

Design Statement: The Engine Of Our Ruin

The Engine Of Our Ruin, was a workshop production of a new script being developed by playwright Jason Wells as part of the Chautauqua Theater Company's New Play Workshop series. The story itself is a political comedy that follows a group of American diplomats as they try to negotiate a deal with an unknown named Arabic country. Everything seems to be going well, till their translator has her own agenda and plans to intervene, purposely mistranslating in order to achieve her dreams and aspirations.

What is unique about Chautauqua's workshop series, is that it is an intense process where you rehearse, design, tech, and stage an entire production within one week. While this is going on, the playwright in residence has the complete freedom to rewrite and make changes as he/she thinks that will better the story. The process teaches you to be collaborative with your fellow designers, as well as to be flexible, and prepared for any situation that may arise during the process.

Before our week started, the team met with Ethan McSweeney and discussed in detail his vision. We set the unknown Arabic city in an urban city atmosphere with primary influence coming from Dubai. Ethan wanted to show the westernization of the Middle East and the struggle between the two cultures of traditionalists and those wanting to "Americanize" their city to be comfortable with foreigners. As we talked one-on-one, Ethan and I agreed that there were little practical effects in the scenes, and that most of the story would be told in the transitions and a few offstage sounds. Sticking with Ethan's vision, I drew from dance and pop music in the Middle East that had a westernized feeling to it. Wanting to stick with the fast paced text and staging of the show, many of the transitions were choreographed and timed with clever editing and high energy music.