

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR DIRECTORS AND ACTORS

On the play:

LOVE/SICK should not feel—to audiences—like a strange play. It *gets* strange and surreal, but this strangeness must not be telegraphed. Every play in the cycle should feel like it's normal—until it's not. ("Obsessive Impulsive" is the exception as it begins in a crazy place and—sadly—becomes more realistic.) LOVE/SICK must be surprising. Always. Constantly pull the rug out from under the audience. Surprise them with every reversal in this play. What thrills audiences is the *surprise* of this strangeness, this surrealness—the *surprise* of these unexpected trips into this alternate reality.

Each play in LOVE/SICK (except "Obsessive Impulsive") starts off in a simple, normal place; hilarity ensues as we climax; and then each play bursts into painful, deep, multidimensional truth. That's part of the fun—getting audiences laughing and then gut-punching them with the depths the play probes. I want LOVE/SICK to make people wonder, "I thought this was just going to be funny. How the heck did we get to this awful place?!? I thought this was going to be funny?"

Make audiences feel the *love*...and then the *sick*. The play is called LOVE/SICK, after all. And, yes, it's a comedy—but it is filled with despair.

On the characters:

Remember—the people In LOVE/SICK aren't quirky. They're pretty ordinary people dealing with extraordinary circumstances. It's the circumstances that are quirky.

The characters in LOVE/SICK are desperately trying to solve their problems. They remain *positive*—against all odds.

The characters in LOVE/SICK are always in discovery mode. And when they make a discovery, they are *consumed* by that discovery. Find the discoveries in this play. And play them *fully*. They should be gasp-inducing—literally. Actors who do this play should gasp over and over and over. The discoveries in LOVE/SICK should force inspiration. And inspiration literally means breathing in. We breathe in new ideas—audibly—in everyday life. Do the same in this play. Gasp.

The characters in LOVE/SICK are quite transparent. They are also mercurial. When they feel joy, they are as joyful as can be, so that when they crash-land into despair, it is devastating for all of us. When they are sad, they are as sad as can be, so that when they bounce back to joy, it is a wonderful ride for all of us. When they are angry, they can rage explosively. When they claw their way back to their right minds, we root for them. Watching them bounce from joy to despair back to joy to rage to joy to terror—usually in an instant—well, that's the ride you need to take (and take audiences *on*) with this play.

The characters in LOVE/SICK don't live ironically. (Irony kills drama.) They don't comment on what's happening to them. They don't editorialize as they live. They are

unaware of what's coming at them. And so—they are constantly getting blindsided. And surprised. Which is actually what happens to us all in real life. We all try so hard to be in control of our lives, but we get blindsided on a daily basis. Contemporary comedy is heavily dependent on irony and seems to be convinced that we are in control of what happens to us and that we are all smart enough to be able to comment on our lives. I don't think this is true at all. We are not in control. We get smacked down by life all the time. And watching people get smacked down by life is just awful. And heartbreaking. And about as hilarious as it gets. (Smackdowns make for good drama—and good comedy.)

On the challenge of using four actors:

If four actors are performing this play, don't worry too much about differentiating the characters. The stories will take care of that. A tip: The couple in "Obsessive Impulsive" (the first play in the cycle) are the newest and freshest and most innocent people in the play. The couple in "Destiny" (the last play in the cycle) are the most beat up, worldly, and world-weary (but not defeated!) people in the play.

On the arc of the piece:

Each play in LOVE/SICK can stand alone and should be able to stand alone. However, the plays work together, using many stories to tell one story, and that story is a chronicling of the life cycle of a relationship—kind of an "e pluribus unum" thing. I described this "one story" idea to Sally Wood, director of the first production, as follows (she found it tremendously helpful):

"Obsessive Impulsive" is the MEETING part.

"The Singing Telegram" is the BREAKUP PART/GETTING-OUT-OF-A-BAD-RELATIONSHIP-SO-YOU-CAN-OPEN-YOURSELF-UP-TO-THE-POSSIBILITY-OF-ACTUALLY-FINDING-SOME-REAL-LOVE part.

"What?!?" is the FIRST-TIME-WE-SAID-'I LOVE YOU'-TO-EACH-OTHER part.

"The Answer" is the WEDDING part.

"Uh-Oh" is the BEING-MARRIED-IS-A-LITTLE-HARDER-THAN-I-THOUGHT-IT-WOULD-BE part.

"Lunch and Dinner" is the AFFAIR part.

"Forgot" is WOULD-WE-BE-BETTER-OFF-IF-WE-SPLIT-UP? part.

"Where Was I?" is the NOW-THAT-WE-HAVE-KIDS-WHAT-DO-WE-DO? part.

"Destiny" is the ADMISSION-THAT-WE-TRIED-AND-WE-FAILED-BUT-WE-WILL-TRY-AGAIN-BECAUSE-WE-HAVE-TO-KEEP-TRYING-BUT-NOT-WITH-

EACH-OTHER-BECAUSE-WE’VE-LEARNED-FROM-OUR-MISTAKES-AND-WE-HAVEN’T-GIVEN-UP part.

NOTES FOR ACTORS (AND DIRECTORS):

On tone:

Not much is casual in this play. Stakes are extremely high.

LOVE/SICK is not a realistic or naturalistic play, but it should feel like one. Each play in the cycle should be played realistically, naturalistically—until it explodes into the fantastical. Some of the plays explode into the fantastical, the strange, the outrageous from the get-go (like “Obsessive Impulsive”). In most of the play, the fantastical, the strangeness, the outrageousness all emerge undetected. Whatever the case—don’t telegraph the fantastical, the strangeness, the outrageousness. Let it sneak up on people.

On sarcasm:

Use it sparingly. A good way to avoid sarcasm is to activate the questions the characters in LOVE/SICK ask. Really *ask* the questions. Really seek answers. Rarely do the people in this play ask questions sarcastically, rhetorically, or knowingly. They *really* ask the questions and because they *really* want answers. Because they really don’t know the answers.

On anger:

There are angry explosions in every play in LOVE/SICK. This anger comes from the hurt and the pain that the characters in the play are experiencing. Rarely is this anger solely an aggressive attack on another person. It is usually confusion, pain, and desperation. It’s a cry for help. Remember—these people are desperately trying to solve their problems. They remain *positive* against all odds. They solve their problems by enlisting their partners’ help, not by pushing them away. The characters in plays four through ten are saying, “I am not very happy with you/us right now and I need you to help me figure out how to make me happy with you/us again. Right. Now.”

On despair:

Find the places in LOVE/SICK where the characters feel the earth opening up and swallowing them. I call it the despair swallow. Or the despair free-fall. There’s at least one despair swallow or despair free-fall in every play. Find them. And play them fully. They’re physical. But not fake.

General note:

Always let us see you sort through the crazy things that happen to you in this play. It’s thrilling to watch people think and figure stuff out.

I think the trick with LOVE/SICK—as with any kind of fantasy play—is to avoid caricature. Make the characters real people. Keep them grounded—but not boring. Play the truth of the moment. Know the stakes. Feel deeply.

NOTES FOR DIRECTORS:

On the play:

LOVE/SICK is a tough play to direct. It's nine different plays. You have nine different stories to tell—as part of one story. Tell each one well and the whole will take care of itself.

LOVE/SICK is a cinch to do. But it's very difficult to put together. Know that actors generally struggle to learn the words. But once they really learn them, the play is just a joyride for them.

On rehearsing:

If four actors are performing this play, I highly recommend calling all of your actors all of the time. That way the two you are not working with can run lines/help each other run lines. This play is tough to learn.

On the kisses in “Obsessive Impulsive:” It is dangerous for the actors to actually kiss unrehearsed. Lips will get bloodied. Teeth might get chipped. For early rehearsals, I suggest doing the action of the kisses without physical contact—but with the physical intention of kissing and with this sound: “mmmmm.” Using this method, actors will learn where the kisses are. Once the this play is sculpted and actors are off book, add the actual kisses and the physicality of the kisses. They need to be choreographed—for safety's sake. But they must seem impulsive!

On transitions:

Be creative. Make them interesting. Don't let the audience rest—but give them time to process what has just happened. And...I feel like there's a “Twilight Zone” quality to this play. And in the transitions...I feel like it'd be cool to have some sort of existential space vacuum sound leading us from one funny and painful play to the next.

NOTES FOR DESIGNERS:

On the set:

With the exception of the first and last play, all of the plays in LOVE/SICK take place in different rooms of a house.

LOVE/SICK has been presented on an empty stage with minimal scenic elements and a door that could be moved into different locations; it's been presented with a cutaway view of a home as a backdrop, using minimal scenic elements and a door that could be moved into different locations; it's been presented on a turntable divided into thirds; it's

been presented on a set with the SuperCenter as a backdrop, with props and scenic elements pulled from the SuperCenter, and a door that could be moved into different locations.

It's also been presented on a set that looked like the blueprint of a home: scenic elements were built into and popped out of this set, and a movable door was used. (The name of each play was written on the walls with chalk as each play commenced. It was pretty cool.)

I've always wondered how this would work: a compressed cutaway of a suburban home could serve as the backdrop, with furniture and props crammed into each room, and pulled out and used and replaced as necessary.

Note that a door factors into every play except for the first one and the last one. Just keep that in mind.

On costumes:

The people in LOVE/SICK are solidly middle to upper-middle class. They dress decently. Urbanites: don't condescend.