

Oklahoma critical analysis

By Sarah Dawson 11V4

The original production of Oklahoma opened at the St. James Theatre, New York, on Wednesday March 31, 1943. The top ticket price was \$4.80.

It ran on Broadway for over five years, besting the previous record holder Hellzapoppin by more than two years. For fifteen years, from 1946 until 1961, Oklahoma held the record as the longest running show in Broadway history.

When Oklahoma closed on Broadway May 29, 1948 after 2,212 performances, more than four and a half million people had seen it there.

In our expressive arts lesson we watched a section of Oklahoma. As our topic is dreams and nightmares, we watched the section where Laurey has her dream. In a swirl of dream images, Laurey sees herself marrying Curly when Jud invades the wedding; he carries her off, thwarts Curly's attempts to rescue her, and, after a horrific struggle, kills Curly. Laurey awakes from her nightmare with a start...and finds Jud ready to escort her to the Dance.

In the beginning of this section we can see Laurey falling to sleep. Then the lights suddenly dim, this shows the audience that we have travelled from reality to her dream.

The lighting plays an important part in this musical, as it communicates to the audience Laurey's mood and feelings. When Laurey is dreaming the light dims to a blue. Then hands appear from the cornfields; they are being lighted up with gold spotlights. She then follows them to a large stage, which is filled up with blue light. In her dream the lighting is calm and cool, and the mood is happy but when it changes into a nightmare the lights suddenly switch red, and makes the atmosphere alarming and unsettling. A spot light is also used on Curley when he enters to dance with Laurey. This can symbolise that he is the one for her, and that he stands out from everyone else. By using a white spotlight shows the audience that he is pure and good. But the spotlights also build a feeling of confusion and distress. This is in her nightmare where the lighting is red and the white

spotlights are darting around the stage. This shows the audience Laurey's feelings towards her nightmare.

Music is crucial in her dream as there is no speaking involved, so the music is the only thing that can be heard. In her dream they are playing the song "oh, what a beautiful morning". This is played in major key, to show the audience that it is a happy and positive dream. The song seems a bit distraught; this may be to show that she is in a dream, as everything is different and bizarre. A lot of string instruments are used in this section to create a calm atmosphere. When other characters enter (cowboys and farm workers). The melody changes, to be happy and relaxed. Then as Curley enters and they begin to dance the music becomes twinkly, and magical. Then as the scene skips to her wedding the music changes. They use bells to show the audience that she is getting married. The music is still very positive and cheerful, but as she opens her eyes she does not find Curley but Judd. At this point the music is built up and suddenly changes into a haunting melody as her dream transforms to a nightmare. The melody is in minor key and uses lots of low string instruments e.g. cello. This is to show the audience the change between the nightmare and the dream. Gradually the music changes into a wonky tone, like an out of tune piano. The music's more lazy and sleazy as the dancing girls and cowboys enter. After the dance sequence, Curley enters and a fight sequence begins, Laurey starts to panic and wants to escape, so at this point a lot of drums can be heard. This may be to represent her heartbeat, and to show the audience that she is frightened and panicky. Then as he is killed, she screams. This is significant as this is the only sound made from a character in the whole dream. This could show the audience that she loves him so much, that her scream is representing her pain and her feelings. The music does down, and drum roles build up as he is taken away.

There are 3 main characters in this section. Curley, Judd and Laurey. The dream shows up how she feels about these characters. Judd is her nightmare as he is slimy and sleazy, and Curley is loving and caring. From the contrasts in characters may reflect the contrast in dreams and nightmares. There are also other characters that randomly appear in the musical. This

relates to dreams as dreams can be very bizarre and random characters appear from nowhere. I believe the farm girls are her good conscience and the dance girls and cowboyboys are her bad conscience.

Throughout the film Laurey wears a white dress this shows the audience that she is pure. Curly is a cowboy and Judd is a farmer. This is also a contrast so may relate to dreams and nightmares. The farm girls are also dressed in white, this also symbolises purity, and I believe show they are the good ones. The dance girls wear red corsets and skimpy clothes. And as the costumes are red it may symbolise bad and evil as the red lighting shows the nightmare.

Movement also plays a large part in the section, as we can tell a lot by the movements, as there is no speaking. When she is dancing solo and with the farm girls they dance in unison, to show they are together and under control. They use lots of turns, and leaps. They also use a lot of ballet movements. This shows the audience a calm, flowing and graceful dream. In the dance with the showgirls, they are all dancing separately with separate movements. They use lots of flexible movements, and balances. This can show the audience that they are separated and unorganised. When she dances the waltz with Curly they use lots of lifts, turns and graceful movements, on the other hand when dancing with Judd she is being thrown around and manipulated like a rag doll. This also shows another contrast, which may relate to the contrasts in dreams and nightmares.

The musical communicated to the audience her feeling and emotions through other means than verbal communication. They show it mainly through lighting, movement, and music. It relates to dreams and nightmares as it seems rather peculiar. The music seems out of tune and distraught. And strange things and people appear throughout to make the dream seem realistic. This critical analysis will help me to relate to dreams and nightmares throughout my performance without talking.