THE BOYFRIEND: COSTUMES FOR THE CHEEKY AND CHEERY

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Master of Fine Arts in Theater Arts
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Design and Technical Theater

by
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To my lovely parents who have continually and vigorously supported my personal development in every way, always pointing me in the direction that is true and right.
Before a character even speaks, we ‘read’ their appearance through their costume.
- Peter Ruthven Hall
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Boyfriend: Costumes for the Cheeky and Cheery
by
Sonia Elizabeth Lerner
Master of Fine Arts in Theater Arts with a Concentration in
Design and Technical Theatre
San Diego State University, 2014

My thesis will cover all topics necessary to describe the process of designing costumes for The Boy Friend. These topics include and are not limited to: my personal theatre theory, discoveries in research, summary of 1920s clothing silhouettes and how they are achieved, hair and makeup design, learning to work with a choreographer, techniques in rendering and reflections upon the process.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While assisting a fellow designer, he told me his story of presenting his thesis design to a panel of people who critiqued away at his designs determining if they were up to the standard of graduation. The costumes he made, and his renderings took my breath away when I saw them! That was the moment of inception to attend graduate school, to have a thesis of my own and be judged by people in my field that could determine if I was prepared for a real professional design career. While looking for graduate schools, dreams displaying plethora of shows danced through my mind, filling it with colors and shapes of my greatest imagination. My thesis, I determined, would be epic.

During my three years of graduate school, my eyes were opened to the many theories of theatre, different design strategies to achieve a final goal in this great collaborative art, I gained the experience of working with multiple sets of personalities, all of which I tried to glean from their strengths and weaknesses. All of this in three years culminated in this final design, my thesis.

Collaboration of a team of people for any given theatrical production is required. The leader at the helm of any production is the director. Paula Kalustian, the director of The Boy Friend, grasps the idea of collaboration with both hands on the reigns. Paula allowed everyone’s ideas to be valid when paired with research and discussion. As she encouraged the design team to think creatively, while always keeping in mind that with additional research and support for our decisions; she would blend our ideas with hers to create a whole. Paula guided us through the entire process, as the show as a whole falls under her supervision.

Cara Tougas, the set designer and a second year graduate student at the time, took up the challenge of designing this show with delight. Our lighting designer, Dominic Abbenante, was the perfect hands-on lighting designer this production needed. Roger Ellis, our choreographer and the lead male dancer of the show involved me in his creative process. Katie Donovan took on the role of dramaturge, making sure her research and other
information relating to the show was available, Ryan Heath, our stage manager orchestrated everything having to do with timing and scheduling. Our sound designer and mixer, Donald Sweetman, was flexible and helpful with mic placement as we moved into the final week before dress rehearsal. We all worked together as the process moved forward to help Paula create a successful show.

_The Boy Friend_ is a musical filled with cheeky and cheery characters, which originated in London in the 1950s though it is set in the 1920s (Wilson). The main story follows a young woman, Polly. When we first meet Polly she lies to her girl friends at Mme. Dubonnet’s prep school about how her boyfriend is coming to town for the costume ball. However, when the delivery boy, Tony, comes with her Pirouette costume she lies to him and says she is just a maid there so he will like her for more than her riches. They are enamored of each other, and decide that not only will they meet on the promenade, but also he will attend the costume ball as her Pierrot that night. Polly’s father, Percy, comes to town to visit Polly, only to find out that her prep school owner, Mme. Dubonnet, was his long lost lover from the war (pre-Polly’s mother). Polly’s friends: Maisie, Dulcie, Fay and Nancy are all excited to be attending the ball. They tease Maisie about the American boy, Bobby, who asks her to the ball. Hortense, the saucy maid, narrates all of this drama.

In Act II, everyone goes to the beach! The girls have a lovely afternoon with their boyfriends. Polly sneaks away from her friends to meet with Tony, while Mme. Dubonnet starts to melt Percy’s heart. Another set of characters arrive and they seem to be looking for someone; they are Lord and Lady Brockhurst- though Lord Brockhurst seems more interested in finding a pretty young thing instead. When Tony sees them, he runs away quickly, and the Brockhurst's send police after him, which makes Polly think Tony is a common thief.

At the costume ball Act III, the boys propose to their girlfriends, but each one promises to answer them at midnight- just to keep them waiting. Polly arrives by herself, and is comforted by Mme. Dubonnet right before Tony arrives as her Pierrot! It is revealed that Tony is actually the son of Lord and Lady Brockhurst, not just a delivery boy! Tony finds out the Polly is not just a maid but also the daughter of a rich English businessman, and they decide to marry. All the girls accept their beaus, and finally Mme. Dubonnet and Percy
announce to Polly that they too are engaged. Everyone lives happily ever after, including Hortense who is so glad to have the girls off her hands- though she loves them.

Design work comes down to a process that can be followed specifically- starting with a brief history of the show and considering concerns immediately after reading the script. Research into location, characters and historical fashions follows. Translating that research into preliminary designs happens with the collaboration of your team members; the ability to be flexible and creative during this portion of the process can change the entire mood of the production. Final designs funnel in all of the preliminary ideas, research and characters into this final step before actualizing the costumes. Next, you get started with physical realizations of the designs; this step requires renting, buying, gathering fabric swatches, making technical drawings of the built costumes and deciding on a silhouette for the show that reflects the period. Once the collecting of garments is well on its way we move into the fitting room, deciding what alterations are possible, determining if garments actually work according to plan and how to remedy those issues. Accessories and shoes are heavily researched and fitted along with the clothing during the fitting process as well. In the final weeks leading to dress rehearsals, hair and makeup designs are finalized and pushed through so they are ready for first dress.

Then comes the final step in the process, dress rehearsal week. Seeing all the elements come together that week can be a rocky process sometimes, but this final week of running the show allows all the pieces to be polished before opening night. After the show opens, you find you can take a step back and enjoy the work done. Reading reviews and watching ticket sales can be nerve racking, but it adds to the excitement of the whole experience. Going through this process with *The Boy Friend* was a learning experience on many levels, and I feel it brought me up to a higher professional level.
CHAPTER 2

PLANNING AHEAD

When first taking on a design job, immediately after reading the script (or even sometimes before) you do some very basic research into the history of the play and past productions. This helps to inform you of traditions that may be associated with the play, how audiences before have perceived it, and helps you get a general feel for the production. As I commenced the design process for *The Boy Friend*, I also immediately started thinking of design ideas, and possible issues concerning budget and movement for a 1920s musical. This show originally opened in London on the West End, and then hopped the pond to open on Broadway. This production found a welcome home there, as did Julie Andrews who starred as the leading role! This was her first appearance on the Broadway stage. The show distinguished itself with a female director, Vida Hope (brought from the West End production), which was not common. It set a tradition for this play though, as Julie Andrews herself directed the revival at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut in 2005, and now San Diego State carries it on with Paula Kalustian as the director. Not to say that a woman has directed every production, but the major reproductions have which to me is an interesting observation.

My first basic research brought the fact that *The Boy Friend* is actually a pastiche to the era of 1920s musicals. A pastiche is defined as a literary or artwork that seeks to imitate an era’s work, unlike a parody that pokes fun at it (“Pastiche”). Before arriving at San Diego State University, I had designed a show named *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. *Thoroughly Modern Millie* is a similar 1920s pastiche musical, so I was already familiar with the style and some of the conventions used in this type of musical. Everything feels just a little stiffly presentational, but then made fun with the music that harkens to the rambunctious nature of the 1920s. This being a pastiche informed every step of my design as I wanted to create a beautiful homage to the 1920s instead of a campy musical- which this could very easily turn into.
After having read the show, I immediately started envisioning each character. Highlighting the differences between some of the characters was important. For example: Polly’s demure innocence contrasting with Maisie’s play girl attitude, or the stiff older English characters from the more open French ones. I knew from my general knowledge that the French, English and Americans were influenced differently, so though the general silhouettes were the same, the English always were more conservative, the French were more liberal, and the Americans brighter and carefree.

One of my immediate concerns had to do with Act II: all of the young people are in bathing suits! In all my time of being a costume designer I had never come across period bathing suits in a rental stock. They might become a huge build if I could not find them in the rental houses. I noted to start researching where to get period bathing suits. It also concerned me that everyone would need a separate pair of shoes for this act alone. Buying dance shoes can get expensive.

My second concern came from Act III, where every character attends a costume ball. I was imagining an all-out costumed affair! How could I convince the costume shop to make all the costumes for this costume ball? How were the actors going to be able to do their large dance routines in formal costumes? Finding rentals to meet the needs of this act would be problematic. I would need to plan out very carefully how to achieve these with my tight budget. The actors’ movement is an important consideration. Flexible and comfortable shoes would allow them to dance without restriction. Also, a tango routine happens mid-way through the act. The script stage directions indicated that it was the actors who played Maisie and Bobby dressed as a famous tango couple. They would need to change out of their costume ball costumes into a tango couple, and then return as Maisie and Bobby for the end of the show. I would need another costume set to satisfy that requirement in the script. It was necessary for Paula and I to discuss all transitions in the musical.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH

Throughout the nineteenth century, photography technology grew leaps and bounds so that by the early twentieth century, photography started to become a widespread tool. Photographers could photograph everywhere, including the beach! The cameras were not little point-and-shoot cameras like we have today, but people loved photography! Being able to look at a photograph tells me so much more in terms of research than a fashion drawing or painting. A drawing relies on the artists’ interpretation. A painter may not be a tailor that knows how clothing works, or be interested in reproducing the details of clothing construction. By working from photographs as research, it makes it easy to distinguish what reality was and what interpretation fashion drawings might have. Photography also started to create a greater global feeling; information was shared faster and more accurately between countries and overseas so fashion starts to move more rapidly with the spread of ideas. Fashions are pushed forward, changing from long hobble skirts to short dresses in just a few years.

The 1920s is the first time we see the poor, young and racier fashions inform the fashions of the wealthy, rather than the other way around. Flappers were young women who were from the poorer class that found freedom in from the dictations of the modes of society. They adapted male inspired attitudes that reflected in their fashion choices. Flappers moved from long skirts to short boyish dresses, and released themselves from their corsets. These girls drank, danced and had fun! Due to the faster spread of ideas, their styles moved up the ranks of society until even the rich were seen with dark shaded eyes and bust minimizers.

In France, Coco Channel moved the new silhouette into fashion. She started a millinery shop, but almost lost it during the winter months. However, the French women were back in August buying as many of her casual clothes as could be imagined (Charles-Roux 139). This was the first year of World War I, and it was during this period when women needed clothes that were practical, yet still wanted to look chic (140-2). In 1921, Chanel's collection featured “sweaters, and short pleated skirts with dropped waistlines,
cloche hats, and bandeaux for a willowy silhouette that Paris would call the garçon look, London and New York the flapper” (Madsen 116). As it became high fashion, the French took it up faster than the English who were historically a little more conservative in their fashions.

Keeping all of the above in mind, I needed to research historical clothing silhouettes. Paula was torn at an exact year in which to set this, so to help I put together some basic research to show her the evolution of the fashions during the decade. What I found out was that there was a general relaxing of the styles from stiff pleats to the softer bias dresses as fashion moved into the 1930s, where that grace and flow of dresses was the norm. The flighty nature of the later dresses seemed to fit the lightness of this musical better than the stiffer pleats (though I kept those in mind for certain restrained characters).

Menswear also saw a relaxing after the war, and throughout the decade. Resort wear grew in popularity, which would have influenced the men of this beach town in France. Evidence of this relaxation can be found by looking at both formal and casual wear. The 1920s saw the rise of the tuxedo jacket as formal wear over the tailcoat of previous centuries. Tailcoats were mostly reserved for only the most formal occasions (Tortora and Eubank 415).

For Act II of The Boy Friend, I researched bathing suits of the period and found that depending on where the character was influenced from, it would change their idea of what was acceptably covering for a bathing suit. After collecting research for both men and women, I decided that the bathing suits needed to be based on their character, even if it meant bending the research a little. It was more important that Dulcie look cute and quirky than being exactly historically accurate. Kati Donovan, who played Dulcie, has an hour glass figure, that was more suited to the suits that existed a little before or after the period when suits were belted at the waist, not hip. There was research to support that bathing suits were starting to be belted at the waist in the late 1920s, so I felt that mixing the silhouettes could work. An image of Miss France, 1927, was used as a reference for Maisie’s character to have a suit belted at the waist (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Mme. Dubonnet’s suit was based on an American suit I found, as it was more conservative (Figure 3.3 and 3.4). The boys’ suits were easier to pin down, as there were not as many styles. Generally men’s bathing wear was a pair of long shorts and tank top or cap sleeve tee shirt of slightly varying kinds.

Figure 3.2. Maisie’s suit based Fig. 3.1, here shown with boyfriend Bobby. Source: Olsen, Luke. Bathing Suits of Maisie and Bobby. 2011. JPEG file.
Figure 3.3. American ad, shows the bathing suit that Mme. Dubonnet’s is based on.

On the other end of the spectrum, sportswear started to make its way into everyday wear. Though it is not solidly popular until the early 1930s, the polo collar (now commonly known as a turtle neck) moves from the polo players into day wear (Blackman 104). Polo shirts, as we know them today, were found rising in popularity as well. “Rene Lacoste, co-creator of the polo shirt... Debuted at the 1927 United States men’s championship” will forever be defined by his alligator symbol on pique polo shirts (Sims 151). He popularized it by wearing it on the court, and then dressed it up with an added sweater vest and two-button white flannel sport jacket off the court. These fast changes in fashion for both men and women helped when designing to differentiate the characters’ ages and personal styles.
Starlets, leading men, comedians— in fact— anyone in the Hollywood film industry helped sculpt the general idea of beauty in the 1920s. Not only did theatres show movies, but also they had newsreels at the beginning— sort of like we have previews now. Almost every person wanted to be one of these lovely popular people on the silver screen! Take your pick: you might be the leading man like Douglas Fairbanks Sr., or a funny man like Buster Keaton. The women may be the darkly handsome Josephine Baker, or the cutesy Clara Bow? This research was fun to do and assign to different characters.
CHAPTER 4

PRELIMINARY DESIGNS

The director’s role is to orchestrate all the pieces together to create a whole show. The best experiences I have had with directors have been with those that are able to breathe every now and again, and trust that the little details are being taken care of by the artists working along side them. My previous experience working with Paula allowed me to be better prepared for the preliminary process of design. Paula does not like last minute additions or changes, even if they might look better, the fact is it throws off the rhythm of the actors and feels like a rash decision to her. This has helped my design process, as I have learned to design thoroughly from the very beginning. Getting ideas approved early in the design process allows for clear direction. By making large design decisions early, smaller details become flexible as you move forward and everyone can help foresee issues that might arise. It also provides a clearer picture for the development of each character. Most actors like to know what they are wearing sooner so they can prepare for it, and it helps for them to plan their character. In addition, the earlier design decisions allow each actor to voice any concerns they might have.

Gathering research from numerous sources opens up the possibilities for the show. Deciding what to present to the director from the research can be challenging. In preliminary meetings, I chose to limit the number of research images shown to ten per character that related specifically to clothing. I placed additional research around the clothing images that related to do with color, attitude and possible distinctive accessories. This approach to showing research allowed Paula could give me specific feedback.

Research for accessories include styles of jewelry, glasses, watches, neckwear and hats. For example, with Polly, Paula had already given me words like “simple”, “shy” and “unadorned” that she associates with her. The director felt moved by a dress in Woody Allen’s A Midnight in Paris, which was a simple red and white dress. I used it as springboard to design Polly in similar simple dresses throughout the play. I presented research that supported those ideas. I kept Polly’s jewelry to a minimum, and used white and red as her
When I presented Paula with the preliminary sketches, she was able to very quickly decide what elements she specifically liked, so fewer changes needed to be made moving forward.

Bathing suits changed at just about every step of the design process until actual fabrics were picked. Choosing specific research images per character first, I moved into preliminary sketches. Paula overall did not like the idea of everyone in black and white stripes, so I knew when I went to look for fabrics, I needed to try to break that up by bringing in more white or polka dots. Paula helped me edit my preliminary designs (Figure 4.1). Next, I did some revisions and was able to present those soon after. Paula responded well to the changes and was able to give me enough notes to move forward into finals.

The preliminary costume designs for Act III costume ball went through many revisions. Figuring out the characters’ coupling helped with choosing the theme for each costume. It had been decided that the costume ball would not be costumes as if for Halloween, they would be formal wear costumes. Figure 4.2 shows a collage of the many ideas discussed. Designing costumes based on men’s formalwear allowed me to be creative within a guideline. Each one needed to be as individual, but still have the traditional look of a tuxedo. Various accessories and costume pieces were carefully designed and added in such away that they did not take away the silhouette of the formalwear. By keeping their formal silhouette, the men matched the formal surroundings of the scene.

Paula would often encourage Cara Tougas, Dominic Abbenante and I to meet without her to brainstorm ideas based on her notes from the last meeting. Cara and I stayed in contact closely during the process to ensure our ideas coincided. We able to share each designs, and give feedback based on what we knew about our specific areas to help trouble shoot. The large trellis on the set went through many revisions, and Cara was able to pursue many notions in a short period of time because of our idea sharing. Dominic and I collaborated closely together throughout the process to ensure that Polly’s white costumes would not change to an odd color under the lighting. Dominic borrowed the costumes many times into the lighting lab to be sure he was not turning them pink or blue with the ambient lighting surrounding the white costume.
Figure 4.1. Three sets of preliminary sketches drawn for Act II bathing suits. Sketches by author.
Figure 4.2. Collage shows the many preliminary sketches drawn for the Act III formal costume ball. Sketches by author.
This play lends itself to a visual arch as it takes place in a single day. The design team wanted to create the feel of morning, afternoon, and night through the musical. This morning to night arch through the play was vital for me to play up with costumes, since the minimal set would have a hard time showing this idea on its own. The goal of the set was to leave it open and airy, for the dance numbers to have plenty of space for Roger Ellis’ energetic choreography! I worked on creating different color palettes for morning, afternoon and night. Dominique created lighting looks that would help set the mood, and sets also helped with this transition by having the pieces coming in get more abstract.

Act I places us into Mme. Dubonnet’s drawing room in the morning time when the girls have classes; the scene was set with large calla lilies. A black and pale pink piano, couch, and side table helped create an air of an upper class sunroom. I chose pastels, neutrals and as many unobtrusive colors as possible. The lighting gels had the soft ambers and blues of early morning light.

Act II is set outdoors in the afternoon on the sur la plage (beach promenade) of Nice. Abstract clouds flew in and brightly colored, striped umbrellas and Adirondack chairs also helped place the scene in the afternoon. Cara and I worked together when choosing colors of chairs and umbrellas, constantly referring to the swatches and fitting photos to be sure costumes and set complimented each other. I chose bold primary and secondary colors for the bathing suits, while the lighting brightened into afternoon hues.

By the time we reached the ball in Act III, the scenery became very abstract with a flying checkerboard lady in the sky, stone balustrades and a small table and chair set upstage on the balcony. Dominic added white twinkle lights of many sizes and shapes for a starry night effect, helping the surroundings to twinkle like the night sky. I decided to try to keep the colors as jewel toned as possible, and only breaking that when certain characters needed the attention.
CHAPTER 5

FINAL SKETCHES

Creating final designs started by making the appropriate changes from the notes from Paula, the other designers, my advisor, and the costume shop. I planned out renderings by taking into account all the characters and who they need to be associated with. Grouping characters together might change how they are perceived in the rendering. I also took into consideration if certain costumes are being built, as their renderings will need to show more information. Organizing these many couples and groups into orders that made sense was key. This show presented the ultimate musical theatre opportunity to design in couples. Every character, save Hortense, ends in a pair by the end of the show. By the time they appear together in Act Two, the audience should have a clear idea of who belongs together as love interests, but also who belongs together in certain groups.

I decided that Polly and Tony would be rendered separately for two reasons: one-Polly’s costumes were being built and may need further information added to them and two-their color schemes were so coordinated, that there was no need to group them together, it would be very obvious they belonged. Tony also has a complete change for Act II, while Polly just adds a scarf and hat. Figure 5.1 shows Polly’s first costume that was inspired by the simple white and red dress from *Midnight in Paris*. Tony starts as a delivery boy in act one, who has a uniform that looks very much like bell hops (Figure 5.2). Then for Act II, a delivery boy would never be off the job in their uniform, so he changes into a more flamboyant red and white look. It is the look of a rich boy, pretending to be a commoner. He has white flannel pants and a candy cane striped jacket. He looks like a rich vacationer, rather than like a common boy, but Polly who also comes from upper crust society, never notices (Figure 5.3). In Act I, the girls all goad Polly about going to the ball as a Pierette; after all, a Pierette cannot go without a Pierrot. Despite her forlorn ending in Act II about Tony, he swoops in at the last moment, dressed as her Pierrot, and they live happily every after (Figure 5.4 and 5.5)!
Figure 5.1. Finished design of Polly’s simple red and white dress for Act I; add hat and scarf for Act II. Rendering by author.
Figure 5.2. Finished design of Tony’s Act I delivery boy. Rendering by author.

Figure 5.3. The finished design of Tony’s resort clothing for Act II. Rendering by author.
Mme. Dubonnet and Percy meet as strangers in the show. Mme. Dubonnet is headmistress as Polly’s school. Percy is Polly’s father. These two quickly discover that they had a love affair long ago while he was stationed in France, before he met and married Polly’s mother who is now deceased. Percy needs to start out very rigidly businessman English, he even hands white gloves and a hat to Hortense when she greets him. In contrast to his stiffness though, Mme. Dubonnet has on her flowing blue water colored silk chiffon dress that moves and swishes with her every movement (Figures 5.6 and 5.7). Though their costumes may feel completely different, they are united already by hints of color. Her dress entertains multiple shades of blue throughout and she is adorned in gold jewelry, which coordinated with the blue body of his shirt, and he continually plays with his golden pocket watch. Percy shows his old-fashioned nature by being the only male character of the play that still has a removable shirt collar. This collar style was just changing over in the 1920s to attached collars, but he continues to wear the stiff separate collar.
Figure 5.5. Finished design of Polly in her pierette costume for the ball in Act III. Rendering by author.
Figure 5.6. The finished design for Mme. Dubonnet Act I. Rendering by author.

Figure 5.7. Finished design of Percy in Act I and II. Rendering by author.
In Act Two, Percy does not change, but all of his browns suddenly match Mme. Dubonnet’s brown velvet devore robe, and her teal swimsuit keeps her in a cool palette like his blues (Figure 5.8). In this act he admits that he is in love with her, and actually starts to tease back in “You Don’t Want to Play With Me Blues”. Their coordinated costume designs will give the hint at creating a very cute pair by the end of the act.

Figure 5.8. Finished design of Mme. Dubonnet in her bathing suit for Act II. Rendering by author.
For the Act III, I paired Mme. Dubonnet and Percy together in their rendering to show how even though their costumes do not match, their colors coordinate (Figure 5.9). She continues to wear light, flowing fabrics, while his fabrics are still stiff and rigid. The convention of coordinating couples’ costumes can be seen throughout history in musicals like *The Boy Friend*. The heightened reality of a musical allows for color coordinating and grouping. The audience already knows it is not reality. Keeping Percy (Polly’s stiff English father) in a tailcoat for Act Three, speaks of his old fashioned ways, because by the time the late 1920s rolled around, only old fashioned men were continuing to wear the tails. Percy makes an oddly stiff pirate, but he came from England and was surprised by the costume ball. He went to the nearest costume shop and was fitted for the most simple, and distinguished costume he could find at the last moment.

![Figure 5.9. Finished design of Mme. Dubonnet and Percy at the costume ball in Act III. Rendering by author.](image-url)
Hortense straddles the world of the audience and the play as the saucy narrator. Because of this interaction with the audience, she needed to differentiate herself from the other characters. Her maid costume needed to be multipurpose - something she could wear with a jacket over for Act Two. There also needed to be a contrast between Mme. Dubonnet and Hortense. Mme. Dubonnet runs the prep school, while Hortense cleans it. Mme. Dubonnet’s light water colored blue silk chiffon dress fluttered with her every movement, reflecting the carefree and fun feeling she exudes. Hortense’s dress is a maid uniform with a straight line and pleats. Hortense is a much more earthy and grounded character than the others who all seem to be floating in the their lighter dresses (Figure 5.10). I knew I wanted her to have a distinctive necklace, something like a big rock or sea shell that she would wear all the times to help show her earthy connection. She finds beauty in nature, rather than glitz. Also in reality she would not have had the money to have lots of jewelry. Jewelry was expensive; to have it at all meant you either had money or saved for it.

Figure 5.10. Finished design of Hortense in her maid uniform for Act I. Rendering by author.
To achieve Hortense’s final costume design, I took a slightly different route. She claims in the script she is re-wearing an old costume. As the poorest of the characters, she probably would have revamped something old. As the narrator, she needed to stand out when appropriate. The young people comment to her, that she looks amazing in her “peasant” costume. We did not want her costume to look like a real peasant costume, but a stylized formal version of it. I gave her a gypsy feeling so she could stand out (Figure 5.11).

![Finished design of Hortense for the costume ball, dressed as a peasant-gypsy in Act III. Rendering by author.](image)

For Act I and II, the boys and girls got grouped together according to gender. The couples of those groups stood in the same order of their partner, so that when viewing them up and down, they corresponded. The four girls in Act I function as a group, and they needed
to look like a unit. Maisie and Dulcie have their separate scenes to create their side story lines, so their costumes needed to fit in within that group, but also distinguish their personalities away from the group. Here I have them distinguished by the two of them with contrasting trim on their dresses (Figure 5.12). The boys that appear need to be part of the same group visually. In the first act, I designed their pants to match, with pastel shirts. They then were in slightly different states of dress to distinguish their personalities (Figure 5.13).

Figure 5.12. Finished design of the girls at school in Act I. Rendering by author.

Figure 5.13. Finished design of the boys in Act I. Rendering by author.
In Act II, the shapes of the boys’ bathing suits were the same. Though they were all in different colors, and slightly different necklines none of them draw too much attention when standing in a line together. Maisie’s bathing suit was a series of chevrons, which created movement during her huge dance song “Safety in Numbers”. All the other bathing suit couples match by using the same colors (Figures 5.14 and 5.15). These costumes were being built, so I had a good deal of control over the final product.

Figure 5.14. The finished design of the bathing suits for the girls in Act II. Rendering by author.

Figure 5.15. The finished design of the bathing suits for the boys in Act II. Rendering by author.
For Act III, all of the boys and girls have coupled up to go to the costume ball. Dulcie and her boyfriend Alphonse go together as birds, complete with silly feather hats! Dulcie herself became a challenge as she sings a song with Lord Brockhurst and needed to have a flirtatious exchange with him. Paula had seen a production where Dulcie was an angel, and Lord Brockhurst, the devil, so when with their respective partners they made one couple, but together they made another sort of couple of opposites. After many hours of thinking, I came up with a few ideas, and we settled on Dulcie being a bird, and he being a cat. So Dulcie would fit in with both her boyfriend, and Lord Brockhurst in different ways. Lord Brockhurst and she could then be a cat chasing a bird.

Maisie and Bobby do a special tango dance at the ball. In the script, it has them change into completely different characters, but Paula felt the change was unnecessary. The audience had already seen them do great dance routines in the other acts; they should just do their tango as if that was their costume they had chosen. The two of them danced energetically in these costumes, so making sure that they both had full range of motion was important when choosing these.

Marcel and Fay came together as a flower and bee. Fay’s character had been established as the most delicate of the girls, so having her be a flower worked beautifully. Her dress was beaded with a flower design that was painted to make her more colorful. She then got leaves for sleeves, and a headdress. Wings, and a gold and black striped cummerbund and bow tie set completed her bee partner, Marcel.

Then came the ball couple! Nancy and Pierre made the cutest little couple, where she has toy balls hanging from her dress, and his sleeves and hat were like inflated beach balls. I took inspiration from a costume the employed balloons from Ester’s Follies. Balloons would have been impractical for dancing on stage, but the balls were a great alternative.

I changed up the way that the renderings for the boys and girls were organized. I have them all coupled up for the ball in costumes standing next to each other, rather than on separate pages like the previous acts (Figures 5.16 and 5.17). By this time, the boys and girls were grouped as couples rather than by gender onstage, so I thought it was appropriate to change their rendering grouping for this Act.
Figure 5.16. The finished design of Dulcie, Alphonse, Bobby, and Maisie for the costume ball in Act III. Rendering by author.

Figure 5.17. The finished design of Nancy, Pierre, Marcel, and Fay for the costume ball in Act III. Rendering by author.
Lord and Lady Brockhurst, Tony’s parents from England, come to France to look for their son. As older, English people their sense of traditional dressing is embedded in their habits. Even though they may be in this French beach town to look for their son, they are also going to adhere to the mores of societal dressing; beach town means resort wear. I wanted to be sure that though these characters are linked together. I also wanted to be sure that Lord Brockhurst had strong colors to display his playfully flirtatious attitude towards the young girls (Figure 5.18). Due to the Brockhursts’ more conservative English sense of dressing, I put them in a more strictly black and white palette for the Act Three costume ball. Lord Brockhurst has a few touches of color, again to show his more exuberant nature. Lady Brockhurst, as a froufrou poodle, and Lord Brockhurst as a cat (Figure 5.19). As discussed previously, his costume also coincides with Dulcie’s bird costume during their flirtatious duet: “It’s Never Too Late (to Fall in Love)”.

Figure 5.18. The finished design of Lord and Lady Brockhurst for Act II. Rendering by author.
Figure 5.19. Finished design of Lord and Lady Brockhursts for the costume ball in Act III. Rendering by author.
CHAPTER 6

HUNT & GATHER

Critical decisions about what costumes can be rented or pulled verses what costumes are built all comes down to budget and availability. Having a thorough wish list of costumes to pull or rent can help save multiple trips to rental houses. The process of turning renderings into realized designs is like the process of hunting and gathering food. Some costumes you go to rental houses or stores and pluck the good pieces for your show. Costumes being built need to be planned out and go through a number of fittings before they finally come to fruition. Specificity in research and drawn technical flats are pivotal to the drapers working on the built garments so they can think about all the details and how they work together. It is also important that a uniform silhouette be decided on with undergarments.

Taking our budget into consideration, I knew I needed to consider as many rental costumes as possible—preferably the ones SDSU has free exchange agreements with. In Act I, Polly’s costume, and the boys’ period pants would be made. Anything else needed to be rented or pulled. All nine of the Act II bathing suits were going to be built costumes. Due to so many bathing suits being built, everything else in that act would need to be rented or pulled. The formal wear of Act III also needed to be pulled, rented or bought. They could then be embellished onto the costumes for the ball. The costume shop simply did not have the manpower to make anymore built costumes.

To pull costumes for Act I, I actually took multiple trips to The Old Globe (The Old Globe is San Diego’s largest regional theatre, and our school has a free exchange program with them). I measured the dresses and suits that I was considering, took photos and was able to present Paula with options for each girl before making the official pull. I also made rental appointments with Lamb’s Players, California State Universities of Long Beach and Irvine. Between all of these places, I was able to accumulate enough options to create a very controlled color palette. Figure 6.1 is an example of the photo sheets I started to put together for decision purposes when looking at what to rent together that made sense. I was able to pull all the other costumes for Act I by following this same process.
Act Two had some greater challenges in pulling. I wanted a red and white striped jacket for Tony, but that was proving very difficult to find. I chose not to purchase this costume, as the director was not certain of this costume choice, and might have been cut anyway. On my last rental trip, I found a red Ivy League style jacket from Lamb’s Players! Paired with linen pants from Long Beach, and a vintage tie from our own stock - Tony looked dapper. He matched Polly not just in color, but also in the light simplicity of his clothing (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.1. Examples of photos taken when exploring other theaters’ stocks. Photos taken by author.

Tony’s parents, Lord and Lady Brockhurst, were pulled garments to keep the budget of the show down. I found that between SDSU and The Old Globe there were enough options for Lord Brockhurst. There would not be a problem finding something suitable for both Acts II and III. Lady Brockhurst posed a particular problem in that we wanted to enhance her silhouette by exaggerating her shoulders and upper body to create a “V” shape. Fortunately there were several rental options that I was able to find at UC Long Beach costume stock. The costume shop manager there pointed me in the direction of some oversized 1920s dresses they had built for a show. I pulled four options for her dresses. Our actress fit into the preferred dresses, with even a little bit of space to add shoulder pads and take in the hips for that “V” shape I had hoped to achieve (Figure 6.3).

![Figure 6.3. The Brockhurts in their pulled/ rented costumes for Act II. Source: Olsen, Luke. Lady Brockhurst Punishes Lord Brockhurst. 2011. JPEG file.](image)

Act Three takes place in a costume ball. Each costume had been designed with the idea of taking already completed garments and adding on embellishment to create the costume. When pulling rental garments, it quickly became apparent that 1920s formal wear
would be difficult to alter into the party costumes without ruining them. I did have two great finds at UC Irvine: Maisie’s tango and Mme. Dubonnet’s peacock costumes. To adjust Maisie’s red tango dress, we tweaked it a bit by adding an under layer of gold and removing some bows, but it was covered in sparkles and made on the bias, so her movement during her tango number was uninhibited (Figure 6.4). Mme. Dubonnet needed a dress that as dramatic as she is, and also needed to coordinate with Percy’s pirate and Polly’s Pierette. UC Irvine had a velvet and sequin raspberry dress that moved with dignity and sparkled every step along the way (Figure 6.5). The rich raspberry color became the perfect compliment to the added peacock feathers to her costume, and she looked quite stunning.

For items that I was unable to find from one of the rentals houses, I bought them. Buying clothing to look like period clothing must be done with great care for details. My two major buys for this show were Bobby’s Act I sport jacket and Act III dresses for the other girls. Bringing research photos and color swatches of possible colors for the garments helps make decisions more quickly when buying modern clothing that is meant to pass as period. For Bobby’s Act I jacket, the salesman was able to look at my research photo, and look at my actor and help me find a jacket that would be appropriate for him. I had a great find at
Loehmann’s with a number of bias cut, knee-length beaded dresses for the girls’ formal dresses in Act III. Each one was alterable for the respective girls’ costume, and also allowed Maisie’s rented bias cut dress to fit in as part of the group.

The great thing about a built garment is the level of control you have over the finished garment. First and foremost, finding the right fabric changes everything about the way that garment will translate from the rendering, into an actualized garment. As a student, it is important to ask questions based on how I wanted the final garment to function, and flow. The built garments for this show were the knit bathing suits for Act II, Polly’s garments for throughout the show, and the boys’ Act I period pants.

Polly’s Act I dress needed to be beautiful when dancing; I wanted it to have lightness about it, but wanted to avoid a bouncy fabric that would make her come across as flighty. I also knew I wanted the dress to have a little texture to it. A discovery of a stack of white cotton fabrics of many weights and textures at Mood Fabrics in Los Angeles became my swatching playground! After bringing them back and discussing the options thoroughly, medium weight cotton with a tiny sheen diamond pattern was chosen, along with red cotton sateen for the trimmings. These fabrics were light in weight, but not flighty.
“Stripes,” was the one word answer from Paula when I asked about what kinds of colors or patterns she envisioned on the Act II bathing suits. I also knew from her comments on the renderings that she would like less black in the stripes. I needed to create one group with all of them together for the big numbers, but also needed them to match as they settled into their couples. That required coordinating eight different colors, and as it turned out approximately sixteen fabrics into this one group of characters. All of the knit fabric also needed to be of certain weight. Selecting these specific fabrics was an educational experience, now I know much more about the various types of knits and their uses.

In Act I, all the boys sneak into Mme. Dubonnet’s Prep School to see their girlfriends. For these period pants for the boys, I wanted them to feel sporty. For tennis in the 1920s, men wore white flannel pants. The color white in this show was designed to make a statement about Polly’s innocence, so I wanted to avoid these being flat white. They needed to be a natural fabric, still in a light color and possibly broken up with a pattern. I brought back many swatches from Los Angeles, and a light, summer-weight woven wool with a slight stripe from B. Black & Sons was used to make all of them. It worked well, allowing them to be light and breathable for their dancing routine.

After doing research into men’s’ trousers of the time, and then further into sportswear, I found research for a self-supporting trouser. Denitsa Bliznakova, my advisor, found an article in Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion entitled “The Odd Trouser” (Flusser 112-8). This article showed me that these self-supporting trousers were out there; I just needed to figure out how they worked! I started searching everywhere for the Odd Trouser to indicate how did they maintained grip on the waist. Then I came across a patent for a pair of Self-Supporting trousers that had been released online, full with pattern outline and instructions on how to put them together (Diamond). Though the original research I had found placed them in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this patent was for 1963 (Figure 6.6). We were able to take the technical drawings of them and turn them into the high-waisted pants of the late 1920s. Keith Bonar, the draper assigned to the pants, created two mockup pants of muslin for fitting the four boys. I discovered in the process of fitting these pants that sometimes they had a slight lean, so the side seam needed to be adjusted so it actually fell straight down. Fitting these pants opened by eyes to how each person has a stance all their own (Figures 6.7 and 6.8).

Figure 6.7. Pierre, Alphonse, and Marcel in their Act I pants that were built specifically for them. Source: Olsen, Luke. The Boy Friends. 2011. JPEG file.
A technical flat is a drawing intended to show specific proportions and details of a garment. Renderings are character driven sketches, and do not always give appropriate information like closures or exact finishes. Drawing out a technical flat so the draper can get started, forces the designer to think about proportions, the specific details, and all the trimmings and how the garment opens. I needed to do this for all built garments. Drawing the flats solidified in my mind the goal of each garment, and how I wanted it to fit. Some changes do wind up being made as you move forward into the fitting room, but as you can see from the examples of the orange bathing suit couple, they changed very little from the flats to the finished product (Figures 6.9 and 6.10).
Figure 6.9. Technical flats I drew for Nancy and Pierre’s bathing suits.

1920s fashion relies on a boyish, flat figure for women that prevailed during that time. That decade also solidified the disappearance of corsets that trimmed and tucked women into stiff positions. The 1920s undergarments were bust minimizers and hip slimmers, but I wanted to avoid those traditional kinds seen because they still required boning, which would inhibit the dancing. All of our actresses had curves of some variation to be minimized. I had a challenge to create 1920s silhouettes out of beautiful hourglass figures of the actresses. My first stop was to Macy’s for breast minimizing bras. The ones I chose promised a whole two inches off the bust line.

After debating the best way to smooth the hipline, I decided on a bathing suit style (or one piece) of slimmer. The second act bathing suits barred me from using any kind of slimmer that had shorts. As you can see from Jessica’s fitting photos she still has a beautiful hourglass curve, but it has been minimized enough that the 1920s style dress looks beautiful on her (Figure 6.11 and 6.12).

Figure 6.11. Jessica Christman (Nancy) in her undergarment fitting. Photos taken by author.

Figure 6.12. Jessica with the undergarment on in her Act I dress. Photos taken by author.
CHAPTER 7

INSIDE THE FITTING ROOM

Once the garments are collected, or in the process of being built, each item must be fitted to the actor. The fitting room becomes a place where designer decisions are made; every garment is examined in detail. Actors should be comfortable to express their concerns, in relation to movement and needs of their character. Lastly, the fitting room can be a place where everyone can feel vulnerable at times.

Being prepared for fittings can be a challenge. As a designer goes through a checklist of the numerous items to be fit, simple things sometimes fall through the cracks. Sending someone for missing garments in the middle of a fitting slows the process down greatly. In a fitting you try to avoid as much “running” as possible!

A garment being built goes through three fittings typically, but can go through more when needed. Built garments give a designer the most control over it; everything from color to the number of buttons must be decided. When fitting a rented item, there are only certain alterations that can be achieved; the rental house expects all costumes be returned with very little wear and tear. A pulled garment from your own stock could be reworked to a greater degree than rented ones, but that often means more work for the costume shop. Keeping in mind the workload for the shop is crucial, so the show can be finished on time.

At the first fitting of a built costume the draper presents a mock up of the garment usually in a simple fabric like muslin or one with the same properties as the finished garment’s fabric. The Act II bathing suits were a lesson in progress during the fittings. Hardly anyone, including myself, had ever worked with knits. Peter Herman, one of the full time costume staff at SDSU, draped the boys’ bathing suits. He started with a knit fabric that was the same weight and feel of the fabrics for the final garments. Two of our actors were very tall and thin, and the other two were short and thin. Due to the men having similar measurements, Peter was able to make two pair of bathing shorts to fit on all four. He made four mock up tops for them so we could discuss the specifics of each design. In the fittings, my goal was to avoid the knit pieces becoming too modern and loose looking. The board shorts look would be wrong for this period. This took some finagling with hemlines of shirts.
and shorts to determine what made them look more period. During every fitting, I posted up the original rendering, technical flat and some research so we had a visual reference. In the end, we had created a consistent silhouette for all the boys’ bathing suits (Figure 7.1).

![Figure 7.1. The boys and girls listed left to right: Marcel, Fay, Alphonse, Maisie, Bobby, Dulcie, Pierre, and Nancy; Act II in their finished bathing suits. Source: Olsen, Luke. *Sur la Plage*. 2011. JPEG file.](image)

On the girls’ bathing suits, their mock-ups were made of a plain knit fabric the same weight as the final fabric. Maisie, Dulcie and Mme. Dubonnet had suits that had waists at the natural waistline. At Maisie’s fitting we adjusted where exactly her waist seam fell. Because her suit chevroned, the waist seam needed to be finalized so Keith Bonar, her draper, could make sure all the stripes lined up properly before he got into cutting the fabric. With Dulcie’s, the challenge became her circle skirt, making sure it all fell evenly after the parts on the bias start to stretch a little. Mme. Dubonnet’s was gathered, which sometimes makes people look larger if there is too much fabric, so during her fitting we tried different amounts of fullness to be sure she would look attractive.

Both Fay and Nancy’s suits had drop waists. It was important to me for the upper portion to be a good medium between being tight and blousy. With the bathing suits the goal was to find the most attractive placement on their body and place the hip bands there.
The goal of the second fitting for built garments, is to check on the changes made from the first fitting as well as to finalize all other design decisions. A hem, final finishes, and garment trimmings can often be left until the third fitting. If the first fitting goes well, the second fitting will be in the fashion fabric. Fashion fabric is the actual garment fabric. In the case of the bathing suits, by their second fittings some were closer to having a finished fit than others. The drapers only move to fashion fabric once the fit is set. When fashion fabric is cut, major alterations can be hard to do, especially in a stretchy knit.

All the girls’ second fittings, they moved into fashion fabrics, and I was able to finalize bindings and hem lengths for them. The determination of the exact length of the bathing suit spoke to their characters: Maisie’s being the shortest, and Mme. Dubonnet’s being slightly longer than the others. Getting Maisie’s bathing suit all chevroned, evened out, and prepared for stage, turned out to be a well-worth challenge for Keith Bonar, her draper. The chevron of her suit, created movement and added shape to her body that made her dances alluring. In Figure 7.2, the array of women’s bathing suit hem lengths can be seen.

![Figure 7.2. The end of Act II with all the bathing suits shown. Polly stands center, and Percy is off to the side with Mme. Dubonnet. Source: Olsen, Luke. Sad Ending to Act II. 2011. JPEG file.](image-url)
The most testing built garment in the entire show fell to the draper Kathie Taylor, a first year graduate student. She comes from many years of fashion and even teaches it at a local school, so she was up for the challenge. The Pierette dress Polly wore in Act III was a backless, bias cut dress. Actually, the backless “V” was filled in with power-net: a strong, stretchy material often used for ice-skating costumes to allow the skin to appear nude. Finding exactly where the dress needed to fall on her hips for the right proportions, and taming the bias cut silk took two fittings before draper Kathie felt confident to move into fashion fabric. The other problem with this dress was how to keep the skirt fabric from getting too heavy and weighing down the dress. The extra fabric from the tiered skirt was pulling the dress down, and was ruining the light airiness of the silk. The answer was to “fake” one of the three layers of lower ruffles, by adding it to the second layer. So, though the final dress appears to have three layers, the bottom two ruffles are attached to the same piece of fabric coming from the waistline (Figure 7.3).

Pulling and renting garment fittings work very differently. Sometimes the fitting room would be filled with ten options for a single outfit, and it would become a quick on / off with the clothing. Bethany Elkin, who played Maisie, was fitted three different times before I could decide on my final garment choices. For Maisie’s Act I dress, I had many options and they either did not fit right or posed problems with movement. I found a possible dress in our own stock that needed some light repairs, but once it was on her, I knew it was the one! The periwinkle dress fitted slightly tighter through the torso than the other girls and allowed her to do her high kicks. After that fitting I was able to set that dress up on a mannequin and do the adding of the bright salmon fabric to give her dress the punch it needed for her to stand out.

Maisie was originally slated to have a dress in Act II for “Safety in Numbers.” I knew she would be doing over the head kicks, and end the number in a split. We never found the perfect dress for her, but Paula and I looked at the script and realized that it actually made more sense for her and the boys in the number to just stay in their bathing suits. Our production did not have a proper chorus of boys and girls that many other productions of *The Boy Friend* have; we kept it to the four boys & girls with lines in the script, so the audience would have been aware of the needless change into clothing, and then back into bath suits. It just made sense to keep Act Two flowing along.
With Tony, the little red uniform in Act One was pulled from our stock, and altered to fit him. I had been struggling with finding this jacket since the beginning, but sometimes looking for the possibility in an already built costume can be difficult. I had not found any great options at the rental houses, and did not want to spend the money from the budget to buy one. So, I made myself look at the stock with a new, opened eye. This jacket had the possibility of fitting him in the shoulders, and was the right color, so I pulled it down, and after it had been fit to him, I was then able to think of trimmings and buttons that made it just what he needed. We made it double breasted with black buttons and braided trim, to add to the adorable factor of his character. Polly looked so sweet in her dress, it was important that he just as sweet as she looked (Figure 7.4).


In Act III, Lady Brockhurst went dressed as a poodle to match her own, in a froufrou, beaded dress, and topped off with a fluffy fur hat that made her even taller. Her beaded dress was rented from Long Beach, so I needed to get creative at how an expensive rented dress could be altered to look like her poodle costume, with minimal sewing to the dress. I came up with a fluffy poodle chest, which again would help accentuate her top half. I then added wrist and ankle pieces that would not need to be attached to the dress. I then topped the costume
off by finding a hat to go along with all the rest of it. Before returning the beaded dress, the chest piece could be removed without harming the dress (Figure 7.5).

![Figure 7.5. Lady Brockhurst matching her poodle at the costume ball in Act III. Source: Olsen, Luke. *Lady Brockhurst in Poodle Costume*. 2011. JPEG file.](image)

The fitting process can open up the possibilities of garments. I made many discoveries in the fitting room. Items I had my heart set on sometimes either did not fit or just did not fit in with the overall scheme. Keeping a calm disposition can make all the difference in the fitting room.
CHAPTER 8

ACCESSORIES & DECORATION

The only thing that separates us from the animals is our ability to accessorize!
- Clairee Belcher
  Steel Magnolias

Our choice of accessories displays what kind of person we are. A character without accessories often feels unfinished, so choosing them becomes the finishing touch. Research for accessories from this period can be found in photos. Every dance musical requires appropriate shoes. A long running musical even requires shoe replacements, repairs, and etcetera, on a regular basis. This show only rehearsed and ran for a total of about a month, so I did not need replacements.

Research for accessories can be found in photos and movies from this era. Every photo of women in the 1920s shows their iconic long necklace dangling in front. For the girls, I generally picked a slightly cheaper necklace, ones picked for fun colors while getting dressed. Mme. Dubonnet however wore many dangling necklaces, all based in yellow gold. Yellow gold has become to signify maturity in our modern eyes, as young people now grew up in the 1990s when silver was hugely popular. So, giving Mme. Dubonnet yellow gold was a way to show that she has money, and is a symbol of maturity. Having her in multiple necklaces shows her tendency for that extra dramatic flair (Figure 8.1). Hortense has a single necklace throughout the show, a coral colored seashell on a long gold chain. Her character would have needed to save money for a nice piece of jewelry, but she probably got it during the off season at one of the beach shops who sells these seashell necklaces to the tourists of Nice (Figure 8.2). Their adornments contrasted with Polly’s unadorned self. Her character actually is described in the script as not having any jewelry in the first act. I added simple pearl earrings for the third act, to finish off her look, without it being sparkly or distracting.

Male accessories tell everything about a man. Percy, Polly’s father, is a simple, put-together Englishman. His lack of pocket square shows that he wears his handkerchief on the inside of his jacket. He wears a simple gold pocket watch in his vest, chaining him off from the world. His no-frills look completes with a striped blue tie that unassumingly almost blends in with his shirt body. Lord Brockhurst on the other hand, wears all sorts of contrasting colors. His bright red vest and yellow shirt scream out for attention from under his blue sear sucker suit. His choice of an ascot, and a fluffy, contrasting pocket square show how this titillated man is on the prowl for attention from the young ladies (Figure 8.3). Tony and Bobby, though different physically, are both young rich boys looking for love. Their colors are intended to match their respective girlfriends in a tasteful way. Having these men coordinate with their love interests shows the audience that these young lovers have the same demeanor and fate has brought them together Maisie and Bobby are pictured in Figure 8.4, while Polly and Tony are found earlier in Figure 6.2.

Dance shoes can be both costly and each brand of shoe performs differently. The importance of getting dancers their shoes as early as possible is paramount. However, I did not have the budget for buying the fleet of dance shoes required for this musical. Actors in the show graciously offered up using their own shoes for as much of the show as possible. Polly (Cassie Abate) even offered up her old red tap shoes for her tap number. I started by making a list of the kinds of shoes that would be ideal for each character in each act, and then had the actors give the stage manager (Ryan Heath) a list of the shoes they had and were willing to use for the show. I then matched the shoes I wished to use from their list, and moved forward into asking them to bring them into their fittings. From there I was able to make appropriate decisions on their height for hems, and decide if the shoes themselves needed retouching or dance rubber on them.

My answer to not being able to get individual shoes for the ladies was to give them little shoe clips so they would be personalized for their character and then costume in the Act III. I set my assistant, Erika Orr, coming up with some creative with shoe clips. I instructed her on how to make ribbon flowers and showed her where beads and other findings were in
the shop, and she went to making prototypes for me to chose from. We went back and forth in their designing, and they turned out to be the perfect touch for their shoes (Figure 8.5). They went from being just another character shoe, to being individual- and all just for the price of buying shoe clips!


Mme. Dubonnet needed a bit more dramatic decoration to her shoes than being plain tan or black t-strap character shoes. Luckily, she turned out be a size that could be found in our own stock of shoes! Her Act III shoes and I were painted and bedazzled so they would sparkle as she gracefully sashayed around the stage.

Act II turned out to be the easiest act for shoes as they all needed to look like the little beach booties of the 1920s. After looking long and hard, I found white gymnast shoes that had grip on the bottom, a simple elastic “V” on the top and came in a large enough size to fit everyone in the cast! These shoes provided all of the elements needed to dance in, while also looking like little period booties. Their soft leather allowed them to be easily altered for Dulcie and Fay, who had variations of the short booties.

Shoe fitting tends to happen early in the process, though any embellishment to them happens in the last week right before dress rehearsals. I wait to pull or buy accessories usually until just before the last week of fittings. By this point in the process, every one is gearing up the final dress rehearsal week where all the elements finally come together.
CHAPTER 9

MAKEUP & HAIR

Bright colors, fun patterns, and energetic dance numbers galore: This pastiche of the 1920s was well on its way to being the fun and cheeky romp it deserves to be! Just after final renderings were completed, I presented Paula with hair ideas through research. Final makeup designs were decided on just before first dress.

Hair ideas were already discussed with the director early on in the process. For instance, I knew Mme. Dubonnet’s hair needed to be red for the drama of her character. Peter Herman, San Diego State’s hair advisor, and I sat down with our actress to do color trials for the exact color. We wound up with a dramatically saturated shade of auburn that fit for the character and actress’ skin tone. Polly would be a medium, neutral brown: an attractive color, but not one that draws too much attention to it. I had originally been thinking that Maisie was the fun, racy blonde of the bunch- but Paula hoped she would match her love interest with black hair. We did the same hair trials with the actress playing Maisie, Bethany Elkin. In the end we went with an almost black to satisfy the director’s vision. To make sure we had blonde wigs on stage, we put the Fay and Nancy in slightly different shades of blonde. Dulcie was a dark strawberry blonde, and Hortense would be an almost maroon auburn.

The wig class that Peter was teaching that semester took on the challenge of creating these wigs. Each person in the class was assigned a character, and given research for the style. In addition they worked through all the issues of each wig during dress rehearsal week. Below I have used Hortense as an example of the research given to the stylist and below that, the finished product (Figure 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3).

For the second act, all of the girls needed swim hairpieces made for them. For Maisie, hers was a band that could be added to her current wig. Dulcie, Fay, and Nancy were all designed to have bathing caps. These girls were fitted into their hats that then had matching hairpieces inserted into them, so they appeared to have their hair underneath.


For the men, I provided research photos to Peter, and we discussed how to best implement them. Everyday before the show, the boys would come into the wig room to have their hair styled by the hair crew on the show. Roger Ellis playing Bobby is African American. During the 1920s he would have had about an inch of hair, and would have it conked. Conking is a form of curling using a special curling iron; it was popular form of hairstyle for African American men from the 1920s through the 1940s. Roger, however was in the habit of shaving his head. After discussing whether he should grow his hair out or not, Paula and I decided it was best for him to stay with his hair as it was. Conking is long and tedious process, and also can be very stressful on the hair. We decided that it also would look strange to our modern eye for his hair to be longer and styled.

Usually finalizing makeup design is left until the last few weeks. I had planned on the make up being natural to start, and then moving into a slightly more made-up look for the women when attending the costume ball of Act III. Two weeks out, Paula came to me with photos of the first Broadway production, where the characters had had over-the-top makeup.
This made sense for a pastiche play to have a makeup style deriving from the styles of the original time period. Stage plays in the 1920s would have heightened makeup much more than modern shows. The original production photos showed even the men with exaggerated mouths and enlarged, darkened arching eyebrows. Many of the characters in the first production had opera eye makeup, where the eye is first lined with white eyeliner, and then that is lined with the darker eyeliner. Accentuating the eyes is done for the large opera houses, so they can be seen from the distant balconies. Our house was not that large, and I felt like our production would look extremely odd with that amount of makeup on our characters. So, I came up with looks for the ladies and men that were somewhere between the over-exaggerated looks of the original production, and the more natural look I had planned for originally. Even the men enhanced their lips a little, and filled in their natural eyebrows with powders. I designed personalized colors, and looks for each female character. For the first two nights of dress rehearsal, we added more blush for a good deal of the characters to help get a level of dramatization both Paula and I were happy with (Figure 9.4).

Compromising our ideas on the makeup helped heighten the production and match the same level of the exaggerated acting for this pastiche.

CHAPTER 10

DRESS REHEARSALS: ALL DOLLED UP

Technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals differ slightly in process depending on the theatre. Technical rehearsals are rehearsals that concentrate on adding the technical elements, such as lighting, sound and special effects. These rehearsals are often held over a weekend with two, twelve-hour days with a two-hour break for dinner. Some theatres want to get actors into their costumes while they tech the show. At SDSU, actors are encouraged to wear colors similar to their costumes for the technical rehearsals, and wait to add the real costumes until first dress on Monday evening. Monday night is the first night of dress rehearsals, and they continue every night of the week until Friday night when the show opens. After costumes are added, rehearsals are called dress rehearsals and the entire week can be referred to as “dress week”. Dress week is the time in the process when changes have to be made quickly. Speedy decision-making is essential to help the production flow more smoothly.

The week of dress rehearsal is the time to work out quick changes of costumes. Playwrights tend to write shows for story alone, so often times a character will end one scene only to start the next that takes place a few days later. Blackouts between scenes are thirty seconds or less, so figuring out how to make those changes extremely fast is necessary. In The Boy Friend though, only one character is required to make a fast change. Between Act I and II, Mme. Dubonnet has a quick turn around from her dress to her bathing suit. I made sure to design a hair look for her that did not require a wig change. I also avoided her going down to the dressing room to change; she changed at a changing station stage right. Since the transition between Act I and II had a song by Hortense in between, Mme. Dubonnet had a full minute to make this quick change. After rehearsing it, she made the change without an issue every night.

When working with a director that has a clear vision, the key is really listening to their wants and needs and implementing them. This could smooth the dress rehearsal process greatly. Paula and I often spoke about priorities so that attention was given to the more important issues. Getting into first dress rehearsal is always a nerve racking process. This is the first time that I, the designer, see all of the costumes together on a finished set and under
the correct lights. Putting the costumes with the other technical elements for the first time makes you question certain choices. As a designer I look for certain things such as: seeing how the garments move, how groups of people look together and how the textures work together. In the past, I have been able to be flexible with changes in the designs after seeing them onstage. However, Paula is not a director who likes surprises.

First night of dress rehearsals, I was pleased by my choice to avoid using pink in my costumes. There were small touches in two of my characters, but it had turned out that none of the pink costumes pulled were chosen. There was a huge trellis onstage that I did not know would be as bright a pink as it turned out to be. All of the costumes were in the same color world, but coordinated with the large pink trellis instead of matching it (Figure 10.1). I was also happy with the way the girls were all dressed all in shades of lavender for Act I.

![Figure 10.1. The girls, Polly and Mme. Dubonnet at the prep school in Act I. Source: Olsen, Luke. Prep School in the Morning. 2011. JPEG file.](image)

At the end of the first dress, Paula was mostly happy with everything. One of her issues was with Dulcie’s Act I dress that had been made at the last minute. Even though it had the contrasting yellow and purple, it was not funny enough for her character. Paula felt Dulcie was falling into the background when we wanted her to be a bright, quirky character.
Teri Tavares, SDSU shop manager, offered to make a color alteration to the purple of the
dress so the contrast would be greater, and I promised to come up with a floppy bow for the
front. The next day in the shop, the dress was completely opened, dyed, stitched back
together and accessories added. All of that resolved the issues from the first rehearsal and
made it into a more successful design for Dulcie’s comical character. It was bright, funny
and still cutesy like the other girls (Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2. Dulcie’s dress after being adjusted from

Paula’s other major change from first dress pertained to Hortense, the prep school
maid and narrator. She goes from being at work as a housemaid in Act I to sneaking out for
an afternoon stroll in Act II. Originally, we had her change from her maid uniform into a
royal blue dress. The dress was not quite finished by first dress rehearsal with its color pops,
but was able to be worn. Paula did not find the blue dress appealing once it went onstage. We
talked about various possibilities in making it work for the scene, but when it came down to
it, Paula really loved the rusty color of her first dress. So, we cut the blue dress, and Hortense
removed her apron and maid hairpiece, and added a cream scarf to hide under when she sees Mme. Dubonnet.

I am glad to say that during the rest of dress rehearsals, we had no more major notes, just fixing things and adding accessories that had already been designed and approved into the mix. Every day, more hats arrived in the final scene, until all their looks were completed. Alana Anthony, our crafts person, worked night and day to get all of the hats ready to be worn by Wednesday so Paula could see them all (Figure 10.3).


Working this way has helped me become a better-prepared professional when heading into dress rehearsals. Since this experience, I have worked hard at the design process, by getting specific with the director about what each item will look like. I even give them copies of designs for them to be able to browse through during the rehearsals. These copies keep the director thinking about what the costumes look like, and have created a much smoother dress process.
Overall, *The Boy Friend* turned out to be a well-polished show because of good communication and well rehearsed actors. Though it was not well attended by the general public, those who did come to see it always commented on how wonderful it left them feeling. I think due to the huge popularity of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* that there is a demand for this show out there, but that it needs to be advertised as such. Movies have taken a good deal of the young audiences away from the theatre, so unless you educate your audience, it becomes difficult to fill the seats. Every movie has a three or four previews for them that give away some of the best parts; however this sort of preview is much harder to prepare for potential audiences for theatre. I found it really interesting that out of the four women I brought to see the show, they all agreed that Hortense was their favorite character. Maybe because they loved her sass or that she broke the fourth wall, but I like to think it was her amazing curly hair!

Theatre is, or should be, an entertaining and an exaggerated imitation of real life. This beautiful musical pastiche that harkens back to the gay 1920s lays the perfect grounds for both entertainment, and exaggerated imitation. Theatre is an art form, if it is boring, and unspectacular, then who cares if it continues as an art? Castlevetro’s *The Art of Poetry* says theatre is to delight, and create a commonality (Castlevetro et al. 175). This is the power that theatre holds in a way that movies and TV cannot. I wanted people to have gotten sucked into the world of *The Boy Friend* enough to care about the characters. Feelings felt by the entire audience bring a commonality to each person in that room- suddenly everyone has something in common with the other. This musical in particular holds the power to produce joy in each audience member, so everyone forgets their own worries as they watch the fun, and sometimes-silly world in front of them. I heard those very praises from the people that did see it!

Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy* brings up a point that theatre is an art of imitation, spectators appreciate being able to relate to the characters in some way, even if it is just their
clothing or living environment (Eliot and De Quincy). Getting too far from what the audience knows is dangerous territory to have a failure to reach people, and have a flat, spectacle based show. Though I did not shy away from spectacle in this show, the show itself draws on our human want to be loved for who we are. My conscious decision of keeping Polly a simple, unadorned girl keeps her close to the audience’s heart, and relatable to all of us, even though they reference how rich she actually is. I felt the same about the makeup. If the makeup had been too over done, the audience would have felt alienated as if they were watching a parody of the 1920s rather than an ode to it.

Grotowski’s view on the theatre is making us feel morally uplifted through feelings of pity, and the reminder of what we might do in similar situations. Theatre can use pity, fear, encouragement, to promote basic morals like equality, treat other well, humbleness, etc. At the same time as Meyerhold has said that the main idea of the play must be subtle, no one wants to be beaten about the face with morality. The morality should be inherent; the spectator should not be cognitive of it. The Boy Friend promotes the idea that everyone can fall in love, no matter how old. I found that as I focused in on that uplifting feature to the story, it became bolder and more beautiful, because there was not a single character left out of the beauty— not even the sourly distraught Lady Brockhurst.

Research and table talk is essential to creating a show that is intelligent and focused on the same goal; because I had many meetings with Paula that included the choreographer and dramaturge, I was able to fully talk through the specifics of the show, and how all the pieces of research and staging correlated together harmoniously. Everything artistic should not have to fall on the director. Our productive conversations, were helpful to the process for the director to be able to just “yes/no” options so she could focus on getting the actors to the best of their abilities.

I wish I had taken the moment to have a more in-depth discussion about makeup a little earlier in the process. Knowing that Paula wanted some exaggerated looks would have helped me avoid a last minute surprise one week out from first dress rehearsal.

My major change to the play might have been having a more cohesive design for the Act III costumes. I believe for what they were, they were fun and thought through. However, looking back, I might have come up with more integral ways to unify their formal wear with their costumes. Some, I feel, looked a little contrived or slightly cheap. The costumes fit our
budget and time line, but I think I could have put some extra thought into how beautifully intricate everything needed to look for a formal costume ball. I will use the bird and cat as examples during their song “It’s Never Too Late To Fall In Love” (Figure 11.1). I think some nicer fabrics needed to be mixed in, and I possibly could have designed everything black and white for the ball.

Sometimes a scene or two in the show take your breath away when you see how beautifully it turned out with all the design elements together. For me, that scene turned out to be the song “Poor Little Pierette” with Tony, Polly and Mme. Dubonnet. The way their costumes coordinated and popped against the dark blue lighting, was just stunning (Figure 11.2).

The Boy Friend’s story reminisces a time of lighthearted beauty that flowed out from the designs, allowing the story of these characters to speak. My goal throughout the show was to bring forth the characters’ feelings and innocence through their costumes and hair. The musical takes place during a time when bold art deco styling prevailed and through Cara’s set, my costumes, and Dominic’s lighting we were able to achieve a show that was boldly beautiful. With tweaks during dress rehearsals, I was able to maintain the characters as individuals in this heightened pastiche world of the play. Paula helped shape the characters clearly from the beginning, helping to shape how each one was perceived throughout the show in their own personal way. Being able to serve the story and characters helps the audience appreciate it. The characters become personable when they are well defined. The fact that this play was able to follow an arch from morning to night, with all the elements ensuing that as a guide helped promote the story.

This process helped form my design abilities in such a way that I now feel I can read a script and plan out a design with all the elements in mind. I am better at keeping the director in the loop at every step of the process, as I would love to get an opinion sooner rather than later on most of it. Working with designers that were hands-on the entire process made putting together cohesive design easier than when the designers are all having separate meetings due to scheduling. Having Paula at the helm also helped smooth the process, because she is very clear and open about the things she wants I just needed to listen. Having everything as planned out as possible made this process one I will remember fondly for my life- I am so glad The Boy Friend was my thesis.
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