

# COSTUMES

## PLAY TYPE

- **Small Costume Show**  
Up to about 10 – 15 complete costumes  
Modern time frame – 1940's +  
Most of the costumes can be found at the Powerhouse costume bank, other theatre's costume rooms, thrift shops, or purchased new.
- **Large Costume Show**  
More than 20 complete costumes  
A musical or pantomime, where most of the costumes are very specific and will need to be made.
- **Historical Costume Show**  
Any number of costumes  
History of costume research required  
Historical period costume patterns need to be purchased or drafted  
Historical fabrics need to be researched and acquired  
Historical construction methods need to be used in building the costumes.

## COSTUME CREW

**Costume Coordinator** is needed for all productions. This individual needs to be organized and works well with others in encouraging them to be creative and inventive. **Optional but Helpful** The coordinator should have some knowledge of fashion, colour psychology, understanding of the purpose of a 'theatrical' costume and how it relates to the play. Must have the ability to sew and draw. Or is willing to learn these things. *(If the costume coordinator does not have these abilities, they then must have a costume designer to work with them.)*

**Costume Designer** is needed for all productions. This individual has knowledge of fashion, history of fashion, colour psychology, understanding of the purpose of a theatrical costume and how it relates to the play. Must have the ability to draw well enough to get the design ideas across to the director. **Optional but Helpful** The ability to sew and make patterns. Have the ability to work with the patternmaker to obtain an accurate fit of costumes. *(If the costume designer does not have these abilities, then they must have a pattern maker/cutter to work with them.)*

**Costume Patternmaker** is needed for a large or historical play type.

For a large cast musical or pantomime – able to alter commercial patterns and adapt them to realize the director's concepts. Has the ability to use dyes or paint on costumes. Is able to obtain an accurate fit to costumes. Is able to work directly with the sewers in constructing the costumes for a large costume show.

For a historical costume play - has the ability to draft historical patterns from a picture and cut fabric to realize the accuracy of the designer's concepts. Is able to obtain an accurate fit to costumes. Is able to work directly with the sewers in constructing the costumes in a historical costume show.

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**Seamstress** is needed for all productions.

For a smaller cast modern day play (1940 to present) is able to do alterations on present-day clothes or construct present day clothes from a commercial pattern.

For a large cast musical or pantomimes the individual is a good sewer and is able to adapt a commercial pattern and possibly sew with more difficult fabrics.

For a historical costume play is able to take the fabric pieces and put together the costumes using theatrical/historical techniques with no written instructions. (*This is not for the beginner home sewer.*)

**Dresser** is required during the run of the play to deal with quick changes and general maintenance of the costumes, i.e. repair and cleaning. Ability to sew and mend costumes and has access to laundry facilities.

*If the dresser does not have these abilities then they must find others to work with them who are able to do these things.)*

Depending on the number of actors, number of costumes, style of the play (historical, modern, fantasy etc.) and desire and time commitment and skills of the persons interested in the 'costume' position, many of these jobs can be combined.

### **PRE-PLANNING**

Costume coordinator is found.

The size of the task is determined and the nature of costume crew is identified – costume designer, patternmaker etc. The costume coordinator/designer is directly responsible to the director and set designer.

### **PLANNING**

For the costume coordinator/designer:

1. Read and understand the play. Make notes of specific costume changes or reference from the script.
2. Discuss with the director, set designer, and lighting designer as to interpretation, style and mood of the play.
3. Discuss specifically with the director as to interpretation, style mood and basic concepts of the costumes.
4. Plan how many costumes will be needed. Prepare sketches or pictures 'mockups' of designs of costumes. (These sketches will reflect the 'ideal' – as if you had all the time and money in the world.)
5. With the Powerhouse costume bank manager see what is available to use from there. The manager can tell you of costumes that are rented out at the moment. If you have found things from the costume bank adjust sketches and plans accordingly. Other equipment available in costume bank: sewing machine, iron, fabric pieces, notions, buttons, jewelry, hair piece, hats, shoes, socks, pantyhose, glasses, and purses.
- 5a. Check other costume sources. Lorraine Johnson-Brotsky will also be helpful with other sources. Other theatre groups are Asparagus (Armstrong), Shuswap (Salmon

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Arm), Caravan or high school drama departments. Costume rental places are Evelyn Milton in Kelowna, Carol's Costumes in North Vancouver or Mallbars in Vancouver.

6. At this point a costume budget can be determined.

How many costumes are already available (rented)	\$
How many can be begged or borrowed	\$
How many can be purchased from thrift stores	\$
How many will be purchased new	\$
How many will have to be made (this will involve costing out the fabric and notions for each costume)	\$

Present this outline to your technical producer so an accurate budget can be established. This must be done asap (within 1st week – even prior to auditions). At this point final costume sketches can be prepared to reflect any adjustments to fit within the budget. Check these final drawings with the director.

7. On each costume sketch, mark where each costume piece is coming from including accessories (e.g. borrow, buy, make). At this point you will have a very specific idea of the number and ability of the costume crew required for the job.

8. Check with the producer about purchasing methods and make the costume crew aware of these methods (purchase order book, petty cash, Powerhouse charge accounts).

9. Prepare a costume plot chart using a grid system sketching each character's costume in the appropriate place according to scene or French scene (a scene within a scene).

10. Timeline chart – from a 'production' chart that has all the dates for everything to do with the play, make a production chart of costume due dates e.g. rehearsal costumes needed, costume parade, 1<sup>st</sup> technical rehearsal etc.

## WORKING

1. Begin this process by having a play reading with the whole costume crew so they will all know what they are doing and why. This can often be done in conjunction with the cast reading of the whole script.
2. Measure the actors.
3. Obtain necessary rehearsal costumes as soon as possible from the costume bank. Make sure a list is left for the costume bank manager of anything that is taken. (Rehearsal costumes that are similar in style to the final costume, e.g. long skirt, short skirt, dress shoe, high heeled shoes, suit, jacket, overcoat, hat, additional stuffing etc.) As rehearsals progress the costume coordinator designer should be told of costume needs that may come up during rehearsals, so keep asking about this.
4. Collect chosen costumes from the costume bank, leaving a list for the costume bank manager. Do not cut or change vintage clothing. If you're not sure ask someone who is, such as Sarah McLean or Lorraine Johnson-Brotsky.
5. Begin the search and buy other costumes needed. Generally actors are responsible for their own underwear, socks, pantyhose, unless the play requires specifics. If so it is most often easier to have the actor buy these and be reimbursed.

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6. For a large sewing costume play begin by searching out the fabric stores and buying. Set up appropriate times to have sewing bees at the theatre. This can be set up in the 'old club room' or the 'upper dressing room' depending on how much space is needed. It is also feasible to have some things sewn at home. Work the costume fittings in and around the rehearsals. A rehearsal schedule should be readily available to you so you and the actor's time are not wasted.  
When costumes are ready they may be introduced into the rehearsal process, as the director will then get a feel as to the costumes instead of seeing them all on the first technical rehearsal. However, make sure that this will not abuse the costumes.
7. Attend appropriate rehearsals as time permits. The sewers should sit in on the odd rehearsal – they are fun – and get a feel for how the costumes look.
8. Attend all production meetings.
9. Have dressers available as requested for rehearsals.
10. During technical rehearsals (the last week before opening) be present to receive notes from the director and take notes for you own use.
11. Arrange for a backstage area for costume changes and storage.
12. Arrange for an adequate number of dressers and make sure they are aware of their duties.  
Costume maintenance – repairing, laundering, and pressing before each show.  
Backstage changes – where and when these take place – be sure actors are aware of how these are done. Sometimes they need 'practice time'.
13. Arrange for adequate dressing room facilities. Change rooms, appropriate number of full-length mirrors and enough hanging space for all costumes. Each costume rack should have labels for each costume to hang by. (Round cardboard discs on the rod also work.) Accessories (non hanging things) can be stored in labeled boxes or plastic bins. Rooms used for costume construction should be cleaned as they may be used for dressing or makeup during the run.

## RUN

Once the show is running the job of the costume designer, patternmaker and seamstress is complete, although they may choose to become the dressers or running crew.

1. Make actors aware that there is to be NO eating, drinking or smoking in costume. There may be smocks made available to cover costumes during intermission. The actor should wear no costume piece home.
2. Make sure there is a 'costume person' available backstage each night even if there are no fast changes required. Regular costume maintenance must be done – repairing, laundering, and pressing before each show. Things can happen to costumes during the play and there needs to be someone to look after emergencies.
3. After each show all costumes and accessories must be accounted for in their proper places.

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### STRIKE

After the play everything must be put back where it was found.

All costumes must be taken to the cleaners or home to be laundered and then returned immediately to the theatre costume bank, costume rental companies, and the individuals who loaned costumes. The Powerhouse has an account with Toppers Cleaners so when taking costumes in to be cleaned make sure they realize it is from Powerhouse Theatre. The cleaning expense will be part of your budget. Any purchased or 'built' costumes will go to the Powerhouse costume bank but must be catalogued by the manager first.

The rooms used for costume construction must be cleaned and all unused notions or large pieces of fabric be given to the costume bank.

Equipment used (iron, ironing board, sewing machine) must be returned to the costume bank or wherever they came from.

Submit final expenses to the technical producer with all receipts and bills. You cannot expect to be reimbursed if you don't have receipts.

Return job description manual and any theatre keys to the technical producer.