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National Museum of African American History and Culture

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CUE

[[image - production black & white photograph of performance of Memphis Bound, dancers in costume in front of set with banner HMS PINAFORE]]

[[caption]] Bill (Bojangles) Robinson and the chorus of Memphis Bound, one of the two versions of H.M.S. Pinafore now in town, dancing on the set designed by George Jenkins. Story below [[/caption]]

[[photograph credit]] Graphic House

A Stage Designer's Lot Is Not a Happy One - But It Pays

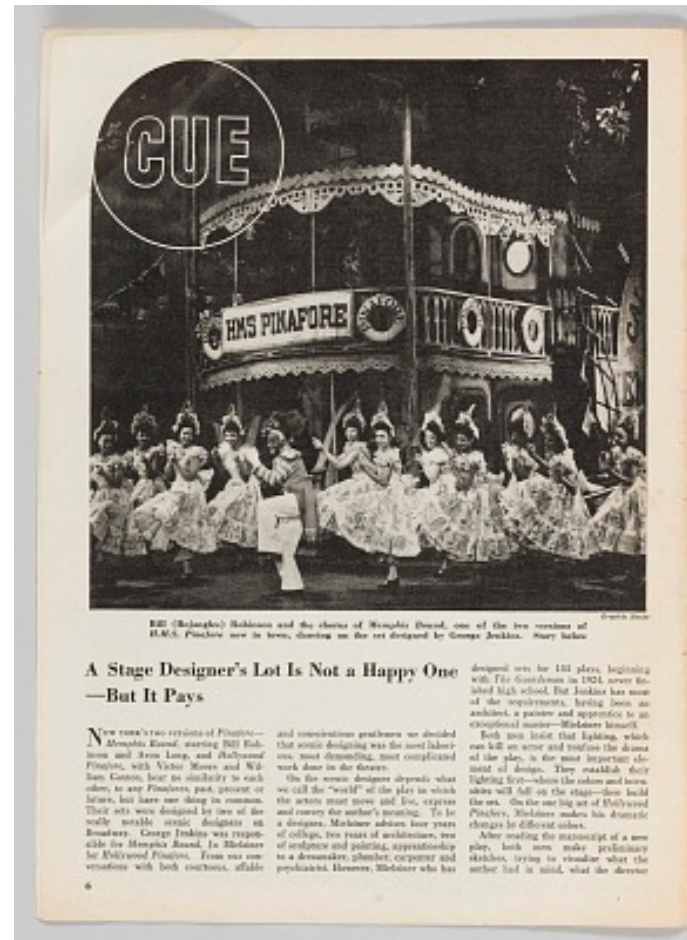
New York's two versions of Pinafore - Memphis Bound, starring Bill Robinson and Avon Long, and Hollywood Pinafore, with Victor Moore and William Gaxton, bear no similarity to each other, to an Pinafores, past, present or future, but have at least one thing in common. Their sets were designed by two of the really notable scenic designers on Broadway, George Jenkins was responsible for Memphis Bound, Jo Mielziner for Hollywood Pinafore. From our conversations with both courteous, affable and conscientious gentlemen we decided that scenic designing was the most laborious, most demanding, most complicated work done in the theatre.

On the scenic designer depends what we call the "world" of the play in which the actors must move and live, express and convey the author's meaning. To be a designer, Mielziner advises four years of college, two of architecture, two of sculpture and painting, apprenticeship to a dressmaker, plumber, carpenter and psychiatrist. However, Mielziner who has designed sets for 144 plays, beginning with The Guardsman in 1924, never finished high school. But Jenkins has most of the requirements, having been an architect, a painter and apprentice to an exceptional master - Mielziner himself.

Both men insist that lighting, which can kill an actor and confuse the drama of the play, is the most important element of design. They establish their lighting first - where the colors and intensities will fall on the stage - the build the set. On the one big set of Hollywood Pinafore, Mielziner makes his dramatic changes by different colors.

After reading the manuscript of a new play, both men make preliminary sketches, trying to visualize what the author had in mind, what the director

6



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