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**Dallas Morning News, The (TX)****A solution for stage fright**

Tom Sime

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All eyes may be on the modern house anchoring the set for Dallas Theater Center's **Big Love**. After all, it was designed by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, which will also design the multiform theater in the planned Dallas Center for the Performing Arts, and the fake building may offer clues to the look of the real one to come. But that blue slab the actors walk on is no ordinary floor, either.

**Big Love**, Charles L. Mee's hip adaptation of Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women*, is the story of 50 women forced into marriage who set out to murder their husbands on the wedding night. It's full of physical combat that could result in injuries if the cast were flipping and tumbling on an ordinary sprung wood floor. So under the sky-blue canvas the actors' feet and bodies fall upon is a layer cake of springs and padding.

"We went to various different theaters [that previously produced **Big Love**] to find out, 'What was the process of the exactly right floor? What was the balance?'" says director Richard Hamburger. "Because if it's too soft, you sprain ankles. If it's too hard, you break bones. So how do you layer it? It's been a process of five or six theaters making samples, all of us throwing ourselves on it, the fight choreographer, physical therapists looking at it, and the actors coming in at a very, very, very late stage, when we've all done a lot of work. Because it's so intensely physical. People rappel in at one point. It's been tricky and demanding."

It starts with the existing concrete slab underlying the theater itself. Then there's a plywood floor, built last summer, which already has a slight spring to it because of a 3/4-inch gap between it and the concrete. The new layers start with a field of 3-inch-tall, 2-inch-wide steel springs, spaced at 1-foot intervals over the 30- by 30-foot floor. The springs are topped with another layer of 3/4-inch plywood, then a 2-inch layer of medium-density foam, then a 1-inch layer of high-density foam for a stable surface.

Fittingly, by the end of the show the whole shebang is covered with bits of destroyed wedding cake.

Tom Sime

PHOTO(S): (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) Actors walking the boards (and falling and fighting on them)

in DTC's **Big Love** will be doing so on a new floor.

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# Big Love Stage Set

2003

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A stage set for the Dallas Theater Center's production *Big Love* - a modern re-telling of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*. 50 sisters take refuge from arranged marriages with their 50 cousins at the villa of Piero, an Italian 'with connections.' The 50 bridegrooms then arrive by helicopter to claim their brides.

The villa is a frame for the action and sponsors a series of events: louvers reveal the interior, a Madonna painting tracks across, the rear wall is lifted as the action escalates, and a chorus line of tuxedo-clad mannequins appear to stand in for the bridegrooms during the climactic wedding bloodbath.







