interpreter, who will need to be on hand when deaf performers attend rehearsal. Whether this role will be filled by one person or by a pool of interpreters who will rotate from night to night is not mentioned in the grant proposal.

Every other kind of production expenditure, from staples to glue to scripts and costumes, is Diane's problem. Her departmental purse strings remain tight, so a great deal of community support will be required to make ends meet. The grant proposal, which includes a detailed budget, assumes alumni donations of at least two thousand dollars, together with grants from other foundations totaling not less than seventeen hundred dollars. Ticket sales from the show itself will hopefully total \$880, with the show expected to run for eight days over two successive Thursday-through-Saturday schedules. Privately, Diane hopes to funnel ticket income from *Ghosts* toward *West Side Story*, but she knows

from past experience that monies generated by a given Mac department—theater in particular—do not always wind up back in the same coffers. Mac has many needs (the biology labs are a particular concern as of February 1999) and accounts get juggled to make ends meet. Diane finds this frustrating but freely admits that she has had tremendous administrative support, and thanks in no small part to Amy Wolff Stein's donation, Diane has generally received the funds she has asked for. The contrast between 1999 and her first weeks in her new position remains striking. When she first approached Dean Jim Goulding in 1997 and asked about her theater budget, he replied, "What budget?"

Christopher Smith has signed on, although communication between Diane and Christopher is difficult and, so far, slow. Telephone calls aside, and with Christopher still in Chicago, Toronto, and elsewhere, e-mail has been the principal vehicle for discussions between director and choreographer. The catch: Diane's native language is English, whereas Christopher prefers ASL. ASL is not, as many nonpractitioners may think, a signed equivalent of English. Instead, it is an entirely separate language with its own grammatical structure, syntax, and internal peculiarities.

Jumping from a visual language to a written language and back again reveals innumerable translational challenges, and nowhere is this more evident than in e-mail. In Christopher's e-mails, emotion takes precedence over standard English grammar, and many messages begin with typed exclamations of, "Oh, Diane!" He frequently sets these off in parentheses. One full sentence in an e-mail sent February 22, 1999, reads, "Diane (smiling)." It is ironic that many hearing users of e-mail have not adopted similar practices; after all, the impetus for such inclusions is the physical separation that e-mail implies. The addition of facial expressions or parenthetical emotions is not so much a "deafism" as it is an attempt to bridge e-mail's obvious visual deficiencies.

What Christopher keeps to himself is his fear that he won't be up to the task. Although he has choreographed many shows,

he has only once attempted to coordinate a full production combining hearing and deaf performers—and that show, an adaptation of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, the story of and tribute to Fats Waller, had a cast of only six (two hearing, four deaf). In 1992, Christopher's *Ain't Misbehavin'* had a short but successful run in Chicago, moving from the South Shore Cultural Center to a downtown venue and playing to thousands of high schoolers, mostly hearing. One notable difference between *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *West Side Story*: every member of the *Ain't Misbehavin'* troupe was fluent in ASL, thus eliminating the constant need for interpreters and the inevitable delays in communication that will soon burden *West Side Story*. Anticipating this, even ten months in advance of the first auditions, gives Christopher pause. Will it work? Can it work? And if the *West Side* ship starts sinking, who will be sufficiently experienced to save it?