

0Ahttp://www.cw.ua.edu/article/2016/11/theater-in-depth)

When Emily Phillips works on lighting for a play she often does it alone at night in an empty theater. It's simply her and a dress form on stage, mimicking the presence of an actor.

"It means nothing until I see actual people, actual actors walking through it performing the show," she said. "I have some idea, but not really a complete picture of what it's going to look like until I see actual people walking underneath it, and their skin tone, their costumes, everything interacting with that light and I know exactly how I need to reshape it to make it perfect."

Phillips, a senior, is the lighting designer for one of UA Theatre and Dance's latest productions, "Appropriate." It revolves around an Arkansas family that comes back together to clean out their hoarder father's house after his death, and uncover some dark family secrets along the way. Phillips is one of the many students who work long hours behind the scenes in the tech department to make every UA Theatre show happen.

Lighting decisions start with the script. The setting of the play is consistent throughout, the family living room, so Phillips wanted it to be realistically lit like a normal house. The lighting in each scene, she said, depends on the time of day the script calls for.

"This show is a little different from everything I've ever done. I've never had anything realistic like this before," she said. "Generally it's trying to understand the time of day and find of way to convey that in a windowless building ... conveying that to the audience and helping them suspend that disbelief. Because everybody walks down, takes a seat and know that we're in a theatre, all of our jobs, but particularly my job, is to set a scene that is not in this building."

Phillips works closely with sound designer Jacob Olsen, a junior, to make that happen. Olsen was first introduced to theater design while working in the first national company of Stephen Schwartz's "Captain Louie." From there, he worked on productions throughout high school and some at the university level.

"For me it's almost like a religious process," Olsen said. "Because, as a Christian I love the Lord with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, all my strength, and just the fact that he created us and he created this world, for me being able to create something too that is beautiful, that will never as beautiful, but something beautiful and we get to share that with the world, I think that's just something really special that not a lot of people get to do with their jobs."

Olsen's sounds and Phillips's lighting are only part of the backdrop of the play. The other part is the literal backdrop, the physical set pieces designed by Charles Moncrief, a third year graduate student, and built by the play's technical sound director Justin Mosher, a second year graduate student.

Moncrief's passion for theater design started in high school. He wanted to be an architect or a sculpture artist but, he said, sculpture artists don't make a lot of money and he found designing office buildings boring. He took a theatre class to fulfill an elective and his teacher, Jesse Tilton, introduced him to theatre design.

"He kind of took me under his wing, realized these interests I had and showed me this whole world of creation in which I can be an architect," Moncrief said. "I can create different worlds and create sculptural pieces and I can do a different one every few months and someone else will pay for it."

What Moncrief designs, Mosher brings to life. From doorways to staircases, to walls that need to fall apart, Mosher builds it. He said his father, a construction worker, is amazed at what his son can build in a short amount of time.

"People don't see all the work that goes in, they think this is a straight up hobby," he said. "That this is only a hobby that we do on the weekends."

That fast-paced creation to create is what drew Mosher to theater in the first place. When prioritizing what to build, Mosher takes how the actors interact with the set into account, so that they can get used to it and look fluent when performing. In "Appropriate," the characters have known the house for 30 years, so if the actors struggle with a doorknob, Mosher said, it would look unnatural.

Bringing an entire scene to life though, he said, takes everyone working as group.

"You have all four of us really all working together," Mosher said. "That's what actually interesting about. That's what I think honestly brings us together as a group is that we get to collaborate and figure out, well I really can't make this happen, but lighting can or sound can, and so we all like to work together and figure out the problem and make the solution."

Seeing it all work together with actors though usually doesn't happen until tech week, the week of rehearsals leading up to opening night. It's then that the actors first get to interact with light and sound and everyone sees how it all works as one.

"It really brings it all to life. because in my mind it's all a painting project and a carpentry project and then once the actors come on stage you realize, this is live theater this is great and wow, there's a whole world all come together," Moncrief said. "I can stack boxes all day long but it's just stacking boxes. when I start seeing how they're used and how we have this playground to play within it gives it purpose. "

And in a week, on Sunday night, the entire world they've spent months creating will be gone in two hours.

"There will be nothing like this ever again," Mosher said. "It'll just go out the dock and this set will never be the same. That's what's so cool and that's what I love about working with designers."