

COSTUME AFFECTS THE CHARACTER IN THEATRE

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Costume

According to the oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

‘Costume is the clothes worn by the actors in a play or film/movie or worn by somebody to make them look like something else.’

It is the creation of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or performer. Costume may refer to the style of dress particular to a nation, a class, or a period. In many cases, it may contribute to the fullness of the artistic, visual world which is unique to a particular theatrical production. The most basic designs are produced to denote status, provide protection or modesty, or provide visual interest to a character. Costumes may be for a theatre, cinema, or musical performance but may not be limited to such. Costume design should not be confused with costume coordination which merely involves altering existing clothing, although both create stage clothes.

Four types of costumes are used in theatrical design: historical, fantastical, dance, and modern

The Costume Designer's Research Process

Design process

The costume design process involves many steps and though they differ from genre to genre a basic method is commonly used.

1. Analysis: The first step is an analysis of the script, musical composition, choreography, etc. Costume Parameters for the play are established and a rough costume plot is created. A costume plot outlines which character is in which scene, when the actors change, and what costumes are mentioned in the script. Study of the character is very important, in which socio-economic condition, cultural background, psychology these are the major aspects.

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2. Design collaboration: An important phase in the process where all of the designers meet with the director. There must be a clear understanding of where the show is headed. The designers get on the same page with the director in terms of themes for the play and what message they want the audience to get from the play.

3. Costume research: Once the director and designers are on the same page, the next step is for the Costume designer to gather research. Costume designers usually begin with world of the play research where they find research to establish the world where the play takes place. This helps the designers establish the rules of the world and then in turn understand the characters better. The designer will then go into broad research about each character to try to establish their personalities through their costume.

4. Preliminary sketching and color layout: Once enough information is obtained, Costume designers begin by creating preliminary sketches. beginning with very quick rough sketches the designer can get a basic idea for how the play will look put together and if the rules of the world are being maintained. The Costume designer will then go into more detailed sketches and will figure out the specific costumes and colors for the character. Sketches help see the play as a whole without them having to spend too much time on them.

5. Final sketches: Once the Costume Designer and the Director agree on the costumes and the ideas are fully flushed out, the designer will create final sketches. These are called rendering and are usually painted with water colors or acrylic paints. These final sketches show what the designer wants the character to look like and the colors of the costume.

The world of costuming requires the designer to investigate ways in which to achieve a desired illusion. This method varies from designer to designer, but there are several components to it that are necessary for every costume designer to follow. These components include the script, the theme, the time period, the character, the sketches, the tools, and the costume plot. The Script Research is imperative when designing for a production and it starts with a thorough reading of the production's script. Costuming may be a creative process, but it is still bound by the circumstance of the costume as prescribed by the script which includes such information as time period, and functional elements. The script is the costumer's playbook through which they start the creative process. Since knowing the script is a monumental prerequisite to the correct execution of a costume, it is necessary that the costume designer read it more than once.

How Costumes Affect the Character

Costumes are such a fabulous part of theatre – they help tell the story, they help actors get into character, and they immediately tell the audience something about what’s going on. However, once actors are actually in their costumes challenges can crop up. Many directors request that actors come to rehearsal wearing comfortable clothes that they can move in. While that is useful for learning choreography and blocking, it’s less useful if the actors will be wearing costumes that are not comfortable. Costumes definitely affect an actor’s performance – for better or worse. Let’s look at some ways that costumes can affect performances and character portrayal, starting from the feet and working our way up to the head.



In the theatre, costume occupies a vital position in enhancing the character’s ability to project his or her mood, profession, status, age, sex, and culture - religion, ethnicity, etc - without uttering a word. This emphasises the saying “Cloth make a man.” To further buttress this statement some scholars in analysing human behaviour affirm that in the first four minutes of contact with a stranger, the understanding of that person’s nature and personality will be based on three primary but unequal factors.



The appearance or what we wear is important because it transmits more information about us more than what we say. In this light, actors like ordinary people are not just costumed only for the purpose of covering the body but also to present and create a lasting impression, pleasant or otherwise, to pass information about the character to the audience. Wilson (2001) reinforces this assertion by stating that; “theatre clothes send signals similar to everyday costumes; but as with other element of the theatre, there are significant difference between the costume of everyday life and those in the theatre”. He asserts that stage costume communicates the same information as ordinary clothes with regards to sex, position and occupation, yet on stage during performance, this information is magnified because every element in the theatre is in a spotlight.



In other words, Wilson is saying that the purpose of costume is to serve as a communicator of everyday life, expressing socio-economic status and class, as well as the culture of the character. Costume deals with everything the actor puts on to enable him or her portray a stage action; be it layers of clothing which includes underwear, hair dress/headress, accessories such as, umbrella, hand fan, jewellery and footwear. The concept, design and appearance of all these items are the concern of the costume designer, and she/he must be able to manipulate the design of each character’s costume to project and transmit specific personal information about the character since costumes worn by an actor can profoundly affect the audiences’ perceptions of the character. The purpose or place of costume in theatre can be fully understood when juxtaposed with the demands it has to meet during any given production. Among these requirements, the costume is expected to aid the audiences understanding of the play through the identification of the period in which the play is set, time of the year or day, or in determining the cultural background. Culture reflects a people’s way of life and this is manifested in their political, social, economic and religious lives for which clothing plays a dominant part.



Observations

How stage costume is an integral part of theatre; whose main aim or role is to express the physical looks of the characters in relation to their social status, health, age, mental condition, geographical location etc. Costume serves as a veritable medium for expressing cultural values of the locals of the play not only to the character but also to the audience. The study has observed how costumes are culturally rooted in the traditions of the origins of plays. It is evident that the costumes of these plays are reflections of the culture of the people from whom the stories originate. Therefore, when adequately researched into, stage costumes without any verbal communication portray the cultural inferences of a people, hence, to understand the costume in theatre it is necessary to study a people's clothing, the geographical conditions, socio-economic conditions, mental health of the character, atmospheric conditions, periodic conditions, with respect to the script for the performance.

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