

“The language in the play is too beautiful to mask with a heavy brogue.”

— Director Anna Segreto

LOCKERBIE

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She also rented “Braveheart” and “Rob Roy.”

“I watched a lot of movies,” she says. “I tried to pick every one I could think of, where a character had a Scottish accent, and just watched them over and over again. The repetitiveness of it is what got the accent into my head.”

Speaking in an accent is a talent just like acting, singing and dancing, says Naples Players Artistic Director Dallas Dunnagan.

“It can be taught, but if there isn’t some initial strength in the ability to do it, it’s hard to do,” she says. “Each actor approaches an accent a different way. And just as different acting styles work for different actors, different ways to produce an accent work for different actors, whether it’s imitation, or tongue placement, or listening to someone who has a true accent, or learning it phonetically. There are a variety of ways to do it.”

But a Scottish accent is one of the more difficult ones to learn, she says.

“Doing a play with an accent presents a challenge and an extra layer to a show. It’s very important to the piece, the Scottish accent. There’s a certain verisimilitude that’s needed in some shows. The thing about ‘The Women of Lockerbie’ is that it’s very much a theatrical piece, it’s not a realistic sort of thing. It presents a situation in a style of a Greek drama.”

Bonnie Knapp, another actor representing a Scotswoman, wasn’t ruffled by the accent, initially.

“I’m pretty good with accents, so I wasn’t too intimidated,” she says. “I can do a decent Irish accent. But I found it more difficult than I thought it would be. I like doing accents, but this is a tough one. Hearing it – that helped a lot. There are rolled r’s, slightly different pronunciations.

“I find it fun and interesting. And I can do one!”

But, she admits it was a lot of hard work.

“This is a pretty tough accent,” she says. “Irish, German, French are more common, easier accents to do.”

Ms. Knapp says she likes to sit in Starbucks and listen to different accents.

“Accents are always interesting to me,” she says. “I like to know where they’re from. So I’ll go up and ask them. I like learning the sounds of other languages. I like mimicking them when they’re talking: ‘Oh, that’s cool, I want to say that like them!’”

Surprisingly, though four actors had to learn how to speak with a Scottish accent, they weren’t going for 100 percent authenticity. If you’re doing an accent on stage for American audiences, Ms. Dunnagan explains, you can’t do a true dialect because you’d be unintelligible. Actors need to create an impression of the accent, but not speak it so strongly that it overtakes the actual words.

“I think that’s really important for any play with an accent, specifically a Scottish or Irish accent,” she says, explaining that our ears aren’t attuned to genuine accents. “You should never do a fully realized accent on the stage; this is a general rule of thumb. (Because) it would take us a while to figure out what was really being said. So you have to hear the suggestion of it, and certainly you have to be true to the script and true to the character you’re playing, in terms of the accent.

“You have to be consistent. There are



COURTESY PHOTO

“The Women of Lockerbie” is on stage through Nov. 22 at the Tobye Studio of the Sugden Community Theatre in Naples.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Naples Players had to learn a Scottish accent, one of the more difficult ones to learn.

certain words you should always say the same way. I think a director’s chore is to pick and choose certain words that you decide as an ensemble to say the same so that American audiences understand them.”

All four actors who represent Scotswomen in the play listened to an accent instruction CD by David Alan Stern. That helped them get a Scottish accent says Anna Segreto, who’s directing “The Women of Lockerbie.”

An accent coach initially expressed interest, but then “disappeared into the ether,” Ms. Segreto says. “He disappeared. He didn’t return our calls.”

Then Sheila Ferguson, an actress who commutes from Scotland to Naples, came by and gave advice.

And then Tony Oteri, who’s in the cast, brought his neighbor, Scotsman Bill Harkins, to a rehearsal.

“He said, ‘Let me hear them,’” Ms. Segreto says. “We did one of the choral odes. He thought they were very good.

He particularly thought Dolores Feters had the most genuine accent.”

So all those hours of watching Shrek movies paid off for her.

At one point during a rehearsal, the four women took Mr. Harkins aside for personalized assistance.

“We gals took him out in the lobby and had him read our lines, so we could get them exactly right,” Ms. Feters says. After all, tapes and movies might give them the impression of a Scottish accent, but they wanted to hear the exact sentences they’d have to say on stage.

“That combination is what got us there,” she says.

The play, by Deborah Brevoort, in set seven years after the crash of Pam Am 103 in Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 270 people.

A vigil is held every year on the date, Dec. 21, the Winter Solstice. The play includes an American couple; the woman hopes that by attending the memorial service, she can resolve her

If you go

- >>What: “The Women of Lockerbie”
- >>Where: The Tobye Studio of the Sugden Community Theatre, 701 Fifth Avenue South, Naples
- >>When: through Nov. 22
- >>Cost: \$20 adults, \$10 for students
- >>Info: Call (239) 263-7990 or go to www.naplesplayers.org

grief. She roams Lockerbie, looking for remains of her son.

“The women of Lockerbie want to wash the clothing of the victims and send them to the families,” Ms. Segreto explains. “It’s the Laundry Project. The clothing was all over; some suitcases exploded, some broke apart.”

The clothing is kept on what they call “the shelves of sorrow.”

An American government agent is instructed to burn the clothing. But the local women want to wash them and return them to the families.

“I was attracted to the play because it’s an ensemble piece,” Ms. Segreto says. “And the actors have gotten a real sense of that. It’s wonderful to work that way. I’m enjoying the experience a lot. The playwright made every role vital.”

And she feels that her actors have the mastered the Scottish accent to her satisfaction.

“The language in the play is too beautiful to mask with a heavy brogue,” she says. “I just want the flavor. Once they became comfortable with the accent, then they could concentrate on the interpretation of the character, developing the character.”

And, she admits before meeting Mr. Harkins, “I don’t know if I’ve ever met a Scotsman or Scotswoman in real life, myself. It is a difficult accent (for Americans to master), quite difficult. I listened to that Scottish CD, and I thought, ‘Oh my God!’ I told Dallas I was glad I wasn’t in the play!”

It took a lot of work, but the women feel they’ve mastered it.

“You have to find a way when you’re on stage to make people believe you’re in Scotland,” Ms. Knapp says. “Help them feel like they’re there, and you’re Scottish.”

And Ms. Feters is happy all her hard work has paid off.

“I’m glad I got it,” she says. “This is a great show, a great role. Heart-wrenching, but great.” ■