

COSTUMES

of the Performing Arts Collection
Adelaide Festival Centre

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This education resource is designed for secondary students and teachers of:

- Drama
- Dance
- Design & Technology – Textiles
- Creative Arts

Activities suggested in this resource connect to the Australian Curriculum:

The Arts (Drama and Dance) through Responding and Making strands as well as Design and Technologies through Knowledge and Understanding and Processes and Production Skills strands.

FURTHER READING

Broadway's Chicest Costume Designers on Making the Season's Most Memorable Musical Looks

<https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/broadway/7776759/broadway-costume-designers-interview-tony-nominations>

The Fascinating Process Behind how Broadway's Most Spectacular Costumes are Made

<https://fashionista.com/2017/02/broadway-costumes-design-tony-awards>

Q&A with Tony Award-Winning Costume Designer Paloma Young

<https://theatrenerds.com/interview-with-tony-award-winning-costume-designer-paloma-young/>

Information and links correct at time of publication.

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COVER Image detail:

Pygmalion, Eliza Doolittle costume,
Performing Arts Collection, Adelaide Festival Centre,
designed by Sue Russell,
State Theatre Company of South Australia 1981



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THE PERFORMING ARTS COLLECTION AT ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE

The Performing Arts Collection at Adelaide Festival Centre celebrates the unique history of performing arts in South Australia. It represents the significant contributions South Australians have made, both on stage and behind-the-scenes to theatre, opera, music, dance, musical theatre, film and circus. The 100,000+ objects in the collection range from the ephemeral (programs and ticket stubs); artworks (paintings and photography); design (costume renderings and set models); architecture (theatre fittings, furniture and décor); textiles (costumes and millinery) to the archives and event files dating back to 1858.

Costumes, for a performing arts collection, speak very loudly as objects. They tell us what performance they came from, the style of the designer who conceived them, and the size and shape of the actor who wore them. Costumes show the talent of the seamstress who sewed them – giving clues about whether it was an amateur or professional production. They also provide evidence of the less glamorous side of life under the lime lights through perspiration marks, worn patches, tears, mends, cigarette burns, and lipstick stains. Since a costume is worn directly on the actor's

skin it is the most intimate connection to the person playing the character and therefore the performance. Literally, there may well be traces of Cate Blanchett's DNA still clinging to the Nina costume she wore for *The Seagull* in 1997 here at the Festival Centre.

Performances are ethereal and once finished, a paper program, review or our collective memory may be all that remains. Costumes are a tangible textile and provide material evidence. You can almost step into the character by stepping into the costume – metaphorically speaking, of course!

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE'S CENTRED SCHOOLS PROGRAM

centrED provides opportunities for Australian Curriculum and SACE linked art-making and responding for students and teachers.

Adelaide Festival Centre's learning program, centrED provides exciting and comprehensive experiences for teachers and students to engage with and access arts across all genres, combined with cross-curriculum learning in South Australia's premier performing arts centre.

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THE BOY FROM OZ

Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre
5 January – 16 February 2000
Music Theatre

Directed by Gale Edwards
Costumes designed by Roger Kirk
Todd McKenny as Peter Allen

Australian Flag shirt costume, worn by Todd McKenny as Peter Allen and designed by Roger Kirk for the 'Still Call Australia Home' scene in the Gannon Fox Productions musical *The Boy from Oz* at Festival Theatre in 2000.

The Boy from Oz follows the life story of Peter Woolnough from his humble beginnings in the outback town of Tenterfield in New South Wales to the bright lights of Broadway as Peter Allen. His songs are skilfully interwoven throughout the musical telling the highs and lows of Peter's incredible life through his own words and music. When Peter Allen meets Hollywood royalty Judy Garland and marries her daughter Liza Minelli, his life changes. As their marriage begins to crumble, Allen faces the truth of his homosexuality. Now a

downtown cabaret star, Allen meets his partner. His partner dies from AIDS and Allen too is sick with the disease and sadly dies in 1994.

Roger Kirk is one Australia's most successful theatre, film and television costume designers, winning the prestigious Tony Award for his *King and I* costumes in 1996. Kirk can turn his hand to create costumes for an opera, realism play or a TV show but is best known for his glam designs. "I have been able to put my beaded stamp on the show" said Kirk about his now famous sequined, beaded and mirrored shirts for *The Boy from Oz*.¹ The most iconic being the Australian flag shirt, which Peter Allen first wore in 1983 at the opening of the Sydney Entertainment Centre performing the finale 'I Still Call Australia Home'. It has become

Allen's signature shirt stylistically showcasing his love and nostalgia for Australia with a spangled nod to Broadway costuming with a 1980s vibe. The symbolism of the flag is both inherently respectful but in true Australian style, a little cheeky.

Kirk recreated the shirt for the musical having it specially beaded in India. When Todd McKenney was reunited with the shirt he said "It's very nostalgic for me seeing this shirt – I thought it was going to be a fake. This one is special because it's the original one that was beaded. Because it's theatre and things get damaged, there were a number of different versions of that shirt made, but this one is the real deal."²

When thinking about his overall design vision for *The Boy from Oz*, Kirk says "there is an image that you have to create. You don't have to reproduce it, but you have to create the illusion of it." Meaning that the costumes for big productions do not have to be exact replicas but should have the right spirit, appeal, or period feel for the show or character. "So, don't worry about period shoes. As long as the basic image is right and everyone behind him has the right look, you'll be ok", Kirk encourages.³



Image: Todd Mckenney with *The Boy from Oz* costume.

Music theatre audiences are dazzled by effortless set changes and the seamless way characters quickly and often change costumes throughout a show. For music theatre lovers it's all about the spectacle. *The Boy from Oz* features approximately 380 costumes, 100 wigs, 300 pairs of shoes plus lots of spare maracas and whistles. There are twelve dressers and three wardrobe staff whose sole job is to repair and maintain all the costumes.⁴

Todd McKenney as Peter Allen had countless costumes changes, which meant design challenges for Kirk. "Plotting him was quite difficult because he rarely leaves the stage," Kirk recalled.⁵ A costume plot is a chart drawn up by the designer who records the character's scenes, when and how much time they have to change and what their costumes consist of. In a big musical with a number of actors and chorus, the costume plot is essential to the precise timing and smooth running of all the costume changes, which in turn is critical for a live performance.

Kirk's advice to aspiring costume designers starting out in the industry "is to learn how to draw – this is by far your most important tool to communicate your ideas to directors, actors and costume makers".⁶

¹Litson, J 1999, 'Roger Kirk', Live Design <https://www.livedesignonline.com/mag/roger-kirk>

²Gilbertson, M 2016, 'Todd's Trip Down Memory Lane', Adelaide Now

³Litson, J 1999, 'Roger Kirk', Live Design <https://www.livedesignonline.com/mag/roger-kirk>

⁴Tracy, J 1999, 'Wizards of Oz', Sunday Mail

⁵Litson, J 1999, 'Roger Kirk', Live Design <https://www.livedesignonline.com/mag/roger-kirk>

⁶Hawes and Curtis <https://www.hawesandcurtis.co.uk/blog/features/interview-with-42nd-street-costume-designer-roger-kirk>



THE BOY FROM OZ – PETER ALLEN

RESPONDING

- 1 When looking at *The Boy from Oz* shirt, what do you immediately notice about the colour, fabric and design of this piece?
What do the design choices of this costume help us understand about Peter as a character?
- 2 The real Peter Allen was well known for his flamboyant personality and costumes. After being used for many years in Qantas advertising, his song, 'I Still Call Australia Home' became an iconic song close to the heart of many Australians. What stylistic choices has the costume designer made to both
(a) represent the patriotic theme of the song and
(b) transform the character of Peter Allen to a large musical theatre production?
- 3 Think of a musical theatre performance you've seen. Using specific examples, discuss how have the costumes added to the 'spectacle' of the performance? How does this enhance the audience's experience?

MAKING

- 1 Research another Australian icon (Steve Irwin, Cathy Freeman, Jimmy Barnes, Gough Whitlam, Eddie Mabo, AC/DC, Jessica Mauboy etc.) to inspire a new mainstage biographical production. Focussing on a key moment of their life, create a mood board* for the costume they would wear in that moment. Think about design elements such as texture, colour, shape and how they can help tell the story of the character in that moment on a large stage such as Festival Theatre. Explain your choices with notes.

* Not sure what a mood board is?

Pinterest boards are digital mood boards.

Also check out these resources:

https://creators.vice.com/en_uk/article/gvdnjm/the-visual-aura-of-istop-the-irgens-i-mood-boards-of-costume-designer-christian-joy

<http://creatively-daring.com/how-to-create-mood-boards/>



Image: Dennis Olsen as Oedipus The King (The Blinding), State Theatre Company South Australia, 1978.⁷

OEDIPUS THE KING/OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Written by Sophocles around 429 BC

Performed by State Theatre of South Australia

March 1978

The Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre

Directed by Colin George

Costumes and masks designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch

Dennis Olsen as Oedipus

This costume was worn by Dennis Olsen in Act 5 of South Australian Theatre Company's 1978 production of *Oedipus the King* at Playhouse and designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch.

A mysterious plague has struck the city. Oedipus, King of Thebes, sends his brother-in-law Creon to find the cause. Creon reveals that the plague can only be lifted when the killer of the previous king, Laius, is brought to justice. Tiresias, a blind prophet reveals that Oedipus unwittingly killed Laius, that Laius was Oedipus' father and, (wait for it) that Oedipus has unknowingly married his mother Jocasta. This was prophesied by an Oracle to Oedipus when he was a young man and unawares Oedipus fulfils this prophecy. When Jocasta learns the truth, she hangs herself and Oedipus stabs his eyes out with pins from her brooches. Oedipus is the classic Greek tragic hero in which the King's downfall leads to suffering.

Designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch deliberately designed all the *Oedipus* costumes to be sculptural, voluminous, woollen and with hand painted details. As in traditional ancient Greek theatre the actors performed in abstracted masks and platform shoes, the more important the character the higher the platforms. Wearing the heavy costumes, masks and platforms under the heat of the theatre lights made the actors grow increasingly uncomfortable. Moiseiwitsch says "but they [the costumes] are terribly hot and in an enclosed theatre they are very hard on the actors. The built-up boots too, demand a lot of practice to be worn naturally"⁸. Actor Dennis Olsen, who played Oedipus, sprained his ankle in dress rehearsal and when performing said that after three weeks of practice the words were "coming out right. But all I was thinking was: I hope I can bloody well stand up on my feet!"⁹



The Attendant describes the fateful scene of Oedipus blinding to the Chorus:

*The King saw too, and with heart-rendering groans
 Untied the rope, and laid her on the ground.
 But worse was yet to see. Her dress was pinned
 With golden brooches, which the King snatched out
 And thrust, from full arm's length, into his eyes –
 Eyes that should see no longer his shame, his guilt,
 No longer see those they should never have seen,
 Nor see, unseeing, those he had longed to see,
 Henceforth seeing nothing but night...
 To this wild tune
 He pierced his eyeballs time and time again,
 Till bloody tears ran down his beard – not drops
 But in full spate a whole cascade descending
 In drenching cataracts of scarlet rain¹⁰*

Oedipus' costume for this scene required the drama of cascading blood. Moiseiwitsch made the blood seemingly flow from Oedipus' eyes like scarlet rain by using shaped, painted and layered lengths of red painted leather flowing down the front of his cloak. It is a very effective yet simple way to represent the description of Oedipus blinding himself as written in Sophocles' text. Symbolically, despite being able to physically see, Oedipus was 'blind' to his own background and the future consequences of his past actions. Interestingly, cataracts by dictionary definition is a large waterfall and a medical condition affecting the lens of the eye, making Sophocles description of "drenching cataracts of scarlet rain" even more meaningful.

⁷Photographer David Wilson, reproduced courtesy of State Theatre Company South Australia and David Wilson.

⁸Hutton, G 1978, 'Behind the mask', The Australian

⁹Roberts, A 1978 'More than just a clever voice', The Advertiser

¹⁰Translated by E F Watling, Sophocles The Theban Plays (Penguin Books, 1974)



OEDIPUS

RESPONDING

- 1 Moiseiwitsch used lengths of red leather to signify blood flowing from Oedipus' eyes. This is a stark contrast to the heavy black cloaking of the rest of the Oedipus costume. In theatre, colour is often used as a symbolic tool to aid the audience's understanding of the character or setting.
 - a. What do the colours chosen tell you about the story, setting, and Oedipus as a character?
 - b. Why do you think the designer chose to use painted leather to represent the blood pouring from Oedipus' eyes rather than stage blood or makeup?
- 2 *Oedipus The King/Oedipus at Colonus* are set in a time of plague and suffering. How do Moiseiwitsch's costumes assist in telling this story of plague and suffering?

MAKING

- 1 Often costume designers need to create design solutions for scenes where quick changes or alterations to the costume are required to tell the story. They often use magnets, zips, Velcro or press studs to 'hide' fabric. Sometimes they may use ribbon or lightweight fabrics that can be pulled through small holes from 'secret' pockets. Using Oedipus or another character that gets killed or injured in a bloody scene, design a costume with a way to reveal hidden 'blood'.



TWELFTH NIGHT, OR WHAT YOU WILL

By William Shakespeare
State Theatre Company South Australia
1999
Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre

Designed by Dale Ferguson
Bronwen James as Olivia

This costume, worn by Bronwen James in the State Theatre Company of South Australia's production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night (or What You Will)*, was designed by leading South Australian set and costume designer Dale Ferguson. In 2009, Ferguson was nominated for the Tony Award for both Best Costume Design and Best Scenic Design for the Broadway revival of the play *Exit the King*.

Written by William Shakespeare, the comedy *Twelfth Night* tells of twins Viola and Sebastian, who are separated in a disastrous shipwreck. After washing ashore on Illyria, Viola disguises herself as boy and finds work in the household of a young nobleman named Orsino. Viola soon falls in love with duke Orsino. Unfortunately, Orsino plans to marry the countess Olivia. Upon meeting, Olivia falls in love with Viola thinking she is a man. The love-triangle

farce continues until all is revealed. Viola's brother Sebastian is alive and in love with Olivia. Orsino, realizing his love for Viola, proposes marriage.

Twelfth Night (or What You Will) was written in 1602. The costumes Shakespearean actors wore on the stage were the modern dress of the time. Costumes were an investment for an acting company. The costumes provided spectacle for the audience, as set was limited. According to Shakespeare's Globe, a company would spend £300 on costumes per year, this is approximately \$64,000 today. To achieve the 'modern' aesthetic the 16th and 17th century audiences desired, some of the costumes were second-hand clothes previously owned by nobles of the day. Using clothes from nobility meant that actors could represent wealthier social classes.

In an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald Ferguson said, "I always feel when I'm designing a play that I'm, in my head, directing it. And therefore, I feel like I'm more of a dramatist than I am an aesthete or a visual artist"¹¹. Olivia's costumes in State Theatre Company of South Australia's *Twelfth Night* reflect the character's social status. Dale Ferguson designed dresses for Olivia that told the audience of her wealth as a countess and were traditional of the 16th century and early 17th century.

Olivia's costume is a pale grey and pink satin gown. Pearl embellishments have been added to the neckline, once again emphasizing Olivia's wealth and stature. The gown incorporates the stereotypically Shakespearean, 16th century ruff collar by adding a similar structure to the gown's sleeve cuffs. Likely for the ease of dressing the actor in the heavy, voluminous gown the costume is separated into two sections. The skirt is attached to the waist of the gown using large elastic loops and buttons.

The gown has corseting around the torso. A corset is a garment that traditionally sits from the hips, past the waist and just under or over the bust. The back laces so that it can be adjusted tighter. This creates an hourglass shape on the body by making the wearer's waist appear smaller. Olivia's gown mimics the shape and style of gowns noble woman would have worn during the time in which Shakespeare wrote *Twelfth Night*.

The feminine gown juxtaposes the masculine outfits of Viola, a female character who is disguised as a boy for much of the play. The costume's silhouette, colour and feminine embellishments purposely mimic Olivia's fair beauty which Viola describes in the play as most "radiant, exquisite and unmatched" and prompts Orsino to utter the famous first line of *Twelfth Night* – "If music be the food of love, play on".

In an interview regarding his design for Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Born Yesterday*, Dale Ferguson explained that even the simplest and minor of costumes must clearly represent a character



to an audience. He explained, "Although a hat may only be on stage for two minutes it actually then has to say more. Because that a two-minute character has to have an impact, you have to know exactly who she is straight away..."¹²

Although not the central female protagonist in the Shakespearean comedy *Twelfth Night*, Olivia has a significant role in Viola's story and the audience must know who and what she is before she speaks a word of dialogue. Olivia is a passive character, she becomes involved in the farce and mistaken identities of the play because of impetuous love. The vain frivolity, nobility and beauty of Olivia are exemplified in Ferguson's intelligent costume designs.

¹¹Dolan, K 2015, 'Meet the maker: designer Dale Ferguson sets the scene for our stars of stage', Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/meet-the-maker-designer-dale-ferguson-sets-the-scene-for-our-stars-of-stage-20150317-1437vk.html>

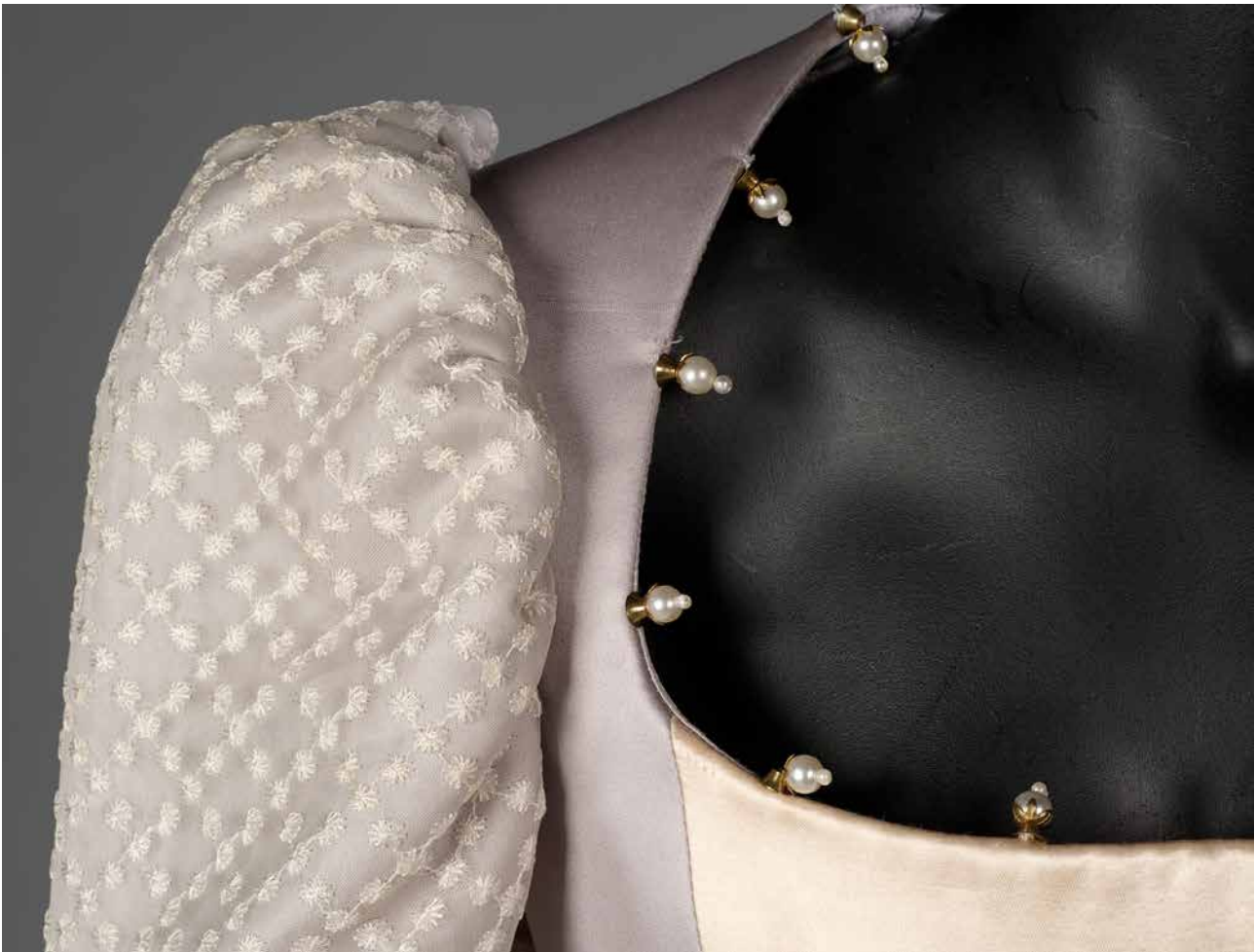
¹²Melbourne Theatre Company – *Designing Born Yesterday* <http://www.mtc.com.au/backstage/2017/01/video-designing-born-yesterday/>

Sources

Sydney Theatre Company – *Dale Ferguson on his set and costume designs for Away* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_v_l6Fd7po

Shakespeare's Globe – *Costumes and Cosmetics* https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/uploads/files/2014/01/costumes_cosmetics.pdf

Folger Shakespeare Library – *Shakespeare's Theatre* <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-theater>



TWELFTH NIGHT – OLIVIA

RESPONDING

- 1 Olivia is a passive character and a 'fair' beauty. What design choices has Ferguson made to represent her character? How does her costume symbolise that she is a beautiful, wealthy noble woman?

MAKING

- 1 Olivia is a beautiful noble woman who is a bit of a romantic. Research more about her character and then, inspired by what you've read, use a website (like ASOS or The Iconic) to create an online 'wish-list' for costume pieces that might suit Olivia were *Twelfth Night* to be set in the present.





PYGMALION

Written by Bernard Shaw, first performed 1913

State Theatre Company

1981

Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre

Directed by Kevin Palmer

Costume design by Sue Russell

Deborah Little as Eliza Doolittle

Designed by Sue Russell, Eliza Doolittle costume worn by Deborah Little in Act 5, *Pygmalion*, Dunstan Playhouse, State Theatre Company of South Australia, 1981. Donated to the Performing Arts Collection, Adelaide Festival Centre by State Theatre of South Australia.

The play *Pygmalion* was written by George Bernard Shaw in 1913. Eliza Doolittle is a young sassy cockney flower seller speaking kerbstone English "Nah then, Freddy: look wh'y' gowin, deah" she says in Act 1. Linguists professor Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering make a bet to pass Eliza off as a duchess at an ambassador's party by teaching her proper English and manners. Eliza agrees to the experiment and Pickering pays for it. The wager is

won. Eliza now not only speaks beautifully but is also very eloquent about her changed position in life. She says in Act IV "I sold flowers. I didnt sell myself. Now youve made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me."¹³ Audrey Hepburn made the character of Eliza Doolittle famous in the film version called *My Fair Lady* in 1964.

Sue Russell worked as the resident designer for State Theatre Company in the early 1980s. She says when designing for the theatre "you need to have an instinct about what a character will wear; you need to be able to interpret a character, like the actors are going to. You need a basic knowledge of how clothes go together. You need to be a bit of

a psychiatrist... Ideally design should be a collaboration between designer, director, and in certain circumstances, actors."¹⁴

Russell designed costumes for a range of State Theatre Company productions, including *Pygmalion*. Her final drawing for Eliza's Act 5 costume, is not only a beautiful rendering but it also communicates to the director, actor and wardrobe what the costume is going to look like. On the drawing itself, Russell has written specific instructions to the costume maker about the jacket, attached a swatch of sample fabric and documented the act, scene and actor's name.¹⁵ In a professional theatre company, wardrobe make the costumes with the designer overseeing the process. You can see from the drawing the dress is very true to Russell's original vision.

This costume is symbolic of Eliza's transformation into a lady in Act 5. The orange colour was a deliberate choice by Russell because it was youthful and modish, evoking "an atmosphere of spring and symbolic of Eliza's new life". The high lace collar suggests respectability. In keeping with the fashion of the time, the actor wore a corset to give the costume the right "shape", and the contrasting lace panels further enhanced the period feel. Russell adds that 'the black bow of the hat and handbag add a touch of drama to the outfit and reflect a boldness and confidence which was also typical of the character'. Using light silk material allowed the actor to move freely, further suggesting a youthful unconstrained quality.¹⁶ A trick of the trade for the quick change is the press stud which is now is often superseded by Velcro.



¹³Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion A Romance in Five Acts* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1959)

¹⁴Stuart, J 1981, 'Designs on the stage', *The News* 1981

¹⁵Susan Russell, Original costume design for Eliza Act 5 (2), *Pygmalion*, State Theatre Company, 1981, Performing Arts Collection, Adelaide Festival Centre.

¹⁶Susan Russell, *Pygmalion*, State Theatre of South Australia, 1981 [email to Helen Trepa, Performing Arts Collection, Adelaide Festival Centre], 8 October 2018

PYGMALION – ELIZA DOOLITTLE

RESPONDING

- 1 *Pygmalion* is one of the original 'make over' plays. Eliza wears this dress in the final act, once she has transformed from the poor flower seller and daughter of a garbage man with a thick Cockney accent, to a well-presented lady with a refined accent. She no longer works on the streets selling flowers, exposed to the elements. She doesn't work at all – as ladies don't work. How are the costume's **shape** and **materials** (think: weight, texture, fibre, colour & adornments) key symbols to representing these changes in Eliza?
- 2 Consider both Eliza's *Pygmalion* costume and Olivia's *Twelfth Night* costume. Whilst they are from different plays set in different eras, both costumes were designed to represent upper class, refined ladies.
 - a. What similarities can you note that the designers have made with each of these costumes? How/why are these significant?
 - b. What are the clear differences in these costumes? Which of these design choices do you think have been informed by the different eras/contexts of Shakespeare & Shaw's writing and which do you think could be swapped? Consider: **shape** (corsetry, sleeves, neckline, ruffs, gathering etc) and **materials** (weight, texture, fibre, colour, adornments etc).

MAKING

- 1 Using your knowledge of what Eliza's Act 5 costume looks like, design a costume for Eliza the flower seller at the start of the play. Think about the colour palette, textures and functionalities Eliza the flower seller would need when braving the streets of London.



THE SEAGULL

Anton Chekhov
Company B Belvoir
1997

Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre

Designed by Tess Schofield
Cate Blanchett as Nina

Nina Mikhailovna Zarechnaya is a central character in Anton Chekhov's 1896 play *The Seagull*. A young girl of nineteen, Nina is an aspiring actress and romantic idealist. During a summer in the countryside Nina ignores the adoring attentions of young playwright Konstantin, instead focusing her passion on the visiting, much older and successful writer Trigorin. In the final act of the play, years have passed, and Nina has had little success in her career while Konstantin is a published writer. Nina visits Konstantin. The young writer, seeing that Nina has fallen on rough times, offers her a comfortable life. Nina refuses his affection, remaining stubbornly entangled in her idealistic love for Trigorin. In despair Konstantin takes his own life.

The Seagull was performed by Company B Belvoir (Belvoir Theatre) in 1997. The play was directed by Neil Armfield, costumes designed by Tess Schofield and starred Cate Blanchett as Nina, Noah Taylor as Konstantin and Richard Roxburgh as Trigorin.

In his Director's Note, Neil Armfield wrote of his production of Chekhov's play:

Chekhov, of course, is the holy of holies. And there are therefore more clichés or 'ways of doing it' that surround the performance of his plays than Shakespeare's or Restoration Comedy. That is why it is has been so important to develop a new translation for the production. Anna Borghesi, Tess Schofield, Anatoly Frusin and I began work for this production last year on a lawn by the river in Patonga NSW. We talked about ways of relaxing the production, of letting it feel as accidental as the play feels. ... we have worked against the straight jacketing of characters into specific realities of period and illusions of particular scenic constructions in favour of a loose and more suggestive collection of clothes and artifacts and furniture gathered together for the telling of this story.¹⁷



Cate Blanchett as Nina wears a simple dress and cardigan set during the beginning acts of the play. The dress is a pale, teal, striped chiffon with a thin belt around the waist. The mid-length of the dress' skirt, high neck with Peter Pan rounded collar, and fluted cap sleeves communicate Nina's youth and innocence. The cream cardigan is embroidered with flowers and embellished with small pearl buttons. Both garments of the costume have traditionally feminine aspects. The pinched waist, full skirt and floaty sleeves of the dress create a ladylike silhouette for Nina. With the addition of the dainty cardigan, Nina's flirty and easy to fall in love nature are revealed in her clothing.

As suggested in Armfield's directors note, the Belvoir production of *The Seagull* does not have a specific time to which Schofield was designing. The costume has a simple silhouette and design elements (such as the tight waist and pleated full skirt of the dress and plain cut of the cardigan). The costume transcends era as it could be a summer, country outfit worn by a nineteen-year-old across numerous 20th century decades.

The play begins with a visit to a country house belonging to the character Sorin. This is where neighbours Nina and Konstantin meet Trigorin for the first time. The country setting in Act One has an impact on what Nina wears. The sheeress of the dress and floral elements of the cardigan are appropriate for summer in the countryside. The play ends in mid-winter, the opposite of the brightness and hope of Act One.



Image: Cate Blanchett as Nina Mikhaïlovna Zarechnaya, *The Seagull*, 1997. Photograph reproduced courtesy of photographer Heidrun Löhrr and Belvoir

Chekhov uses the symbol of a seagull throughout his play. It has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. However, Nina is the first to mention the seagull. In Act One when talking of her childhood country home, Nina explains “I am drawn here like a seagull to the lake”. She feels a sense of security and belonging near the lake, “I’ve spent my whole life by this lake. I know every one of those little islands”. Nina is compared to and compares herself to a seagull throughout the play. The colour choice used for this costume, the cool blue of the dress and cream of the cardigan, mimic a white seagull landing on the waters of a lake.

SOURCES

The Seagull program, Company B Belvoir, 1997

Lloyd, T 1997, ‘Ambitions realised’,
The Advertiser.

O’Brien, D 1997, ‘The Seagull’, Unknown

Brooks, R 2014, ‘Study Guide – The Seagull’,
State Theatre Company,

http://statetheatrecompany.com.au/content/uploads/2017/02/TS_Study-Guide.pdf

¹⁷Armfield, N 1997, ‘Director’s Note’, *The Seagull*, Company B Belvoir

THE SEAGULL – NINA

RESPONDING

- 1 Why might the director have made the decision to 'relax' the production of *The Seagull*? How did this impact Schofield's designs?
- 2 The image of the sleeve and underarm area of Nina's dress shows the decay of the costume. Stage costumes are worn for performance after performance, and they often travel from city to city for new seasons. The fabrics used generally need to withstand washing, be comfortable for the performer, be easy to work with for the maker, fit within the budget and be able to assist in telling the story. Thinking about all the costumes in the resource, and the requirements of the costumes, do some further research (you might like to gather swatches from a fabric store) and create a list of some of the 'best' and 'worst' fabrics for stage costumes with justification for your categorization of each fabric.

Some fabrics to get you started:
knitted wool, tweed, silk, polyester,
lycra, cotton drill, rayon, chiffon,
denim, muslin

MAKING

- 1 Read more about the characters Konstantin and Trigorin. Choose one of these male characters and design a costume for him that complements Schofield's Nina design. Note that Director Neil Armfield wanted the costumes and the setting to not be tied to a period of time.



THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II
SEL and GFO
2001

Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre

Designed by Catherine Zuber

Lisa McCune and Rachael Beck as Maria

The Sound of Music is a beloved musical written and composed by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Set in Austria during the late-1930s, Maria, a novice nun, leaves her abbey and is hired by widower Captain von Trapp to be governess to his seven headstrong children. Maria connects with the children through music. Noticing the growing bond between the children and Maria, Captain von Trapp soon falls in love with the governess and they marry. The Captain's brother Max is impressed by the children's musical talent and proposes entering the family into the Salzburg Festival. After his honeymoon, the Captain is ordered to report for duty to the German Navy. Opposed to the Nazi regime Captain von Trapp and Maria use their family's performance at the Salzburg Festival to disguise their escape into Switzerland.

This costume was worn by Lisa McCune and Rachael Beck as Maria in the 2001 SEL and GFO production of *The Sound of Music*. In the forward of the 2001 Adelaide program the producers' forward states – *As soon as we saw The Sound of Music during our annual trip to Broadway to see "what's on" we knew we wanted to bring the show to Australia. It was undoubtedly the highlight of the 98-99 season for us.*¹⁸ Unfortunately, critics did not share the Australian producer's enthusiasm. They called the Broadway production "just fine"¹⁹ and "it seemed endless"²⁰. However, it was agreed that Catherine Zuber's costumes, reproduced for the Australian tour of *The Sound of Music* in 2001, were a highlight. One critic saying – *Catherine Zuber's period costumes maintain[ed] the production's poise.*²¹

At the time of both the Broadway and Australian tour of *The Sound of Music* Catherine Zuber was an established Broadway costume designer having designed for productions such as *Triumph of Love* (1997), *Ivanov* (1997) and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1994). Zuber has now become a sort-after costume designer, most recently winning the Tony Award for Best Costume Design of a Musical for *My Fair Lady* in 2018.



This costume designed by Zuber for Maria is worn during the family's performance at the Salzburg Festival. The younger girls wore almost identical dresses to their step-mother and the Captain and boys' costumes are matching the girls in palette and aesthetic. This dress is based on the traditional German and Austrian folk costume named a dirndl. The pinafore style of the dress, jacquard fabric, floral embroidery (colourful flowers on the black velvet and smaller white flowers on the under-shirt), white puff-sleeve shirt and corseting on the chest are all traditional of a dirndl.



The costume is not physically heavy, which is important when designing for musical theatre. The actor must easily move around the stage. The skirt is given fullness by using three different light fabrics. The outer skirt is gathered in the waist and made from a green jacquard fabric. The underskirt is made of white cotton with the addition of embroidered white lace on the hem. And the final layer, closest to the actor, is a simple cotton petticoat. All pulled in at the waist to create the fullness desired.

Unlike a traditional folk dress this costume has a concealed zipper down the centre of the chest continuing to the waist. Also, unlike its inspiration, the white shirt is not a separate piece of clothing and the red ribbon is not corseted across the chest, instead metal rings are used to give the illusion of intersecting ribbon. This is so the actor can take the costume on and off quickly. Indicating that this garment would have been used when the actor swapped costumes very quickly.

In an interview with Playbill Catherine Zuber said, *I love to enter another society, another world, and examine the components that make that world what it is,...To study the choices people make in what they wear, the conditions that force people to wear certain clothing, the requirements of the society that influence how they choose to dress.*²²

It is important to note why Zuber would have designed a traditional dress for the outgoing, non-traditional, effervescent Maria and her new family at this point in the musical. The von Trapps are performing for an audience that includes members of the Nazi party. A fascist regime that exhorted traditional Anglo-Germanic values. The von Trapps are wearing a disguise, a costume that encourages the attendees at Salzburg Festival to believe the family are allied with the Nazis.

Playbill – Roles List: Catherin Zuber
<http://www.playbill.com/personrolespage/person-role-page?person=00000150-ac7c-d16d-a550-ec7e8eee0003>

¹⁸2001, 'Producers' Forward', The Sound of Music, SEL and GFO

¹⁹Evans, G 1998, 'Sound of Music', Variety, <https://variety.com/1998/legit/reviews/the-sound-of-music-5-1200453133/>

²⁰Brantley, B 1998, 'Sweetness, Light and Lederhosen', New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/13/movies/theater-review-sweetness-light-and-lederhosen.html>

²¹Evans, G 1998, 'Sound of Music', Variety, <https://variety.com/1998/legit/reviews/the-sound-of-music-5-1200453133/>

²²Rothstien, M 2013, 'A LIFE IN THE THEATRE: Catherine Zuber, Costume Designer of The Big Knife, Coast of Utopia, Far From Heaven and Beyond', Playbill, <http://www.playbill.com/article/a-life-in-the-theatre-catherine-zuber-costume-designer-of-the-big-knife-coast-of-utopia-far-from-heaven-and-beyond-com-203939>



SOUND OF MUSIC – MARIA (FLORAL DRESS)

RESPONDING

- 1 Maria is a kind, gentle, free-spirited, young Austrian woman. At the beginning of *The Sound of Music*, she is a postulant (a candidate to become a nun), but she moves away from the Abbey to become the von Trapp family's governess (looking after the children).
Look closely at the costume. What creative decisions regarding use of fabrics or sewing techniques has the designer used to express the characteristics of Maria? How does this dress symbolise to the audience who she is as a character?
- 2 The **dirndl** is a style of dress easily recognised as typical to Austria and the surrounding areas. Maria's dress shares a similar shape and style. How does using an easily recognisable symbol like the dirndl help to communicate the setting or story of a stage production? Why is this important for some productions?

MAKING

- 1 Choose a play or book in which the country/culture it is set in is a key component of the storyline (i.e. *Les Misérables* – France, *Looking For Alibrandi* – Australia & Italians in Australia, *The Outsiders* – United States in the 1960s, *Like Water for Chocolate* – Mexico).
 - a. Research the dress of the culture/location featured in the story.
 - b. Create a mood board of some key 'typical' styles of dress representative of the region/culture.
 - c. Sketch your own costume for a chosen character. Thinking about how the dirndl shape and floral embroidery on Maria's dress represents Austria. What key elements would you include to represent the setting of your chosen text?