

Costume Design at the International Fringe Festival and the Presentation of a Student's Work in a Professional Setting

Introduction

Travel and exposure to world culture is a vital element of any student's education. As an artist, one strives to soak up as much cultural art as possible to ensure a healthy development of the imagination and creative centers of the mind. As a student artist, traveling to events which feature multicultural, international works of art and culture is an invaluable experience. Travel and experience prevents the student from falling into the routines of the familiar, helping to establishing a love for the unknown and experimental. I believe that any opportunity for travel, especially if that travel includes work in one's field of study, is a prospect which must be pursued to the best of the student's means.

Purpose and Objective

My creative research project is built upon a three part plan: (1) To design and carry out a successful costume design for Charter Oak High School's production of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* under the constraints of a severely limited budget (around \$400). (2) To travel with the cast and chaperone the costumes to Scotland, presenting the production at the international Fringe Festival in Edinburgh. (3) To compare and contrast the success of *Complete Works* against 1) other high schools taking part in the exchange program and 2) professional companies in the international festival. This comparison will be based on 1) the reaction of the audience towards the various performances as a whole, 2) my personal reaction towards the design and entire production and 3) any possible reviews of the shows at the festival.

The project will have several outcomes for me. First and most obviously, I will be able to determine if my costume design was a successful when placed in a professional setting. Secondly, through the process of the design, I will develop the skills needed to produce effective costumes based on my designs on an extremely tight budget. This can be categorized as real world experience as costume designers are never given the budgets they need to accomplish their costuming goals! Last, during the process of attending and taking part in the international theatre festival in Edinburgh, I will garner valuable life experiences that will assist me in my pursuit of costume design as a career choice.

Background about the Festival

The Fringe Festival began in 1947 and is an offshoot of the annual Edinburgh Theatre Festival. It has possibly been most the successful offspring of the Theatre Festival, attracting hundreds of multicultural theatre groups and performers each August from all over the globe.

“The Fringe is focused almost exclusively on the performing arts, particularly theatre and comedy. Fringe material can be anything from Shakespeare to the truly experimental. Some Fringe venues are established professional theatres and regularly sell hundreds of tickets to a performance; others are converted church halls or even living rooms, and attract single-digit audiences.” (Wikipedia)

Together, the various arts festivals held in Edinburgh during the summer months draw almost half a million visitors each year. “The Fringe is still getting bigger. In 2001 over 600 groups from 49 different countries performed 1,462 shows in 175 venues across the city. Ticket sales soar to a record £6,636,093”(www.edfringe.com). The sheer volume of artistry in such a compact area makes Edinburgh one of the most inspirational spots for a student of theatre to travel to and experience.

The Trip

The particular trip that I will be a part of this summer is arranged through the American High School Fringe Theatre program. This program selects 20-30 American high schools to take part an invaluable experience at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The American High School Fringe Theatre program gives the selected high schools the opportunity to travel to Scotland and participate in the festival, allowing the high schools 4 performances each at coveted theatre spaces in Edinburgh during their stay. This trip is an amazing opportunity to observe and participate in the largest theatre festival in the world. As part of the package, the group will be staying in London for 2 nights, attending a show at the famous West End theatre district. The group will then proceed to board a train up to Edinburgh where we will be housed in dorm-like residences for the remainder of our stay (10 more nights). This program, providing us with 2 meals per day, housing, airfare, and other travel expenses naturally is an expensive endeavor. Being a participant in the group as opposed to a chaperone, I will not have access to the funds which are being raised by the high school this year to pay the students' expenses (\$4,300 for the entire package). To this purpose, I am planning that the SURP funds, if awarded, will be used to pay for my travel expenses to Scotland, allowing me an opportunity which otherwise would not have been possible for me on a student's budget.

Responsibilities

This creative project is above and beyond anything that I have undertaken in the past. I will be not only responsible for the creation of the costumes for *Complete Works* but also the only participant with the skills needed to keep the costumes in working order. I am also in a unique position as far as the greater festival is concerned. As the only student involved with a prospective degree in my near future, I have the opportunity to observe the festival in order to develop techniques that I can immediately put to work in my own studies at the university level.

To begin, the preparation for the costume design will take a great deal of time on my part in order to successfully carry out the costumes for this production. This will involve commuting from my home in Irvine to the high school located in Covina in order to observe rehearsals and take measurements. This spring, I will schedule various meetings both with the director of the show, Roger Graziani, and with my mentor at UCI, Madeline Kozlowski, in order to keep myself on track and ensure that my design matches the vision that the director has for the show. Once the summer begins and rehearsals start, I will begin to collect and build the costumes for the show. This will include shopping in the fabric district of Los Angeles as well as more local stores. I will also be searching through the closets of the cast members for any personal items that they can donate. I am hesitant to rent any pieces from costume rental houses simply because the idea of traveling overseas with rental costumes makes me extremely nervous.

This being said, having worked on high school productions in the past, I understand that this time will involve a good amount of ingenuity and imagination on my part, not to mention time. The budget that I will be working with will most likely be significantly under \$500, which is a paltry sum for a show which involves 24 actors playing numerous characters. My desire to produce a show at the visual level of the professional companies at the Fringe Festival will make creating this show under such a tight budget a difficulty I will need to overcome. Obviously, this experience alone will help me develop some interesting problem-solving techniques, many of which will surely be helpful as I continue to design shows in the next years under limited budgets.

This intense preparation will lead to the payoff at the end of the summer which includes both the presentation of *Complete Works* for families and friends at a theatre in Covina and the actual trip to Scotland. As part of the Charter Oak High School group, my responsibilities include the care and possession of the costumes for the production as well as acting wardrobe person for the 4 performances. This will still allow me a significant amount of time to attend other performances at the festival. The trip will cover almost a full half of the run of the festival, giving me ample opportunities to soak up with creative atmosphere of the festival and attend as many performances as I can.

I will be able to attend all of the other high school performances involved with AHSTF at a price included with the travel package. This opportunity will allow me to compare and contrast the level of professionalism of the other participants with that of my own group. This comparison will be based on my own observations as well as those of other audience members at the performances and will be developed through reactions towards both the level of acting as well as the design accomplishments. Furthermore, I will compare these performances with those which are professional entries in the Fringe Festival and draw conclusions on the differences between the creative work of students at the high school level and that of the professional companies.

More personally, I will also be able to conclude whether my own costume design was successful and influential when compared with the other high school entries. I will gather responses from both members of my own party and audience members attending the performances, collecting their specific

reactions towards my design, positive or negative. In this way, I will be able to conclude if I was indeed successful in my purpose.

Regardless of this outcome, I am very anxious to observe the use of costume design in the professional productions at the Fringe Festival. Naturally, with thousands of international performers taking part in the festival, I will undoubtedly come across new techniques and design concepts from multicultural sources which I would not otherwise have had access to. As a costume design student, one is always searching for new methods to apply in one's designs. Detailed note-taking on fascinating international forms of costume design will allow me to use the Fringe Festival experience as an accessory to my own work at UCI, adopting and sharing these new methods of design and construction with my fellow students in order to bestow my findings to those who's work will also benefit from my experience.

This creative project will not only be invaluable to my own research and artistic experiences, but also as a venue for sparking interest in the creative arts. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival is an amazing forum for artists as well as those who are exploring the arts for the first time. I feel that as a student with the opportunity to experience this multicultural festival, I can inspire others to make the effort to travel and savor the world of the arts. Besides the inestimable effects that this project will have on my knowledge of costume design, I hope that my experiences will open the eyes of other students to the possibilities of international travel.

Timeline

April-May

- Bimonthly meetings with the high school director to discuss his vision
- Preliminary research on the characters and costumes
- Meetings with faculty mentor as needed
- Development of designs

June

- Final design and renderings approved by the director
- Measurements of the cast taken
- Start shopping for materials, begin constructing costumes
- Meetings with faculty mentor as needed
- Begin attending rehearsals at least once a week

July

- Continue construction of costumes
- Finalize construction of costumes

- Attend rehearsals at least once a week
- Tech rehearsals for performance near the end of the month for 1 week
- Prepare costumes for travel

August

- Prepare costumes for travel
- Attend final rehearsals
- Performances for family and friends
- Prepare personally for travel
- Actual International Trip
 - Departure-August 12th, 2005
 - Return-August 27th, 2005
- Determine effectiveness of costumes. Analyze feedback from reviews and performers.

Sources

<http://www.ahstf.com/pages/fringe.asp>

Official site for the American High School Theatre Festival

<http://www.answers.com/topic/edinburgh-fringe>

Information about the Fringe Festival

<http://www.edfringe.com/>

Official site for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival

<http://www.eif.co.uk/>

Official site for the Edinburgh International Festival

<http://www.eventful-edinburgh.com/events/fringe.html>

Information about the Fringe Festival

