

Mary Rodriguez

*Arsenic and Old Lace* Thesis Paper

At this time last year, I embarked upon my thesis project, directing *Arsenic and Old Lace*. At the time that I began, I do not think that I knew about all of the challenges and the rewards that lay ahead of me, but looking back upon the process shows that the best way to learn to direct is to actually begin to do so.

The first step that I had to complete was the choosing of the play which would become my thesis project for the next year and a half. I was doing an independent study at the time, directing *Two Rooms* by Lee Blessing, and another part of the project was to read dozens of full-length plays to try to choose mine. Just reading all of the plays opened up new worlds of possibilities for me; most of those I read I had never seen performed. Seeing the huge range of comedy, tragedy, and drama that these talented playwrights had to offer, as well as discerning those styles and types of plays to which I was personally drawn, led me to narrow down my options to three: *Proof*, by David Auburn; *The Nerd*, by Larry Shue; and, of course, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, by Joseph Kesselring. I submitted these plays to the theatre department for them to choose which show would best fit in the season and in budget.

I chose to short-list these plays because I was confident that I could successfully direct any of the three. My least favorite was *Proof* because, while still an excellent play, it is an opened-ended drama. I thought that it would present a real challenge to me because all of the shows that I had directed thus far had been fairly straightforward, if a little odd in their conventions. *Two Rooms* fit into this category of being somewhat off-beat, but by the time the show had ended the audience was clear about exactly what had taken place in the world of the