

from the front page



Max Gersh | Daily Sun

Eric Van Tassell, right, works from an elevated platform to remove lighting while setting up for a performance of "Story of my Life" at The Studio Theater Tierra del Sol.

## 'The Story Of My Life'

By KRISTEN FIORE  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

If you walked into The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol in September or October, you found a round black platform with white marble accents. Three steps led up to a desk and chair perched among an assortment of books.

This was the set for Brian Hill's musical "The Story of My Life," the first show in season three at The Studio Theatre.

The black marble made it clear that this wasn't quite an office or a study. It was actually the outskirts of an award-winning writer's mind as he struggled to write a eulogy for his best friend, Alvin.

"We wanted it to be very open-ended, almost like a blank canvas, but still setting the tone for what we're looking for, which is why it's all black and white marble," said Kenneth Constant, technical supervisor and set designer at The Studio Theatre.

Lighting also was at play on this set. An eerie blue glow dominated the show as Thomas grieved Alvin, but the appearance of Alvin in Thomas' memories came with a warm blaze.

Hanging lights that looked like stars twinkled at times. The piles of books surrounding the desk were director Jeremy Seghers' idea. "I wanted an element of Alvin in the set, to balance it,"

Seghers said.

As a writer, Thomas' character mostly worked from the desk, while Alvin, who worked in a bookstore, interacted a lot with the books.

"The Story of My Life" was done in the round, meaning that the audience completely surrounded the set.

This was a challenge for Seghers, because he had never done a show in the round before. The main thing was that the actors had to move a lot to give everyone an equal view, according to Seghers.

"For the most part, I knew what I wanted: a lot of distance between the actors. They're rarely very close to each other. Alvin's blocking is rounder, Thomas moves in angles. That was once again just to show how different the characters were but how they could exist in the same space together."

Seghers said he thought the set was uniquely designed. "It was different from the Broadway version, which was very light," he said. "This one was a lot darker, which added to the drama. The audience is kind of a part of it. The original Broadway production didn't have that. It was very presentational."

## 'Stop Kiss'

By KRISTEN FIORE  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Diana Son's "Stop Kiss" is the story of the relationship between Sara and Callie, who become hate crime victims after they are seen kissing on the streets of New York in the 1990s. This was the second show in season three at The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol.

The show flips between scenes in Callie's apartment, a hospital and the investigation of the hate crime, requiring one of the largest and most complex sets in The Studio Theatre history.

The majority of the set was Callie's apartment, a big open space with magazines scattered on the floor, CDs on the coffee table, empty take-out boxes on the kitchen table and unfolded laundry in a heap on the sofa-bed.

The multicolored apartment obviously belonged to a character who is scatterbrained and busy, but comfortable with herself. Callie and her apartment were so tied together, they almost became one and the same.

Abstractly painted on the walls of the apartment was a large cityscape. "We wanted to create something that keeps the setting in mind throughout the entire show," said Kenneth Constant, technical supervisor and set designer at The Studio Theatre.

Production Manager Danielle Paccione said painting the walls of the set was like working on a huge paint-by-number artwork.

"In order to paint it, we had to lay it out on The Sharon stage and use a projector above it to project the image and outline



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

Tony Fairchild works on the set of the play "Stop Kiss," which opened in November 2018 at The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol.

where the different paint colors were," Paccione said.

In order to show other parts of the story, the team used scrim, a type of screen that can appear solid or see-through, depending on the lighting, to show scenes from the hospital and investigation.

Amber Sacks, props master and set dresser at The Studio Theatre, said finding props for "Stop Kiss" was an interesting experience.

She had to acquire a hospital bed ("A Facebook Marketplace find," Sacks said. "We try not to think about it.") as well as a mannequin to lie in the hospital bed, which the cast named Joan.

Sound designer Nick Erickson also had a lot of breakthrough moments in "Stop Kiss," because there were

a lot of environmental sounds, like the streets of New York and the hospital waiting room.

He designed it all, down to the buzz of the florescent lights in the hospital.

"It's not something that anyone would think about, but you're going to feel it on your spine," Erickson said.



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Luke Bezio, left, and Preston Speaker carry in a piece of the set while setting up for a performance of "It Shoulda Been You" at The Studio Theater Tierra del Sol.

## 'It Shoulda Been You'

By KRISTEN FIORE  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

A black-and-white tile floor, elegant blue walls, food carts, a chandelier and a second-story hallway full of doors made it obvious as soon as you walked into The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol in January and February that you were in an upscale hotel.

This was the main goal for technical supervisor and set designer Kenneth Constant.

With a cast of 13 people, Brian Hargrove's musical "It Shoulda Been You," was the largest show of season three at The Studio Theatre and had the biggest set in Studio Theatre history.

The hardest part of designing the set was making sure the size worked with the actors and venue, according to Constant.

"We had to make it large enough to do everything it needed to do without making the actors look small," Constant said.

"It Shoulda Been You" is a full-blown musical comedy about the shenanigans that ensue before the wedding of a Catholic groom and Jewish bride as their families get

acquainted with each other.

It was full of flashy costumes and musical numbers, and the set needed to have enough space for dancing and enough entrances and exits to accommodate all the actors.

Lighting designer Eric Van Tassel said he had a lot of fun lighting moments in the show, particularly in the musical number "Nice," in which the bride's mother sang her inner monologue.

"Every time we're in reality, there are lights in the rooms with a subtle pink, because I established that that character's color was pink, so when she was dominant, the lights had a pink hue," Van Tassel said. "Then when we would go to the times where she was singing an inner monologue, everything went blue except for her and the other four women in the room, and she had a spotlight so you could see her really well."

Because the set was so large, "It Shoulda Been You" was a props-heavy show for Amber Sacks, props master and set dresser at The Studio Theatre.

"We practically planned a whole wedding," Sacks joked. "Needless to say, I'm never getting married."

Kristen Fiore is a senior writer with The Villages Daily Sun. She can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5270, or kristen.fiore@thevillagesmedia.com.

## 'A Doll's House'

By KRISTEN FIORE  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Set in the late 1800s, Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House," served as The Studio Theatre Tierra del Sol's final show in season three and first-ever period piece.

The set for the show was unconventional in many ways.

It was done in the round, with audience members seated on all sides of the set, an elegant wooden platform surrounded by large ornate doors and stained glass windows, and decorated with tables, chairs, pots of flowers, tea trays and a piano.

Although the look of the furniture was true to the period, the fabrics were modern.

"It's set in 1879 Norway," said Kenneth Constant, technical supervisor and set designer at The Studio Theatre. "Finding pieces that are Norwegian from that period is very difficult, so we took a different approach to how we wanted that aesthetic to work."

The result was a period show with modern elements.

"A Doll's House" features a woman named Nora who hides a big secret from her husband and so as not to hurt his pride.

It is a feminist piece that was extremely controversial when it first came out. Today, it's a reminder of how far women's rights have come and how much more needs to be done.

"I hope that by not throwing everything back to the 19th century that it's easier for the audience to ground their connection to the story, because it's still relevant today," Constant said.

For props master and set dresser Amber Sacks, a lot of research and visits to antique shops was required.

"Period pieces are my favorite because I do get to spend so much time looking around for vintage pieces," Sacks said. "They are the most challenging, especially while trying to stay true to the time



Max Gersh | Daily Sun

Clay Becker connects sections of a door frame while setting up for a performance of "A Doll's House" at The Studio Theater Tierra del Sol.

period. But the research and shopping really makes you appreciate how far we've come."

One prop that has to be kept in constant supply is meringues, a small dessert. The cast eats seven meringues in each show, and five of them are consumed by Whitney Morse, who plays Nora.

By the end of the run Sunday, the cast will have gone through roughly 260 meringues, with Morse eating 180 of them.

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