Costume Design and Technology – A Process of Growth During A Global Pandemic

Heather Gonzalez

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COSTUME DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY – A PROCESS OF GROWTH DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

by

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DEDICATION

For Jose. Your constant support has enabled me to dare to create magical worlds. I love you more than life itself. Thank you for uprooting our life and planting ourselves in a new place so we can soar to new heights. I can’t wait to see where our future leads. You are my everything!
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Making it through grad school during a pandemic has required support from all sides. First, my family, Jose and Abraham. I know you sacrificed a lot for us to be where we are. Thank you for your patience and understanding, especially as I was away, whether it was a long tech night or months away for professional opportunities. You give me so much hope and joy. I love you both so much!

Thank you to my parents, Marlene and Richard. I wouldn’t be who I am today without you. It was you who instilled in me a love of storytelling from a young age. Thank you for all those library trips. I learned what hard work and dedication was from watching you.

To my siblings and in-laws, John, Eli, David, Heather, Mary, Leslie, and Steven, who offered encouragement and love when things were difficult, thank you. I cherish all of your words and long distance hugs.

Thank you to my many friends who showed love and support. I needed every ounce of light from you.

Campbell Childers, my cohort and immediate friend, you amaze me. Our pathway hasn’t been the most traditional, but we made it! Thank you for all the wonderful memories, and I look forward to many more.

To the educators who helped me grow and develop, thank you! Kristy Hall, Valerie Pruett, and Kelly Renko-Clarkson, what a blessing each of you has been. I couldn’t have had the remarkable growth without your expertise.
ABSTRACT

In the best of circumstances, obtaining a Master of Fine Arts in Costume Design and Technology requires dedication and persistence. However, another layer of complication is added when the world shuts down due to a global pandemic. This thesis provides a look at three realized designs and delves into the way in which the pandemic affected my process for each of the designs. I also discuss my growth technologically as a costumer as I examine the class projects and shop work completed. Additionally, I review my growth artistically, and my professional experiences. My thesis provides a look at each facet of my experience of obtaining my MFA of Costume Design and Technology at the University of South Carolina.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ......................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... v

List of Figures .................................................................................................................. vii

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Amadeus ........................................................................................................ 3

Chapter 2: She Kills Monsters ....................................................................................... 23

Chapter 3: Season of Echoes ......................................................................................... 53

Chapter 4: Technical Costuming .................................................................................... 67

Chapter 5: Artistic Journey .............................................................................................. 102

Chapter 6: Professional Work ......................................................................................... 121

References ...................................................................................................................... 128
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 General Research for *Amadeus* ................................................................. 4
Figure 1.2 Portrait Research for *Amadeus* ................................................................. 8
Figure 1.3 *Amadeus* Nested Realities ........................................................................ 9
Figure 1.4 *Amadeus* Inspiration Images ...................................................................... 10
Figure 1.5 Character Research for *Amadeus* .............................................................. 11
Figure 1.6 Salieri and Mozart Renderings ...................................................................... 13
Figure 1.7 Constanze, Teresa, and Katerina Renderings .............................................. 14
Figure 1.8 Court Renderings ......................................................................................... 16
Figure 1.9 Ensemble Renderings .................................................................................. 17
Figure 1.10 Katerina and Teresa Draping with Fabric Choices .................................... 18
Figure 1.11 Wigs for *Amadeus* by Linda Nye ............................................................ 19
Figure 1.12 Facebook post from UofSC Department of Theater and Dance .............. 20
Figure 2.1 *She Kills Monsters* Character Research .................................................. 25
Figure 2.2 Monster Research for *She Kills Monsters* ............................................... 27
Figure 2.3 Sketches of Orcus, Succubi, Ronnie, Tina, and Gabby ............................. 29
Figure 2.4 Tillius, Lillith, and Kaliopse Renderings ...................................................... 30
Figure 2.5 Monsters Sketches ....................................................................................... 31
Figure 2.6 Narrator and Farrah Renderings ................................................................ 32
Figure 2.7 Renderings of Fantasy and Reality
   Characters Illustrating Color Palate ........................................................................ 33
Figure 2.8 Vera Rendering in Different Stages ................................................................. 34
Figure 2.9 *She Kills Monsters* Character Breakdown .................................................. 35
Figure 2.10 *She Kills Monsters* Schedule ................................................................. 36
Figure 2.11 Tillius in Front of Green Screen ............................................................... 37
Figure 2.12 Narrator in Front of Green Screen ............................................................ 38
Figure 2.13 Monster Makeup featuring Lillith, Farrah, Evil Tina, and Orcus .................. 40
Figure 2.14 Farrah in Front of Green Screen ............................................................... 42
Figure 2.15 Green Screen Setup in Longstreet Theatre ............................................... 44
Figure 2.16 Production Image featuring Lilly and Agnes ............................................. 45
Figure 2.17 Production Images featuring Monster Parts .............................................. 46
Figure 2.18 Kalioppe in Front of Green Screen ........................................................... 47
Figure 2.19 Production Image featuring Agnes, Lillith, Kalioppe, Tillius, and Orcus ....... 48
Figure 2.20 Production Image featuring Evil Tina and Evil Gabby ............................... 49
Figure 2.21 Production Image featuring Barbarian, Agnes, Evil Tina, Evil Gabby, Kalioppe, Orcus, Lillith, and Tillius ................................................................. 50
Figure 2.22 Production Image featuring Tillius, Agnes, and Chuck ............................. 51
Figure 3.1 Dance Renderings used as Inspiration ....................................................... 53
Figure 3.2 Movement of Fabric Inspiration Images ...................................................... 54
Figure 3.3 Texture Inspiration Images ........................................................................ 55
Figure 3.4 Pinterest board of Color Palate and Season Inspiration ............................. 56
Figure 3.5 Photoshopped Design Plan for Each Season ............................................... 57
Figure 3.6 Season of Echoes Sketches at Different Stages ........................................... 58
Figure 3.7 Season of Echoes Renderings .................................................................... 61
Figure 3.8 Season of Echoes Costumes on mannequins ................................................. 62
Figure 3.9 Production photo of Season of Echoes ................................................................. 63
Figure 3.10 Production photo of Season of Echoes ................................................................. 64
Figure 3.11 Production photo of Season of Echoes ................................................................. 64
Figure 3.12 Production photo of Season of Echoes ................................................................. 65
Figure 4.1 Flat Pattern Projects ............................................................................................. 67
Figure 4.2 Flat Patterning Final Dress .................................................................................... 68
Figure 4.3 Draping Projects ................................................................................................... 69
Figure 4.4 Bias Dress Draping Project .................................................................................... 70
Figure 4.5 Dyeing Projects .................................................................................................... 71
Figure 4.6 Distressed Dress ................................................................................................... 72
Figure 4.7 Gore Projects ....................................................................................................... 73
Figure 4.8 Zombie Project ....................................................................................................... 74
Figure 4.9 Wind in the Willows Project .................................................................................. 75
Figure 4.10 Roller Sets .......................................................................................................... 76
Figure 4.11 Historical Hairstyles ............................................................................................ 77
Figure 4.12 Drag Queen Project ............................................................................................. 78
Figure 4.13 Lady Macbeth Project ......................................................................................... 79
Figure 4.14 Titania Project .................................................................................................... 80
Figure 4.15 Caliban Project .................................................................................................... 81
Figure 4.16 Sweatheart Hat .................................................................................................... 82
Figure 4.17 Bastet Animal Headpiece .................................................................................... 82
Figure 4.18 Marie Antoinette Wig .......................................................................................... 83
Figure 5.7 *She Kills Monsters* Renderings ................................................................. 112

Figure 5.8 Figure Drawing Image.................................................................................. 114

Figure 5.9 Figure Drawing Image.................................................................................. 115

Figure 5.10 John Singer Sargeant Portrait of Copy Work ............................................. 116

Figure 5.11 *Season of Echoes* Renderings ................................................................. 117

Figure 5.12 *Finding Neverland* Renderings ............................................................... 119
INTRODUCTION

“So fierce is the passion that burns within my heart, a raging forest fire, unstoppable and consuming.” -Michael Faudet

Stories. That’s what drives my life—it’s what ignites my soul. From a young age, I knew that I needed them as a strong force in my life. That insistence burning inside of me has taken different pathways throughout my life, but it’s always been there. It’s taken the form of devouring novels into the wee hours of the night, acting in plays, or imagining characters in perilous situations that then turn into short stories, poems, or even a novel. Stories have a potent power to change lives through inciting empathy in those that consume them. Although I didn’t know it at the time, when I found costuming, it would be another avenue in which I could be a central part of storytelling.

I started costuming early in my undergrad years. My professors fostered my interest and it became a central part of my education at Southern Utah University. I worked in the costume shop, as well as designed a number of productions there. It was obvious to me I had found a passion when tears slipped down my cheeks when my first design hit the stage. It started a small smoldering fire inside my heart, that grew throughout the years.

Yet, my plan for many years was to become an English teacher. So, I continued on that path. Becoming an English teacher excited me. I wanted to make a difference in
the lives of others, just as my teachers had done for me. The flames of passion I felt for
costuming were pushed aside and even buried a little. I found joy working with my
students. However, after some time in that profession, I knew I needed a change.

Around that same time, I had begun to design again. I designed a production of
*Julius Caesar* for an all-female company, Women of Will. Being a part of that production
reminded me how much I loved working in costuming, especially costume design. It
uncovered the coals of passion, reigniting my love. Shortly thereafter I designed *The
Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as well as *Newsies* for the Education department of the Utah
Shakespeare Festival. These productions threw my passion into a full-fledged forest fire.
The need to be part of this process felt all consuming.

With these unstoppable flames burning bright, I embarked on the journey to find
the right place for me to continue my education, eventually landing on the University of
South Carolina where I could get my MFA in Costume Design and Technology. I left a
career of stability, moved my family across the continent, and began my journey of
discovery and growth.
CHAPTER 1

AMADEUS

_Amadeus_ by Peter Shaffer was my first to-be-realized design assignment for grad school. Campbell Childers, my cohort, also served as co-designer. Campbell and I had built a strong relationship during our first semester, so it was a pleasure to work together on this project. We were able to rely on one another’s strengths in the quick design process. When we started, the director had not yet been chosen. We relied on collaboration with one another, as well as getting input from Kristy Hall, our mentor and professor, until we were able to begin collaborating with the director.

Our first step was to read the script. We read it separately, each delving into our own thoughts about the plot, but especially the characters. Whenever I am designing, I always read the play and write down my initial feelings and thoughts. This helps me later in the design process to think back to my gut reactions. I find that these gut reactions are often the most honest, and many times I am able to dig deeper and discover the motives of the characters or reasons behind those initial feelings. These notes later lead to specific design choices. I did just that for this process.

Campbell and I then began discussing our thoughts about the plot and characters together, which was a little bit unique, since many times, as a designer, you start the work alone. However, I found it extremely interesting and stimulating to hear a different
perspective from my own. Campbell immediately expressed her distaste for the play entirely. I held some similar views, but not so vehement. One of the biggest issues we agreed on was that the women held smaller roles, some not speaking at all in the play. We wrestled with that for a while.

We then began conducting research, mostly period based. It started very generally with research from 1781-1791, and 1823-1825, which are the time periods in which the play takes place. We wanted to get a solid understanding of the silhouettes of those times. Within that research, we also started to identify specific images that we felt true to certain characters.

Figure 1.1 General Research for *Amadeus*
We also started to do additional research as we began to write our concept paper. I admired the way Campbell dug into historical research and got to know the lives of the actual people upon whom this play is based. For Campbell, this caused quite a difficulty, because of how she felt it was strange to call this a historical play or anything even close to biographical for Salieri nor Mozart. It seemed odd to her that this story be told using real people who existed and were documented as inspiration for a play that could have been written by fictional people and perhaps still told the same story. She found herself feeling uncertain about this script since it felt like something very easily proved melodramatic but also intended to be believable. However, for me, I kept the realities of the lives of the men separate, and treated this as a separate work of art. I found it instructive to think about another’s viewpoint because each person has an individual relationship with a play. It allowed me to think about how I might react if I needed to design a play that I disliked, or had issues with. It helped me realize that it is important to find your way into a play, to make an emotional connection, even if it is a small one. Once that connection is made, then the process becomes easier, and doable.

For me, one of the ways into the play was through the way the play dealt with Salieri’s relationship toward God. The word Amadeus can be broken up to reveal its meaning. Ama comes from the Latin word Amare which means to love, and Deus means God. So, the title itself means to love god. As such, one of the main things that we wished to convey was Salieri’s journey from a pious Catholic who strives to obey all of God’s commandments and wishes to be His vessel, to a vindictive, jealous, bitter man who destroys another man’s life in order to spite God.
Additionally, we delved into the possibility of Salieri as an unreliable character. *Amadeus* is a memory play. It is told from the perspective of a dying man, who may or may not be telling the truth. This unreliability was an interesting avenue to think about portraying the characters through. They could be as Salieri remembers, not perhaps, as they truly were. Some of Campbell’s intensive research gave us a more solid base for that line of thought. Salieri lived with dementia the last year or so of his life.

From there, we started to imagine what characters might look like. Some of our original thoughts were as follows: Salieri should start more muted, and calm. He is pious, and therefore could be dressed traditionally for the time period. By the second act, after he has denounced God and promised to ruin Mozart, he will become more lavish, particularly, we imagine him in gold, representing his transition into worldliness. In contrast, Mozart will start in extravagance to match his personality at the beginning. He should feel childlike, and be bright and colorful. Then with the loss of his wealth, he will appear more as a pauper. The decline in Mozart should be definitive. The aesthetics between Salieri and Mozart should switch throughout the play so that we can understand them as foils for one another.

Constanze’s arc should be similar to that of Mozart’s. At the beginning of the play, she should seem young and vivacious. She should feel sumptuous and full of life. Then, as Mozart can’t find a job, she should lose the opulence, to become a bit more subdued and gentle.

Teresa is described as “la statua” or the statue, so we would like to embrace that. Her costume should be rigid, with cool colors, to show that she is standoffish. Katherine
should be her opposite. She should appear full of life, with warm colors, representing her vivacious tenacity for life. We feel that this contrast will help highlight their differences since neither of them have any spoken lines.

For the Venticelli, since they are Salieri’s “little winds” we want to include something that evokes wind or sky, such as the color blue and/or flowy fabric for their cravats or frockcoats.

Beyond that point, we felt we needed to have discussions with our director. Our first big question was what the intended cast size would be. The script was written in such a way where there was not only an undefined “ensemble” but also silent but significant roles such as Teresa, Katherina. Depending on how our director chose to cast we could end up having members of the Citizens of Vienna who step out of the crowd to represent these named characters or have those named characters be ever present within the Citizens but still recognizable as Teresa, Katherina, etc. Knowing how the cast will function in this way would be impactful both logistically and creatively.

Somewhat connected to this first concern was the way scene changes were structured. Because they flow into one another without breaks in action and the script notes mention having “servants” who do the physical scenic changes we wanted to clarify if that means the ensemble cast is responsible for those or if we will be responsible for costuming the run crew as well as the actors. Knowing this would help us more accurately plan for the scope of our show and the work required to realize it.

Another logistical and creative question we had was how we wanted to handle showing the passage of time, specifically with Salieri who was almost never offstage but
also transitioned from an old man to his young self multiple times throughout the play. We wanted to be sure to convey his changes through his clothing without slowing down the momentum of the piece.

Figure 1.2 Portrait Research for *Amadeus*

Our final big question was how much inspiration we wanted to take from history, especially with so many characters being real people with fairly public lives. Because of this we could actually reference portraits and other documentation of their lives and styles to portray with varying degrees of historical accuracy. Depending on our director’s
choices we felt we could lean more heavily on that specific research than we would in a typical production where our period research would be more broad.

From there we began to have conversations with our director, Ian Frank. He was able to answer some of our questions directly, while others he was unsure of how to answer at that point. We began to have more thematic discussions. For Ian, this play was an unburdening by the ghosts of the future, mainly Salieri unburdening himself to the audience. He also wanted to make sure that we had 3 nested realities, as seen in figure 1.3. That helped us solidify that the time period of costumes would be essential. When we talked about this, Ian was a little unsure, but later on in the process we showed him research images and he was more responsive to the images. This taught me the importance of visual research, especially when speaking to directors because they don’t have the same level of expertise or knowledge when it comes to clothing.

Figure 1.3 Amadeus Nested Realities
Another aspect we talked about was recognizing the sublime, or “that” feeling Salieri felt when he heard Mozart’s music. Within this, we talked about breaking realism and feeling the colors. Although that might not have relied solely on costumes, but the entire production team as a whole, especially lighting. That thought informed my thoughts about the design. I constantly thought back to these inspiration images as seen in figure 1.4.

![Inspiration Images](image)

Figure 1.4 *Amadeus* Inspiration Images

We then jumped into more specific research for each character, relying on our initial research as a jumping off point. This research specifically informed our rendering choices as well. As this was a codesign, we had to make some choices on how to render the show. We spoke with Kristy, and she helped us decide how to break it up. We had already started thinking of some characters as stagnant or still, while others we thought of as fluid, or with movement. Luckily, that break down was somewhat even. Campbell and I had implicit trust in each other because we knew we had the same vision when it came
to each character. We had discussed the characters enough and agreed on reference images.

Figure 1.5 Character Research for *Amadeus*
I drew those who were stagnant, while Campbell drew those with movement. For these sketches, Kristy had us use tracing paper over our reference images. When we finished our initial sketches, we handed over our sketches to the other, and she did the fine tuning. With this, we felt that artistically our figures looked cohesive enough to be one. We even had Kristy guess who drew which ones. For the most part, she was correct, but on a few they were similar enough that she wasn’t sure. From there, we went into the painting portion of the rendering process, returning to the figures we had initially sketched.

For Salieri, we chose to put him in a black suit, with green lining and a green waistcoat. Mozart was in a bright blue suit with yellow accents. He needed to stand out, and in some way the color, especially in relation to all other costumes, he represented the color of the music. We wanted to make sure that they contrasted one another. Later in the play, we planned to have the older Salieri in a nice dressing coat, with accents of red.
Constanze, as Mozart’s wife, we chose to put in a light pastel pink dress to show her youthfulness and to tie her into the magic of the music. Teresa, as Salieri’s wife, we put in muted tones, with a much more structured dress. She wore a striped riding suit. They needed to echo their husbands. Katerina, we chose to put in a slightly older silhouette because she was an opera singer. We wanted her to feel slightly more grand, and to stand out from the crowd. So, she wore a saque dress in floral.
Figure 1.7 Constanze, Teresa, and Katerina Renderings
For the court, Bonno, Von Strack, Van Sweiten, Rosenberg, and Joseph II, we decided to keep them in muted tones, so that Mozart and Constanze could stand out, and the court would be part of Salieri’s everyday world that was monotonous, and not part of the magic. We thought about the personalities of each member of the court, as well as titles Ian had given each member, to help inform our decisions on their costumes. Bonno, the fossil, was dressed in the fashion of a few decades before, indicating he was stuck in his times. Joseph II, the clueless king, was slightly more grand than everyone else, as an emperor. Von Strack, the rule follower, we put in a suit with many structured buttons, to emphasize his rigidity. Rosenberg, the artsy snob, had a lot of embellishments on his suit to show off his snobbery. Van Swieten, the Robot, wore a plain suit, exactly as would have been expected of him, nothing too fancy, nor too homely.
Figure 1.8 Court Renderings
The Venticelli, our story tellers, stood out a bit from the crowd. We put them in a warm color palate, with the man wearing a maroon suitcoat, the woman in a dress with the pink, red undertones. One of the big reasons for this, is that Constanze was aware of what was happening to her husband, and we wanted to tie the venticelli to her visually with the colors.

Lastly, the ensemble, would have been in very basic clothing of the time period. This would have needed to be under the costumes for other people. They would have needed to remove the pieces from their character to this look.

![Figure 1.9 Ensemble Renderings](image)

At this point we started pulling options from stock, looking at rentals with our designs as a jumping off point. We found some options that we liked for some of the looks in our own stock, while others we found some rental options. We discussed with
Kelly, the shop manager, and Kristy about what we could build. We decided that Mozart, Constanze, Teresa, and Katerina would be our builds. The ensemble dresses would be part of the understructure for Teresa and Katerina. We also found fabric for each of these builds, and we started draping them.

Figure 1.10 Katerina and Teresa Draping with Fabric Choices
For hair and wigs, we decided to rent some from Linda Nye. With this period, there was some very specific styling we hoped to achieve. Some actors natural hair wouldn’t have been able to be in that. I began to have conversations with her about our needs. She agreed to provide one for Venticelli, Salieri, Mozart, Teresa, and Constanze. We planned to wig others, but to do those wigs in house.

Figure 1.11 Wigs for *Amadeus* by Linda Nye

We began to have fittings with the actors, which were going extremely well. It was good to have conversations with the actors about how rehearsals were going, and how they felt about their characters. Some of our designs were shifting from our renderings due to what we had in stock and budget, but we felt good about how they were
evolving. One of our most happy finds was a suitcoat for our female venticelli that matched perfectly with the one for our male venticelli.

Then we left for spring break. I went on a backpacking trip, and had no service. I was excited to take a step back, connect with nature, and myself. If this were a usual semester, or year, this probably wouldn’t even make it into my thesis. However, these were not usual circumstances. It started with a message from Campbell when I got back to service, a link to an article titled “USC will extend spring break a week to ‘mitigate the spread’ of coronavirus.” We immediately started worrying about what that meant for us. We had left in the middle of a build, but we couldn’t return to campus even if we wanted to. Without that work week we knew we couldn’t start tech at the same time as originally scheduled. So, we waited to see what would happen.
Then, just days later, we got news that we would try to have at least one weekend of performances, pushing back everything. We were the lucky ones, we thought, because other performances were cancelled entirely. We held on hope that we could still have performances. As time progressed, we continued to wonder even if we did come back to campus, how would we make it all work. We, as much of the world, were naïve. We didn’t know what was coming, or how the entire world would be impacted. So many of
the decisions being made were with the best information they had, and in many cases, decision making was completely out of the hands of those in the department.

We never went back. The production was cancelled. Practically the entire world shut down. It was devastating for us, as it was for many others. We understood the reasons why, but that didn’t soften the blow. The work we had put our hearts into would never see the stage. And so, we pivoted. Our lives revolved around the computers in front of us. Staring at screens, people in little boxes became the world’s way of connecting with others. Zoom, or other similar software, was in high demand. The pandemic, and that initial shutdown, affected us all in ways I don’t know we even comprehend now. It will probably take years for us to uncover those wounds.
CHAPTER 2

SHE KILLS MONSTERS

*She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen was my second realized design of grad school. We came into the production with the lens of wanting to make sure it happened, even if we weren’t in person. The pandemic had shut down pretty much all in person theater globally, but there was a rise in virtual theater. There were a lot of questions, but regardless of that, I knew that preparation was going to allow me to be as successful as possible. With that in mind, I reached out to Lindsay Rae Taylor, the director, far in advance.

Before reaching out to her, I became quite comfortable with the script. I spent time getting to know the characters, and I made many connections to my own life. As I did this, the characters started to come to life for me. I’ve realized that when I design, empathy plays such a huge role for me. I get into their heads, their lives, their motivations and from there my design process springs to life.

Another thing I really wanted to focus on when designing was what the story we were telling was about. One of the things I wrote in my notes from my initial readings was: “Power of Imagination/Stories. Transcends the limitations of real life –allows people to confront larger issues.” In these few words, I knew I had found a seed of what I loved about this story, and stories in general. This play was a little microcosm of the
world, and especially in the climate of the world, with the pandemic, it was an opportunity to have a little bit of escapism.

This is the fertile headspace I was in when I started speaking with Lindsay. Our first discussion focused on the strong female characters. Lindsay especially wanted to celebrate the female form, and celebrate the “badass women.” Another quote we talked about in depth was a line that Tilly said after Agnes asked why they play, she said, “...we play because it’s awesome. It’s about adventures and saving the world and having magic. And maybe, in some small teeny capacity, I guess it might have a little do with wish fulfillment. Kelly gets to walk again and Ronnie gets to be super strong... I get the girl” (66). This quote tied directly into what I was already feeling about the power of stories. Other words that were mentioned during that meeting were loss, rebirth, and discovery.

The other part of the meeting was us addressing the fact that there were still so many questions about the how of this production. We were pretty sure it was going to be shared virtually, but was it going to be performed live, and streamed to others? Or was it to be prerecorded? If it was to be prerecorded, how? Would people be allowed to be on campus? Would it be recorded in people’s homes? And if so, then the question became, how would we get the costumes and other equipment to their homes? A big question for me was how much of their body would be seen if it was over zoom? We determined pretty quickly that we wanted to see their entire bodies at times, but other times it would be closer up. We knew we weren’t going to get answers right away, but it was still important to continue the process.
With all of this in the back of my mind, I jumped into research. I had just started playing Dungeons and Dragons for the first time over the pandemic, so that was helpful in understanding some of the play. Then, we were pretty sure we wanted to set it in the 90s like the original script, but there were some questions about licensing, and which version we were going to be doing, and the virtual realms version was set in modern day. So, I knew I needed to make decisions anyway so that my designs were done by the time school started. Luckily, I knew that a lot of fashion trends from the 90s were coming back. That worked in my favor.

I had massive amounts of research, or what I like to term as “brain candy” from which I could draw when thinking about characters. I narrowed it down into some of the research as seen in the figures to share with Lindsay.
Figure 2.1 *She Kills Monsters* Character Research
Overall Lindsay was extremely happy with where I was going, and felt that I was bringing the characters to life. One concern she had was with how sexualized many of the female characters were in many of the fantasy images I had brought. The sexualization of women in many videogames or other fantasy franchises is rampant. This was especially true for the images I had for Lillith. I completely agreed with her, so one of the thoughts I had going forward was how to make sure I stayed true to the characters and the research, while not having that sexualization. There were some specific problematic lines we talked about, and eventually were cut from the script.

The other big question was how we were going to deal with the monsters. If it had been on stage, it very likely would have been huge puppets, especially for Tiamat at the end. But with doing it virtually, I was thinking a little bit differently. Although the idea was not completely conceived, I started thinking about the creatures in bits and pieces. And my research started going in that direction. With the camera, we could film something that was much smaller in real life and make it seem big. So, as seen in the following images, my research started here.
Figure 2.2 Monster Research for *She Kills Monsters*
At this point I started sketching the characters. I decided to do them digitally as I had gotten an Ipad and felt that this would be a perfect opportunity to get to utilize the digital medium. I used the program Procreate. I used images to trace in the program, usually making that layer more transparent.

At this point, I was thinking about the liminality between the characters in the real world and the fantasy world. I wanted to make sure that I conveyed that. So for example, Orcus was this really laid back guy who didn’t necessarily even want to be part of the journey, so I felt that Ronnie also needed to be a modern version of that. Similarly, there was Evil Tina and Gabby, who were the Succubi cheerleaders that taunted Tillius, so the everyday version of them needed to be similar, to give off the popular, mean girl vibe.
I also started thinking about the levels within the game. Tillius was a high level paladin, the highest there could be. So, she was the only one I chose to put in actual armor. Whereas, for Lillith and Kaliope, they had something made out of leather, so it
would still offer them protection, but not to the same level as Tillius. Then, from there, I thought about how I could make their fantasy characters into something more modern.

Figure 2.4 Tillius, Lillith, and Kalioppe Renderings

Miles, and Miles the Barbarian had the least amount of liminality for their costumes because Miles the Barbarian is Tillius’s view of Miles, and it is the least accurate understanding.

Agnes was the average, everyday person. For her costume, it was a sweater with blue pants. The simplicity compared to others helped illustrate that. Vera, Agnes’s best friend, I chose to be a little bit more eccentric. She wore a skirt or dress with a sweater overtop. Her look was finished off with a hat. For Chuck, the dungeon master, I used a
reference image from one of my little brother’s best friends. They had played D&D for ages. He wore oversized clothing, then also added a cape for when he was doing the DMing. None of these characters had a fantasy version of themselves.

For Farrah, the fairy, I chose to put her in wings, a longer dress, with an undersuit of branches peeking through. This showed both the cute, feminine side of the fairy, as well as the darker side of her. The narrator was very much based off of the Lord of the Rings character, Galadriel, as described by the script.

For the monsters, I drew the entire character after doing some more research to get to understand them. I didn’t think about how I would accomplish them at this point. I focused more on the design aspect. Later on, the bugbear and kobold were cut completely before I got to the painting stage of the rendering.

Figure 2.5 Monsters Sketches
I then began to paint my images. This turned into a bit of a collage and digital painting mix. For example, for the Narrator, I found a texture, or a fabric and then used that as my base to paint over. Within procreate, I used many layers to create the effects that I wanted. Whereas with the Farrah rendering, I digitally painted the entire rendering without using any underlying textures. I used my best judgement in which method to use in the renderings.

Figure 2.6 Narrator and Farrah Renderings

One of the other things I had to think about was the use of green screens. I could not use any green in my designs. This was especially difficult when I thought about Kariope, the elf. Because elves in my mind are deeply tied to nature, so I think it started subconsciously, but I ended up tying her to the nature of Southern Utah, which has the red rocks mixed with the blue skies.
I specifically chose to use the color palates of the characters to further illustrate the connections between the real versions and the fantasy versions. Tina and Gabby were in pinks and purples, while Orcus was in reds. I put Lilly in blacks and dark blues, and Kariope in oranges and blues. Tilly was in reds and yellows/golds. I chose to tie Agnes together to Tilly through the yellow color. I specifically wanted a sweater that had ribbing that reminded one of the armor that Tillius wore.

Figure 2.7 Renderings of Fantasy and Reality Characters Illustrating Color Palate

Throughout the rendering process, I would have check-ins with Kristy and there were different iterations of the background, and making sure that I pushed the shadows. I got to a point where I just wanted to be finished, but then I pushed a little farther, and they ended up being so much better. The following shows different iterations of the same rendering in different stages.
It was decided that the program OBS would be used to share the production. It was also decided that instead of filming at home, the production would be filmed one person at a time in front of a green screen in the Longstreet Theater, and then would be composited into a background. From that moment on, I began to think of this project more as a film project. It meant that scenes would not be filmed in order. This gave costumes a unique position to request that all scenes that had fantasy characters be filmed later. So before even moving into the shop, I started to break down the script into different sections, as seen in the figure below.
With this information, I was able to talk to Kelly and Kristy about shop needs, as well as Lindsay about what we could accomplish by when. It was agreed upon that all of the reality scenes would be filmed first, and then later, the fantasy scenes. With this, we began having discussions in the shop about what could be built, pulled, or bought. From that, it was decided that Farrah’s dress, Kalioppe’s outfit, the Narrator’s dress, Miles’s barbarian vest, and Tillius’s body armor would be built. Farrah’s body suit would need to be painted. We also knew that the cheerleader outfits might need to be built, but we were to look at other options first. We gave Lindsay, and Lisa, the Stage Manager, feasible dates about when things could be built. From there, a production schedule was created. With that production schedule, I created another piece of crucial paperwork that we constantly referred to. The schedule, with which characters were in the scene planned to be filmed that day.

Figure 2.9 She Kills Monsters Character Breakdown
Figure 2.10 *She Kills Monsters* Schedule

Another thing that I discussed with Kristy was the need for a costumer to be there each day. We didn’t have a wardrobe crew like we would with a normal theater production. Kristy was able to arrange Kennedy, a third year grad student, to be there most nights. According to the needs, other students, Kelly, or I would be there as well. Some of that was put in the schedule, but we later discovered that it had to be much more according to the needs of the nightly call.

For each of the pieces that were built, I had conversations with the people who were to drape the garment. We talked through any questions they had after seeing the rendering. I also sourced fabric for the pieces as well. After auditions, we got the measurements for each cast member. Campbell draped both Farrah’s dress and Kaliopé’s outfit. Kelly draped the Narrator’s dress. She also ended up making the cheerleader outfits. Kyla was my assistant designer, and she also assisted me in building the armor. Mason, one of our undergraduate workers, would paint the body suit for Farrah. We also had conversations about when what needed to be done, so Campbell focused on Kaliopé first because that was to be filmed before Farrah.
When it came to the Narrator, another level of difficulty was added because the actor, Jen Sanchez was in a different state, and was to be filmed in front of a green screen in her own home. So, Kelly and I made the plan to send her a mock up with some basic fitting supplies, then had her do the best she could with fitting it according to our instructions. The mailed it back to us so the pattern could be altered. Due to mailing time,
we knew that we wouldn’t be able to fit the final garment again. But, we felt okay about that because the pattern alterations weren’t too intense from the first mockup fitting.

![Figure 2.12 Narrator in Front of Green Screen](image)

We also began to have fittings for the modern characters right away. It was wonderful to get to work with the actors, and to show them the renderings, and to talk about the characters. For many of the actors, the show was a little bit of a strange process for them because they didn’t have an entire rehearsal process before performing the scenes to be filmed, and they also weren’t used to that process. They didn’t feel like they
had the opportunity to really get to know the characters, but they did feel that the
costumes helped them know and understand the characters a little bit better.

Because of COVID-19, we also had very strict protocols when it came to fittings,
and how garments would be dealt with before and after. This made the process a lot more
difficult and time consuming. For example, everything had a quarantine period before we
had any fittings. It sat for 72 hours, untouched, in a different area. We then had the
fitting—the actor in gloves, a mask, and goggles, and the costumer in gloves, mask, and
face shield. Afterward, the costumes were put back in quarantine for another 72 hours
before they could be worked on again. We accomplished this by putting a rack with paper
dividers for each day. We then knew which day the fittings had been, and when it was
safe to work on them again according to protocol.

Another concern we had to work through before filming started was how to keep
the actors at least 6 feet apart in fitting areas. For this purpose, we had to come up with
extra fitting spaces. The solution was to use the two fitting rooms on the main floor, one
of the fitting rooms downstairs, and then a conference room behind the theater. This
precaution allowed actors to remove their masks for short periods of time to apply their
makeup before putting their mask back on again. I also sent emails to all of the actors
with their modern makeup/hair looks, and asked them to send a picture to me before the
first day they started filming. This allowed for any problem solving to happen before
shooting.

While all of these logistical conversations were happening, I still continued to
work on the creative side of things. The monsters became a big focus. Linsday and I had
some good conversations about what it might look like. We didn’t want to see the whole monster, especially when it came to Tiamat. A similar idea would happen for some of the other monsters. We started to look at options for 3D printing for the monsters.

When it came to actors who were not strictly human in the D&D world, I started to turn to makeup as a solution. One of the big things to work through was my original idea for the Succubi, which was their skin looking cracked, revealing the monstrous side of bullies. This type of makeup would have taken skilled hands, and especially with COVID-19, there wasn’t a wardrobe or makeup person. The makeup needed to be completed by the actor themselves. Lindsay and I had some conversations, and I rethought about what they could be. For Orcus, a big part of the design was a tattoo design on his arms and face. I found a place to get those tattoos made. We worked with Lindsay and Lisa to schedule times when the actors were not being filmed to have practice days for the makeup looks. This allowed me to give the actors feedback, as well as letting them build confidence in applying the makeup.

Figure 2.13 Monster Makeup featuring Lillith, Farrah, Evil Tina, and Orcus
For the 3D printing monsters, I found some files, mostly on a website called www.thingiverse.com. It allowed me to find specific things that I wanted to be printed. Kristy’s husband, Rick from Studio Mayday, agreed to print these for us, and then Kristy would paint them. I provided a list of things I wanted to be printed. Then, Rick, Kristy, Lindsay and I talked about how we wanted the individual pieces to potentially be utilized.

One thing we had to think about for the production was continuity. That was another reason why it was so important that a costumer be present every night. Kennedy was able to be there many nights. She took pictures each night that were then uploaded to a google drive so that others could refer back to this. If someone else was there, they did the same thing, or referred to the pictures. The costumer also watched throughout filming, and would fix things.
It was a wonderful experience to see my designs come to life, even if it was only in front of a green screen. I saw that the designs I had rendered were now a reality. They were also remarkably accurate to my renderings, which I found to be satisfying. This helped me realize the power of renderings. It allows you as the designer to truly express the desire you have for the character. It is also a wonderful tool to use in fittings, and for the entire shop to see the vision you have.

For some hair needs, I reached out to Linda Nye again. She was able to provide a wig for the actor who was in California, as the Narrator. She also provided a hair piece.
for the Kaliope character, over which we used the actors own hair. Then, I also bought a wig for Farrah, and Mason was able to style it. For the other actors, just like with the makeup, I gave them images, and they styled their hair themselves.

When filming started, it quickly became apparent that filming scenes was taking longer than anticipated. They would work through each scene, talking about it, since they had never rehearsed it before, then began filming. Each actor was filmed, one at a time, with multiple shots. The rest of the actors would read their lines, as they tried to make sure they got the correct sight lines that would make sense with the storyboard. This also meant that the number of people in the scene exponentially increased the amount of time each scene took.

The majority of people doing this were theater people who had never done film before. Lindsay was also virtual, so Lisa did the best she could under the circumstances. However, this became an extremely tense and stressful situation for many people involved. Each night we would get a schedule that would tell us what would be happening the next day, but it was often different from the master schedule we had. That led to actors getting into costume and makeup but never being in front of the camera. As a costume team this led to not knowing which costumes would be used which days, as well as not being sure if on some days someone extra would need to be there. When it was days of filming with few characters, one person could handle it, but on days when many people were being filmed, the workload increased, and more people would need to be there.
Once the fantasy characters started to be filmed, this became exacerbated. An extra person always needed to be there. Actors were frustrated, as were we as costume personnel. A big reason why this was so important was the number of tattoos I had
ordered for Orcus. I had based my number off of the schedule, even getting some extras, but if the schedule continued the way it was going, then Orcus would not have enough tattoos to finish filming. It also took time away from us, and time away from filming. I spoke with Kristy and Kelly about the issue at length. They took the issue on, and things changed after that point. They tried to make sure that they planned the schedule being more aware of who would be in costume when. Although it didn’t fix the problem entirely, the situation greatly improved.

Filming continued, but the editing process was happening at the same time. It was taking a lot longer than anticipated. We started to see images coming back to us of the figures composited onto the background images. It definitely felt different to see that process than it did to have an opening night.
For the monsters, we determined that the actors holding or manipulating the creatures would need to be in full body green screen suits. During filming that day, it was a lot like watching little kids play with toys while Lindsay coached them a little to get the effects that she hoped would work based off of our conversations. Some of the pieces were static, and did not move, while others were made of material that could be moved and articulated.

Figure 2.17 Production Images featuring Monster Parts

47
One of the issues we had to deal with during filming was from the fabric I had chosen for the orange leather for Kaliope’s costume. It was not real leather, and it started to peel. What we had to do was cut the pattern piece of that fabric and reconstruct it once it got to a point where it was too bad.

Figure 2.18 Kaliope in Front of Green Screen
Also, for the Succubi I had ordered wings from overseas, but due to COVID-19, they weren’t arriving. Customs, and shipping in general was taking longer than usual. We ended up finding wings that worked, but weren’t exactly what I imagined. When Mason painted the horns for the Succubi, she also painted the wings. It actually ended up working out better than we had hoped, because the wings were moveable, and the actors were able to use them in more diverse ways to be more expressive. It was a good experience in problem solving.
It was very satisfying to see the characters come to life. I did miss aspects of a live production, but was happy that I was able to design something at all. After the production was done being filmed, and I had seen the final product, one of the biggest things I wish had happened was better communication between the scenic/background designer and myself. Especially with one background, I felt that the color palette of the background was extremely similar to the color palette of the Succubi. If there would have been better communication, or more time for editing before the production started, I would have loved to see if that could have changed.
Overall, the process of working on She Kills Monsters was a rewarding one. I feel that through the costumes, I was able to convey the story, and help build the world of the play. The use of the liminality between the modern day and fantasy characters was successful, especially as the audience joined Agnes in her journey of discovery.
I learned a lot from this production. Some of my biggest takeaways are the power of preparation, organization, creativity, and collaboration. I feel that I was able to show my strength in each of these areas throughout the process. Had I not had the initiative to work ahead, and been prepared from the very start, the entire course would have been different. Also, the organization I used helped me, as well as others, know what needed to happen when, so that we could all do our best work and get it done on time. This project pushed me creatively. I was able to come up with exciting concepts and solutions to problems that people in the industry had never faced before due to the pandemic. This process also allowed me to work collaboratively with a number of people, and it was through those successful collaborations that the costumes were a success.
The following design was a dance design. I worked with choreographer Jen Deckert. When I first started with this design, there was a possibility I would be designing more than one dance piece for the spring concert, but throughout the process, I ended up working only on Jen’s piece.

Our first conversation started very generally, by Jen describing her idea for the piece. She spoke about different seasons overlapping, and that she would love for there to be the seasons represented. She also knew there would be a number of sections, and that due to COVID, most likely most of the dancers would not be touching. She mentioned that there was a set of twins who might be able to be paired together in a section. However, it would be performed onstage.

Within the first meetings, Kristy mentioned some of my renderings I had done for a project that went with the feeling of the piece, and I sent Jen those to see. She responded with some inspiration images, as well as some of the music that she would most likely be using for the piece.
Figure 3.1 Dance Renderings used as Inspiration

I immersed myself in the music, listening to it repeatedly and let myself feel all the emotions. While still steeped in that emotion, I started visual research. A good portion of that was images that emphasized the movement of fabric. The magical visual language of this movement moved me.
Additionally, I started thinking of the importance of texture within the design. At first, I wasn’t sure if that was the way the fabric was dyed, or different layers of fabric. I found more inspiration images, a number of which were oil paintings, where you could see the dimensionality of the paint. This felt true to the texture of the music as I listened.
This led me to explore ways of having dimensionality within my design. This led me to appliques as texture. As I did research, the appliques had the same feel of the painting but in fabric form. I also felt excited about the many possibilities that the appliques could afford as far as when I thought about the inspiration images that Jen had shared with me.

When I had my meeting with Jen and Kristy, they were happy with the direction I was going. We also discussed that there would likely be a male dancer, so to think about how I might want to costume him. Kristy encouraged me to keep going and to define what each person would look like more definitely. I began to think about each person within seasons, and found a lot of inspiration from bouquets of flowers I felt encompassed each season, which then led to defining color palettes. As I did this research, I continued to listen to the music letting the emotion guide me.
Figure 3.4 Pinterest board of Color Palate and Season Inspiration

I then moved on to more specifics. I started looking for appliques and lace that I thought would work for the different seasons. It was helpful to find the specific appliques because it was both an inspiration as well as helpful logistically. Eventually I used photoshop to create a master design plan. This helped me to compare how the different seasons looked together as well as tying different seasons together so that if they appeared together, they would still look cohesive. I also created an entire unified look for the entire piece in this phase of my design.
Figure 3.5 Photoshopped Design Plan for Each Season
Sketching was my next phase. At this point in my journey artistically, I felt comfortable with sketching from inspiration images. So, I started with the bodies. It was very exciting to be able to have dynamic dance poses. For the purposes of making sure that the design was understood before we left on winter break, I started with just three of the designs. One of which was the male figure so that we could have conversations about that aspect of the design. I first drew him with tights or leggings, but in the end, we decided to have the male figure in a skirt because we decided it was about the movement of the skirts and the texture of the tops, and regardless of gender, that was the story we were telling. In the end, we didn’t have a male dancer.

Figure 3.6 Season of Echoes Sketches at Different Stages
As I continued sketching, I tried to make sure that I got into the right headspace as I sketched. One thing I did was do yoga before sketching. This was an interesting way to get into the right headspace, but it helped me connect to the body, which was such an essential part of this design. Doing the deep breathing also calmed my mind, getting me into an abundant headspace for creativity.

After doing the bodies, I then moved to the skirts and the fine details of the appliques. I really focused on capturing the movement of the skirts and how the fabric interacted with the body. I could feel the difference and improvement artistically from previous design processes.

We also began having conversations about how to make this happen logistically because this piece was being worked on simultaneously with another show. This was one of the first times that a costume design student was working with a dance professor to create a design. We were able to talk with Kathleen, who had worked with dance in the past, to do some of the building, so that it wouldn’t interfere with working on the theater show.

I also spent quite a bit of time looking for the right skirt fabric. This was a little bit difficult because the ordering was done online, and I enjoy being able to feel the fabric and look at the drape. I also had to consider how the fabric content would dye. I found one option, and ordered it, however, because of the large quantity that I needed, they told me that they didn’t have enough. So, I went back to the drawing board and found another option. It was a milliskin tricot that ended up being wonderful. Then, I ordered some skintone mesh for the bodices, as well as the appliques that were needed.
Another thing we talked about was hair, and masks. Originally, my idea was to try to tie in the appliques on the face, and the mask. I also thought about wrapping the appliques around the head. My ideas were super exciting, however, in the end, we decided to forego that idea due to time in producing the piece. For the hair, I thought about having the hair in three buns, but Jen felt it would detract from the piece, because it felt too syfy and I could see where she was coming from, and ultimately agreed. Instead, we kept it simple by having masks dyed the same color as the skirt, and having a bun.

For my painting process, I continued to use exercise and stretching as a gateway to a good headspace. Kristy encouraged me to move a bit faster than I was used to, and to push the shadows. I feel like I was able to accomplish that. I spent one night mixing most of the colors, so that when I started painting, that I could move quickly. I also tried to make sure that the texture of the lace and appliques was readable.
Kathleen was able to build the skirts. She made most of them before we had a cast, so we were able to get into them into fittings fairly quickly. We had anticipated that she help with the tops as well, but in the end, she was only able to work on the skirts. I draped and patterned a number of sizes for the shirts based on their measurements, and then fit the mesh stretch tops to the dancer. One of the concerns that Jen had was making sure that the tops stayed down. The solution to that was to have an opening in the side seam where buttons were sewn to the leotard beneath to anchor the skirts to. The skirts
then had little pieces of elastic, or ballet loops to attach them to. The mesh would not have been sturdy enough to hold the weight of the skirts.

![Figure 3.8 Season of Echoes Costumes on mannequins](image)

I spent a lot of time pinning the appliques to the mesh tops, staying true to my designs many of the times, but also adding a bit here and there to make it look better. In the fittings, I made sure that on each dancer’s body, the appliques laid correctly, so that we could sew them correctly. Another thing that was really important was getting the
skirts to be vibrant, so I spent a lot of time on that, ombreing each skirt individually. (See TECHNICAL CHAPTER for more details)

Figure 3.9 Production photo of Season of Echoes

It was wonderful to see the movement of the skirts in tech rehearsal. The color of the skirts, combined with the flow was a superb achievement. I felt great satisfaction watching. There were a few little tweaks that needed to be made, such as altering the hemlines of a few of the skirts because the bias had stretched.
Figure 3.10 Production photo of Season of Echoes

Figure 3.11 Production photo of Season of Echoes
The collaboration with Jen Deckert was a wonderful one. It allowed me to be creative and explore the emotion of the piece, and ultimately create costumes that helped tell this story of connection and beauty in different seasons of our lives.
CHAPTER 4

TECHNICAL COSTUMING

Academic Instruction

One of the biggest reasons I chose the University of South Carolina for my MFA was the combination of both the design side as well as the technical side. During my time, I was able to take a number of classes that aided me in my growth on the technical side of things.

I took both flat patterning, as well as draping. I already had learned these skills during my undergrad when working in the costume shop there, but Kelly Renko Clarkson, as an instructor, helped me hone my skills, and expand my knowledge of this subject.
Each week we worked on something different, practicing specific skills. Some of the more difficult silhouettes were a good challenge for me to think about, such as the keyhole bodice as seen in the top left of Figure 4.1. Then, for our final project we draped a dress that utilized the majority of those skills.
Figure 4.2 Flat Patterning Final Dress
Figure 4.3 Draping Projects

We followed a similar pattern for draping. I appreciate flat patterning as a skill, however, taking these classes helped me solidify that I like to drape more than flat pattern. I enjoy the process of manipulating the fabric on the dress form and seeing something come to life. I also think that draping allows for more organic shapes, which I find to often be more visually stimulating
This class continued normally, until it was disrupted by COVID-19. We were able to bring a mannequin to our homes and continue working on things on our own. For our final project for this class, we draped a bias dress.
Another class I took was a dyeing and distressing class taught by Valerie Pruett. We learned a variety of dyeing techniques, including shibori, tie dye, batik, ombre, stamping, and more. We also used different types of dye, like RIT, as well as acid dyes. This class taught me a lot about the scientific nature of dyeing, but it is also combined with a creative eye.

Figure 4.5 Dyeing Projects
We also did some distressing projects. One of my favorites was where we took a
dress we built, ombred, and then distressed. It took a lot of work to get it to a point where
it would be readable from stage. I learned that you will usually need to go darker than
you think.

Figure 4.6 Distressed Dress
Another class that increased my knowledge of some technical sides of theater was a hybrid class with Valerie. It covered makeup, wigs and hair, and millinery. For this class, I designed and did the renderings of the costumes and hair and makeup for some characters. I was also part of the undergraduate course where I refined makeup skills, as well as learning some new techniques. We had a couple of weeks where we focused on special effects makeup.

Figure 4.7 Gore Projects
At the end of this, we used those skills in creating a zombie look. I had chosen to do a 1920s zombie, so it allowed me to do a period makeup look as well as doing special effects. I used latex, gelatin, fresh scab, and 3rd Degree to accomplish the special effects.

Figure 4.8 Zombie Project
For my Wind in the Willows character, I learned how to apply a prosthetic piece, as well as using airbrush makeup. This helped me understand how I could change the shape of a face to look more animal like.
Figure 4.10 Roller Sets

For the wig and hair side of things, we learned how to do different types of roller sets. We did brick lays, pin curls, and spiral sets. From there, we also started to do some historical hair styles.
Figure 4.11 Historical Hairstyles
This led to me also incorporating hair design into my designs for the characters I was doing the makeup for. One of these was a drag queen. I started with a wig, did a roller set, and styled it, with the help of Valerie, the instructor. For this project, I also had a model, so I also got the practice of working on someone else.
For my Lady Macbeth, I also styled a wig. I incorporated victory rolls into this hairstyle. She was designed to be from 1940s. We also created a tattoo design for this character.
The class moved into more stylized makeups. We had the assignment to do a day of the dead Titania. Once again, I had a model for this makeup. I styled a wig once again, and completed the makeup on her. If I did this look again, I would have tried to add more contrast in the features and contours. Especially in the bright light, the color combination that I used did not read. I was happy with the design overall though.
The final makeup I did was a Caliban that was inspired by being of the forest. I used latex to attach the pieces that added dimension to the face. I also styled my own hair for this one. I used some age makeup techniques from the painting on the face, making the character look older.
For the millinery part of this class, I built a number of hats/headpieces. For the buckram hat, I did a little sweetheart hat. It was fun to choose fabrics that complimented one another, along with making the flowers adorning the hat from different fabrics.

Figure 4.17 Bastet Animal Headpiece
I also created an animal headpiece built on a baseball cap, made out of foam, tape, and papier-mâché. I used the Egyptian goddess Bastet as my inspiration. After it was built to the correct proportions, it was painted, and I used a ping pong ball to create the eyes, and some leather to create the eyelids. I learned the importance of the eye shape. This was where I struggled the most.

One of the more difficult things I did was create a Marie Antoinette wig on a fosshape base. First, I had to create the fosshape base, and make sure it fit the head. After that, I used wire to create a cage. I then sewed the hair on. From there, I styled it. The hair said it was human hair, so when I did a curler set, it didn’t curl. I also learned that it might have been helpful to have even longer hair especially for the base of the neck. Or to have the cage a little bit shorter. I feel like this was a great learning experience, even if it didn’t turn out exactly how I would have liked.

Figure 4.18 Marie Antoinette Wig
Another class was one where we researched a specific time period and learned about the underpinnings from that time. I chose the 1910s. We conducted extensive research and narrowed it down to what we wanted to build.

Figure 4.19 Combination and Corset Research
From there, we decided on an ensemble of undergarments. We sourced the fabric and hardware. I built a combination, and a long line corset. We draped the garments, had fittings, adjusted the patterns, and then created the actual garments. For the combination, I learned how to sew in insert lace. I also dyed the ladder lace used at the waist to match the fabric.

For the corset, I sourced a silk for the fashion fabric, then used coutil for the underlayer, with Prussian tape for the boning channels. The most difficult thing with the corset was all of the grommets. It was very time consuming, but in the end, looked fantastic.
Figure 4.20 Combination and Corset Project
Each of these classes taught me extremely valuable skills that will help me in my career in costuming. The classes I took earlier in my time at the University of South Carolina helped me in assignments that I had later on. I am extremely grateful for the instructors as they helped me navigate the new skills, and improve the old.
Costume Shop Builds

Another very valuable piece of my education at the University of South Carolina was working in the costume shop working on the mainstage shows. While there, I worked on countless numbers of alterations, as well as being part of fittings, constructing, and draping. Each garment I worked on taught me some valuable lessons.

During my first semester, I worked on a number of dresses for Much Ado About Nothing, designed by Kristy Hall. One of the other graduate students served as the draper. It was interesting to work with her. I learned about how to communicate with a draper when there were some questions I had, as well as some useful things to make sure are on the pattern. Some of these garments I constructed myself, while others I oversaw a stitcher or two to complete the garment. Campbell was also a first hand on some of the garments as well.
Another project that I worked on was for Eurydice, designed by Kennedy Roberts. I was also an assistant designer for this show. I started by draping a dress, had a fitting, then built the dress, with the organza flatlined to a heavier muslin. It was apparent to me that the organza would not have the stability needed to hold the weight of all of the balloons. I even had a discussion with Kennedy about the fact that the green would probably not be seen at all, and if we wanted to only have muslin underneath the balloons. However, Kennedy did want to have the green, so that is why it was flatlined together.

To attach the balloons, I got ribbon and sewed the balloons to it. There was a color pattern to it. I used a Teflon foot. Once the balloons were sewn to the ribbon, I then
sewed the ribbon to the dress. This process took months to complete. It was extremely time consuming. Every once in a while I would get help from another stitcher to sew some balloons to ribbons, but for the most part I completed it myself. This project taught me patience, perseverance, and to use a little creativity in the process.

Figure 4.22 Balloon Dress Process Photos

Another thing for this dress was building a tutu/petticoat to go underneath. Kennedy wanted the dress to be big. Especially with the weight of the balloons, for this to happen, it needed something sturdy. Kelly, the shop manager, was a big help as I
discussed with her how to accomplish this. I sewed channels in the petticoat and used metal hooping inside that. During tech, however, it was decided that this was too big, and it was taken out.

Figure 4.23 Eurydice Balloon Dress Photo  -- Designed by Kennedy Roberts
Campbell and I designed *Amadeus*. We also were draping for the show. I started draping dresses for Katerina and Teresa. For this project, I had to make sure that the undergarments were the correct shape over which to drape. It was set in the 1700s, so having a corset, as well as a pannier for Katerina’s dress was essential. For Teresa’s, I needed a corset, bum pads, and a petticoat to drape over. I spent a bit of time looking at historical patterns for saque gowns while draping Katerina’s dress. It was fun to figure out the historical garments.

![Amadeus Draping Photos](image)

Figure 4.24 *Amadeus* Draping Photos

Unfortunately, as was mentioned in an earlier chapter, due to the coronavirus pandemic, production was shut down, and these dresses were never built. I still feel like I learned a lot from this process about draping for historical time periods.

For *She Kills Monsters*, while designing, I also built armor for Tillius the Paladin. I had worked with Worbla before, attending a USITT conference. So, I took this on, with the help from Kyla, my assistant designer, to do the boots. To start the process, I taped
out the actress's body, then put it on a mannequin that I padded out to exactly her shape. From there, I drew the approximate shape of the armor to make pattern pieces.

Figure 4.25 *She Kills Monsters* Tillius Armor Process Photos

I used craft foam and worbla for the actual armor. For the moveable pieces, I used the gold head fasteners used for office supplies. One of the problems I encountered during the fitting was on the shoulder piece that the actress couldn’t move her arms up because it restricted her mobility, so I had to reshape that piece. For the most part, it fit
her like a glove. I was pretty close to her size, so I also would try it on from time to time to see how it would look.

Figure 4.26 *She Kills Monsters* Tillius Armor Painted

The next phase of the project was the painting process. First, I used multiple layers of modge podge to prep for painting. Then, I made the jewels with hot glue on tinfoil, then painted it with nail polish. I spray painted all of the pieces black, followed by using a sponge to apply the gold to give it a tarnished look. The paint really made it look like real armor.
The next two projects I was working on simultaneously. For *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged* designed by Kyla Little I draped an outfit for the character Daniel. This show was double cast, so I draped one while someone else draped for the other cast member. It was interesting to talk to one another throughout the process to see what was similar and what was different. I draped the bodice, and flat patterned the
breeches. In the first fitting there were some alterations to the pattern that needed to be made, especially when it came to the petals on the bottom of the bodice. This came together pretty quickly, which was good because I was in the middle of designing and working on the dance piece at the same time. It was a good lesson in working on multiple projects at the same time.

Figure 4.28 The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged Production Photo – Designed by Kyla Little
For the dance piece I designed choreographed by Jen Dekert, I used the skills I had learned from the dyeing class. I wanted to make sure I got the right colors, so I spent the time recording meticulously the recipes as I tried to get the right colors for the skirts. I then discussed with Jen which colors she liked best.

Figure 4.29 Season of Echoes Dye Process Shots

Once that was decided, I took about a week to dye all of the skirts. Each one was ombred by making sure that I constantly was moving the fabric so that there were no distinct lines. I also dyed masks to match the skirts as well.
This process really helped me gain confidence in the dyeing process. I was proud of the vibrancy of colors for the skirts. They matched the vibrancy of the applique and lace pieces on the top.

For You on the Moors Now designed by Campbell Childers, I draped two pieces, and built three. For the character Jane Eyre, I draped a dress, then built two versions of it. One was an every day version, and the other was a more fantastical version. We deemed it the star dress. I also draped a pantsuit for Marmee.

The most complicated parts of patterning Jane Eyre’s dress included the sleeves as well as the pleated bodice. For the sleeves, there was an under sleeve, over which there were pleated details on the top, which opened up after a band that controlled the pleats.
The bodice also had a control layer underneath it. For the everyday dress the sleeves and waistband were of a contrasting fabric.

The star dress had a blue layer of fabric, and a sheer black fabric with stars. The two layers were flatlined together for the top of the dress. On the bottom they were their own individual layers. The pleating for this version of the dress took a lot more precision. But the end result looked stunning.

One problem with this dress that we had to deal with was due to Covid protocols, the dress was put in the dryer each night after performances to kill any bacteria. This fabric was not meant to be washed, so it was not prewashed. This caused shrinkage, which caused the zipper to pop because of the change in size. So, mid production, the zipper had to be replaced.
I also created the pattern for Marmee. It was a pant suit with giant legs meant to look like a skirt. In the fitting, I had sewn in horsehair to the bottom of one of the sides, but not the other so that our designer could see the difference.

She did like the silhouette better with the horsehair in, so we went ahead and used that for both pant leg hems. It turned out looking like the hoop skirt feel that Campell wanted as a designer.
Each opportunity I had in the shop furthered my education. I learned a lot with each project I worked on. I was especially grateful for the help I received from Kelly, the shop manager because she shared her expertise in the technical side of costumes when I had questions. My experiences here were irreplaceable, and even with COVID-19 happening, it was wonderful to have the production experiences.
CHAPTER 5

ARTISTIC JOURNEY

Another aspect of grad school has been my artistic journey. While elements of that have been shared via discussing my design processes, I feel it important to dissect the process further because it has been an element of huge growth during this program.

When I entered the program, I had not taken an art class since middle school. Most of what I knew came self taught. Kristy recommended the book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* to me before I started the program, and I began to do some of the exercises from the book. As I did these exercises, it helped me start to see my growth.

So, when I began my first semester in Kristy’s costume design class, she had us do copy work. When I turned the rendering in, I remember Kristy telling me that I had shown her that I could do things “right” but that I should work on trying to be more free with my art. Looking back at this, I can see my precision, and the use of tools I knew how to use, or had at the time. I think I had a control of the detailed shapes, but still needed to work on the use of color, and new mediums, including watercolor, and other paints.
Figure 5.1 Copy work

Our first big design project was a theoretical design of *In the Red and Brown Water* by Tarell Alvin McCraney. This artistic process started with finding references images to trace. We used tracing paper to get the figures right. I think at this point, I didn’t have a good understanding of the anatomy of a figure. But tracing something helped me to start understanding.
Figure 5.2 *In the Red and Brown Water* Renderings
From there, we scanned the images and adjusted them in Photoshop to then print them on watercolor paper. I had never used watercolor before in my life, so I was nervous to get started. Kristy did a demo for us in class, and then I started. I was nervous doing it, but as I continued the process, I started to feel more comfortable. Kristy gave us feedback along this process, and helped us improve our renderings. I think at this point, I was still feeling very cautious in my painting and felt afraid to make mistakes.

Looking back at these renderings, I can see some that are more successful than others. I see where my strengths were, as well as my weaknesses. One place where I can see a strength is the leg on Elegba’s pants. You can see the movement of the fabric and the dimension. Whereas on many of the other pairs of pants that same dimension is not there. That was the biggest thing that I needed to work on.

During my second semester, for Amadeus, we employed a similar process for sketching. However, when tracing this time I was much more aware of line quality and the details of the hands and facial features. When drawing, Kristy helped me understand how to dig in and have thicker lines when drawing something with shadow, or especially with facial features.

This was an interesting project artistically because Campbell and I worked together when designing, and then Kristy had us switch renderings after she gave us notes to fix. It felt a little strange to be working on a rendering I had not done originally. However, this gave me the opportunity to see drawing objectively, and each of us had differing strengths and weaknesses.
Figure 5.3 *Amadeus* Renderings
For this painting process, we had to be quick due to deadlines. I felt more comfortable with watercolor this time around. In this project, it was reinforced how to include a shadow especially on white fabric, as seen in Katerina’s rendering. I also tried to keep the organic shape of shadows on fabric, which was successful as seen in the Male ensemble. Looking back, I still see that it would have been better to continue to push the shadows darker, and having more defined facial features. But, there was an improvement.

During this same semester, I also started using an iPad pro for the first time. We did some sketches from a few time periods. I used these projects as an opportunity to start to learn some of the basics. I started by using the drawing program included on the iPad, SketchBook. From these sketches, I began the use of using layers and patterns. I also improved on my understanding of anatomy and proportion.

The shift in focus caused by COVID-19 impacted my art journey in a positive manner. I don’t know exactly what caused the change, but at this point, my art shifted. My art improved dramatically. For one of our classes, we chose a theoretical design to complete. I chose the American in Paris Ballet sequence. We also chose an artist who inspired us. I chose Leonid Afremov, and did some copy work from him. I used the app Procreate. I loved using the broad sweeping strokes, and bright colors.
Using this same style I completed a set of 8 renderings. I chose to make slight differences, in that I used longer strokes that in the copy work, and had a tighter palette. These renderings showed a deep understanding of the anatomy that I had not previously exhibited. Additionally, there was a freedom in the strokes that Kristy had been trying to get me to use since the beginning of the program.
Figure 5.5 American in Paris Renderings
Figure 5.6 American in Paris Renderings
I think perhaps part of what facilitated this change was the use of the electronic medium. I have always been a careful person, and in many instances, a perfectionist. This shift in being able to undo anything caused a psychological shift where I was no longer afraid to make mistakes. It allowed me to let go of the meticulous way in which I often approach life. There was a joy imbued into each of these renderings.

Amidst the semesters, Kristy had me complete detailed skull tracings. This allowed me to understand the anatomy of the head intimately. Similarly, I completed drawings of body parts in different configurations. The more I did this, the more familiar I became with the body part, such as hands. It became muscle memory, and it helped me come up with my own “shortcuts” or style for the different body parts.

For my design of She Kills Monsters, I chose to continue on with doing my renderings electronically. I did a combination of tracing, and reference images. Additionally, I used some collaging techniques. It allowed me to get some details and textures into my renderings that would have taken a lot more time and effort to accomplish. I also was more successful with facial features because of the effort I had put into the drawings of the body parts, it felt more second nature to me. Similarly, I had spent some time drawing shoes, and I could see that my familiarity with them helped the process.
Figure 5.7 *She Kills Monsters* Renderings
Another thing I had started focusing and thinking about more was having highlights, and being aware of the light source. I felt more successful with this because I could add the highlight, rather than leaving the highlight as I had needed to previously. I also went through some iterations of backgrounds. Artistically, I was thinking more about the entire composition, rather than just the drawing. Comparing these renderings to the renderings from my first year, I could see the growth.

I also took a figure drawing class. At first, charcoal, as a medium felt foreign to me. I remember feeling frustrated many times leaving the class. But, as time progressed, I started to appreciate it. The class taught me to see in larger shapes, to think about the body’s shape more abstractly at first, then to move to the details afterward. We started off doing the drawings smaller, as seen in figure 5.8, but then spent the majority of the semester on a large scale project.
This large scale project had its unique challenges because the model was the same person that moved to different positions within the class. This forced me to work back and forth between the two figures and to then decide how to combine them compositionally. It also made me look at the body and think anatomically. Thinking in light and shadow also started happening while in this class. When I look at my final product, I can see how important that was in my art journey.
The most important thing I think I accomplished while in my figure drawing class was a greater understanding of anatomy. Because of this, I felt comfortable as I transitioned from using tracing as a tool to looking at reference images and drawing on my own.

Another valuable exercise I did was a large scale copy work of a portrait by John Singer Sargeant. This image was divided up into squares, and I tried to replicate each square meticulously. This helped me understand better how a master accomplished his drawing. This was a valuable lesson, even though it was painstaking at times.
With my deepened understanding of anatomy, for the dance renderings I did, I started with dynamic poses and drew the bodies. I could tell that my understanding helped me to draw more efficiently and correctly. After the bodies were drawn, I later added the clothing and tried to be aware of the way that fabric behaved on the bodies. I also drew the detailed lace pieces, which gave a dimension to the renderings.
Figure 5.11 *Season of Echoes* Renderings
These renderings were also painted quickly. I mixed most of the colors that I used in one night, and then was able to paint more quickly than I ever had before. I felt more comfortable using broad sweeping strokes. When I completed these renderings, I felt proud and recognized my growth from the previous year.

Another project that illustrated my growth was the theoretical design I completed of Finding Neverland. This project included 50 renderings. I used the many skills I had learned throughout grad school to complete these renderings. As I drew the many figures, I recognized the ‘short cuts’ my brain created to draw certain features.
Figure 5.12 *Finding Neverland* Renderings
I also used a new medium, goache, and discovered I enjoyed using goache immensely. I appreciated the pigmentation and viscosity of it. I was able to create some beautiful dimension. I chose to leave a portion of the rendering ‘unfinished’ to represent the imagination filling it in for the adults.

As I look back through my artistic journey, I can see my growth. Kristy guided me to become a better artist and therefore to become a better costume designer. I will continually use the skills I gained while in this program.
CHAPTER 6

PROFESSIONAL WORK

During my first year, I interviewed with Hangar Theatre in Ithaca, NY for the position of Assistant Costume Shop Manager, and was offered the position. I was thrilled with the opportunity, however, due to the pandemic, the Summer 2020 season was cancelled, so I was not able to work there that summer. They did offer the same position to me for the summer of 2021. I appreciated and learned a lot from the costume shop manager. She emphasized the importance of work life balance, and looking at the job as just a job. She also had years of experience and was willing to talk about her previous experiences in both theater and film. As the assistant costume shop manager, one day a week, I managed the shop because the manager was gone due to other previous responsibilities. While at Hangar, I learned about working with equity actors, working with different designers in a short period of time.

We produced three mainstage shows, as well as four Kidstuff plays, which are plays for children’s programing, and four Wedge shows, which are more experimental theater. Most of the shop’s time was spent on the mainstage shows as they are fully supported by the shop. As part of my responsibilities, I attended the production meeting for all of the Kidstuff and Wedge shows. The designers for these were young professionals, or students. It was a valuable experience to do what I could to mentor and support them, and help give them ideas on how to achieve their designs on a very limited
budget and amount of time. One of the designers also had a bad experience with one of the directors, so it was important to give her as much support as we possibly could as she continued to work with that same director for multiple shows.

One of the Wedge shows was *Sun Serpent* and part of the design was all of the costumes being made out the same fabric as an installment in the set. In the end, the fabric ended up being slightly different. At first the plan was to make it out of muslin, but the muslin wouldn’t have draped or had the same movement as the final fabric. I was proud of how they turned out, as time was limited, I patterned all of these simple garments in an afternoon, and the stitchers constructed them.

For the mainstage shows, I was able to be in most of the fittings, and saw how each designer worked. Danielle Preston designed *The Realness*. Then, Deb Sivingy designed *Once: The Musical*, and Sarita Fellows designed *Sweeney Todd*. Each designer had a different process, and each production brought its own challenges. I enjoyed working with each of them, and saw strengths in each of them. Each play was so different in its needs, and it was a pleasure to see how the designers viewed each character.

One of the largest issues that we had to work through was having an outdoor season in a place where rain is common place. They chose to do this because of the pandemic. It was much safer to do performances outside, and the rules for NY allowed larger audiences outside. A new stage was built for the season, and unfortunately, the seating area often flooded, which made it difficult to do tech, and also many performances were cancelled. It was valuable to see people pull together to make things work in difficult circumstances. Some aspects were handled better than others. But
overall, I think everyone knew that other people were doing the best they could in new, and everchanging situations.

Hangar Theatre was an excellent opportunity, and I learned a great deal as I was the assistant costume shop manager. I am happy that despite the pandemic, theater continued. I saw people work hard and come up with creative solutions. It helped solidify in my mind that people that work in theater are some of the most resourceful, determined people. I am grateful to be counted among them.

During the fall, I had a few months before going to the theater. I decided to audit an illustration course, to work on some artistic skills. It was interesting to think about an entire composition and not always have a figure to draw. Most of the time when I am drawing, I draw figures, so it was an interesting experience to not always do that. I was only able to complete half of the course, because of leaving for my internship.

The play Metamorphoses was also being produced in the lab theater, and Tiffani Hagan asked me to design. As I had a quick turnaround, I relied on frequent discussion with the director and research to design this show. One of the biggest challenges was that one actor played many roles, and there were many quick changes. We wanted to make sure that each character was distinct. I relied on a base layer for many of the actors, so they didn’t have to change the entire outfit. In the end, I decided that even though it made the quick changes more difficult, the entire costume was changed for some of them. Another aspect I had to consider was that I left for my next gig during the tech of this show. I relied heavily on my organization, and had paperwork to make sure everything
was clear for the actors, and crew. Some of the other grad students were gracious enough to come in during the last days of tech to be there if needed.

I also got the chance to work at Tuacahn Center for the Arts as part of my internship. This was a fabulous opportunity, as I got to see the workings of a LORT-B theater. When I arrived, they were just finishing up their season in their large amphitheater. The costume shop manager encouraged questions, and I constantly asked about how things were run at Tuacahn. She oversaw the work in the costume shop, wardrobe, hair and makeup, and rentals. Much of her work could have been seen as what the industry calls a costume director, even though that wasn’t her official title. I also worked closely with the costume shop foreman, as part of the internship was getting to understand the workings of costume shop management as a whole.

While we finished up striking the massive amounts of costumes from their season, we also discussed how to improve the flow of the shop, as they felt they didn’t have enough space. So, we talked about what issues occurred during the summer, and brainstormed on ways to improve. We came up with a new layout for the shop, to hopefully improve efficiency, as one of the issues they ran into was with where a draper table was, in front of many of the notions, that draper was constantly interrupted. I recommended creating an aisle with some of their storage cabinets, which was adopted. It was interesting to see a few of the issues that the costume department faced while at Tuacahn, and how they addressed them. It reiterated to me how much costuming, and theater at large, is essentially interpersonal relationships, and it is important to know how to work with many different personality types.
I also learned about how the costume shop budget is constructed for the year. One of the manager’s main jobs for the year is to complete that document and submit it, and to stick to it. The document had the entire year, week by week, and showed which people and positions worked each week, and how much the pay was for each position. Seeing the organization and precision of the document helped me understand how this large scale theater functioned.

Another aspect that I worked on was serving as a co-costume coordinator for *A Christmas Story: The Musical*. They had chosen to rent a package from another theater. Working with a rentals package was an interesting experience. First off, there was no official designer, but we as costume coordinators made decisions based off of discussions with the director. The costume shop manager served as the main liaison with the director, but we all were part of the meetings and discussions. Working with a rental package was a new and different experience. A huge thing was that the actors we were working with were not the same sizes as those from the rental package, so many of the items that came were not useful to us. Not having a specific designer had some drawbacks, especially because the director didn’t like some of the choices from the package, and had to be redesigned. This was the most exciting part for us, but for the theater is wasn’t as cost efficient. The costume shop manager had lobbied to have a designer, and in the end, it would have been less expensive to do that because of how much of the package was not utilized.

Despite the frustrations of the package, there were many aspects that were wonderful. The three of us worked so well together. It was an excellent collaboration with wonderful communication. We put together the lines for each actor for the musical.
The fittings went extremely smoothly, often only creating minimal notes. It got to the point where the shop manager would exclaim in excitement that we were so good at our jobs. She expressed that she wanted me to come back to work with her as a design assistant in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect the theater. As per equity guidelines, everyone involved with the production was tested three times a week. So, it became the norm to take a break in the middle of the day to our noses swabbed. Within the cast there were children, so it was a good reminder of what it is like to work with children, and to see their enthusiasm. However, due to some of them being so young, the company was not fully vaccinated. But with the precaution of being tested regularly, we all felt safe. The one time there was a positive result, the show was cancelled that day. We all tested every day that week, and no other positive results came. The role was covered by others in the cast until they were able to return.

Another big part of what I did while there was once the show opened was work in the rentals department. I saw what a process looked like to catalog a show to get it ready to be sent out for a rental, including putting in or recording bar codes. They had just completed Beauty and the Beast so we spent many hours photographing the costumes for the website and rental theaters. We also figured out how to put the pieces in travel boxes. This was a little complicated due to the large foam pieces. We also discussed the possibility of rebuilding some of the pieces in the future to make them more easily shippable. Part of the process I also saw is when a package is returned, going through and making sure the pieces are all there, and in good condition. I realized how important a revenue source rentals are for a company.
The opportunity to work at Tuacahn allowed me to see and experience a breadth of responsibilities. I gleaned a lot from each person I came in contact with, and made wonderful connections, many of which have worked or performed on Broadway. I feel grateful for all that I learned.

I have the opportunity to design three productions in the spring. *Tick, Tick...Boom!* for Trustus Theatre, *La Belle Hélène* for the University of South Carolina Opera, and *Native Gardens* for Warehouse Theatre. I started the process for a number of them in the fall. As I write this, I am at a different stage of the design process for each of them. It has been interesting to keep them all separate in my mind, and to give the attention to each as I have never designed this many shows at one time before. However, it is extremely valuable because in my future, I am sure that I will do freelance work, just as I am now, and I will work on multiple shows at the same time. I can tell that my training in this program has been beneficial for the opportunities I have now. I have established a process for my designing that has allowed me to work on multiple projects at once without being overwhelmed. I am thrilled for the future, and grateful for this program and what it has taught me.
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