

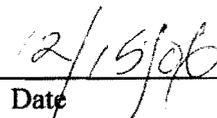
An Experience in Costume Design:

*The Wizard of Oz*

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This creative project has been approved by:

  
Valerie Birk, Advisor

  
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**Abstract:**

My ideal career is working with community theatre, with an emphasis in costumes, and as such my motivation for this project stemmed from that ambition. The purpose of my creative project was to provide myself with the opportunity to practice my skills and learning in a guided experience of costume designing a production for live theatre. The target audience of my creative project was anyone interested in live theatre or theatrical clothing.

My creative project consisted of designing costumes for *The Wizard of Oz* at Muncie Civic Theatre, performed April 28-May 6. I generated ideas with the director, Darrin Murrell, pulled costumes from Muncie Civic's extensive stock collection, made alterations as needed and built pieces from scratch as needed. I learned to accommodate for issues such as choreography and movement, quick changes, and theatrical enhancements. In addition, I learned to work with a budget and with a specific timeline for the show's requirements.

The outcome of my project was a huge success. I received many compliments on the final costumes, and I gained quite a bit of insight to the costume process. I fulfilled all of my goals: utilizing skills learned from the classroom setting, gaining the experience of working with a live production and actualizing a concept through time and budget management. Though at times stressful and defeating, the project allowed me the opportunity to experience a life dream. When the final pieces came together, I was pleased with the resulting outcome.

I would like to thank the Honors College and Muncie Civic Theatre for allowing me this opportunity and all of my family and friends for their endless love and support throughout the project.

My senior honors thesis was a creative project in costume design, culminating in a live production of *The Wizard of Oz* performed at Muncie Civic Theatre between April 28, 2006 and May 6, 2006. I chose this particular creative project because my future goal is to work with costuming for live theatre. In addition, this project allowed me to implement many skills I have learned in my Family and Consumer Sciences: Fashion and Merchandising classes. These skills included pattern alterations, sewing constructions skills, and creative thinking.

Originally, Muncie Civic Theatre intended on producing the musical *Chicago*, and I had planned on designing the costumes for this show. In January, the Executive Director, Darrin Murrell, realized that the theatre would not be able to obtain the rights for *Chicago* because it was still being performed on Broadway, so he began to investigate other shows that might be well-received. After some discussion with me as to what I would like to design, and after discovering the popularity of family-oriented productions, he decided that *The Wizard of Oz* would be the perfect mid-season replacement.

I was very excited to undertake this project primarily because I knew that it would involve a lot of costumes that needed to be constructed from scratch as well as costumes that needed to be pulled and altered from Muncie Civic's extensive costume stock. This type of production offered me two different experiences: first, for costumes that needed to be produced in whole, I learned time management, delegation, and furthered my own skills in those areas; second, for costumes that were pulled from stock, I developed a sense of imagination and judgment. I needed be able to differentiate which costumes would work for this production and which would not work as they were, but perhaps

could be adapted to our production. In all, the production needed a grand total of ninety-five different costumes, of which thirty-two needed to be constructed from scratch.

Because the show wasn't opening up until late in the semester, and rehearsals weren't even starting until after spring break, I used the early part of the year to brainstorm different ideas. I spent time talking to the director, Darrin, about what his vision of the production was and how I could help him achieve this vision. From Darrin, I learned that while he wanted to keep some of the traditional aspects that people associate with the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, he also wanted to have an original production that wasn't a carbon copy of the movie. One of the major changes he decided to make was that he wanted to remain true to the original L. Frank Baum story in which Dorothy wears silver slippers, not ruby slippers.

Darrin wanted the play to be set in a sort of abstract late 19<sup>th</sup> century time period, particularly when the characters were in Kansas at the beginning and end of the play. I accomplished this through costuming the characters in sepia-toned clothing that was reminiscent of older style farm clothes. One character, Hunk, was supposed to be Dorothy's Native American friend, so we outfitted him in a vest and a beaded necklace. The exception to these color choices was Dorothy. The idea was that in Kansas, Dorothy would be slightly more vibrant than her counterparts, but when she arrived in Oz, she would be more subdued (all while staying in the same costume, of course). I chose a light blue plaid dress with a white blouse underneath. In addition, I found a pair of old-style red ankle boots that Dorothy wore during her Kansas scenes to pay homage to the ruby slippers in the film.

The concept for Oz was much more dramatic. Just as in movie, the characters in Oz are “brought to life” through the use of vivid coloring. The concept for the munchkins was a type of psychedelic peasant look. This atmosphere was achieved by using many articles of clothing that Muncie Civic already owned. I paired very bright shirts and vests with wild pants, skirts and aprons. Each munchkin also had some sort of headgear, whether that was a bonnet, top hat or newsboy cap.

In these first few scenes in Oz, we also met Glinda the Good Witch and The Wicked Witch of the West. Darrin wanted Glinda to both be symbolically good, but he also wanted her to represent the munchkins because she such a part of their way of life. This decision led to the design choice of having Glinda in a bright pink dress, a large headpiece and even a set of wings. To contrast with this brightness, the Wicked Witch was decked all in black with an oversized skirt and high-necked bodice. Her sleeves draped around her when she lifted her arms, so it gave her a more imposing feel.

The other major characters, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion were created in a very traditional way. Because these characters are actually Dorothy’s friends from Kansas, we wanted to incorporate the idea that Hunk (the Scarecrow) was Native American. We incorporated feathers and raffia into his Scarecrow costume and he wore his beaded necklace throughout the show.

The Tin Man’s costume proved to be the most challenging to construct because it was actually made out of sheet metal. With Darrin’s help, I designed a pattern for the costume, and together we riveted all the pieces together. I used different kinds of metal dryer tubing to create joints and silver duct tape to enclose any sharp edges and connect the pieces. Underneath the metal costume, the Tin Man wore a silver lame jumpsuit.

The Lion's costume was constructed very similarly to the costume that the Lion in the movie wore. I chose lighter colors for the Lion because Darrin wanted the Lion to be portrayed as friendly. I felt that darker colors may have made him seem too frightening. The actor playing the Lion was a larger man, so the pattern that was used to create his costume had to be altered significantly. Once the pattern was finished, the costume itself was constructed without any problems.

The other characters which I needed to work with Darrin for conceptualization were all of the chorus parts. These characters turned out to be the most difficult because there were so many of them (sixteen children and twelve adults) and because they all needed multiple costume changes. These characters not only played the munchkins mentioned above, but also the poppies/snowmen, the citizens of Emerald City, the winkies (the Wicked Witch's henchmen), the flying monkeys and the jitterbugs. While we were able to pull many of the Emerald City citizens' costumes from stock, most of the other costumes were created by significantly altering articles of clothing that we already possessed or by building them from scratch.

The biggest challenge of this project was that funds were not available to purchase the \$500 worth of fabric needed to construct costume until ten days prior to the opening of the production. For those ten days, the only thing I did was sit in front of my sewing machine, and I often felt overburdened with the task at hand. However, I found that just as I was beginning to wonder how all this work would ever get done on time, volunteers began to ask me how they could help. Mothers of some of the children in the cast offered to sew together different costumes. Specifically, I was able to utilize their talents to construct masks and jumpsuits for the flying monkeys and ponchos for the

poppies/snowmen. One mother came to my apartment to work on the jitterbug arms (made out of felt, stuffing and fishline). Together, we were able to finish these costumes the night before the dress rehearsal.

There were times during the project that I questioned whether or not I loved this type of high pressure environment enough to enter a work field like it. However, over the course of the project, I learned that most of the pressure was coming from myself, and that nearly every other person involved with the project was supportive of all the efforts I made. Darrin constantly reaffirmed that I was helping to produce his vision of the production, and he did all he could to help me with my project. He actually worked with me to construct the Tin Man costume, and he petitioned the actors to find other people that were willing to sew. When I had pulled a lot of pieces for the munchkin costumes, the actors came in and mix and matched the pieces themselves to create their costumes. In this way, I learned the true meaning of a collaborative production.

Enclosed in this binder is a CD presentation of photos from *The Wizard of Oz*. These photos should further illustrate the examples mentioned. However, these photos were taken during the final dress rehearsal of the production, and as I explained the nature of the timeline for the production process, a few of the costumes (which are noted in the presentation) needed some final touches before opening night. This explanation of the project should be used to supplement the enclosed photo CD.