

Costume Design Process – Kierceton Keller

Think of a new dance as a puzzle that you have all of the pieces for, but it's just not put together yet. You have the idea, and a way to execute it, but need all of the pieces to make it a success.

The pieces of the puzzle include:

- Dancers
- Music
- Performance space
- Occasionally a set or props if they're called for
- Lights
- Costumes

A puzzle isn't finished until all of the pieces are put together to make a beautiful final product, the dance itself.

How costumes can enhance your dance:

Costumes can support and help further tell the story you are creating with your bodies. Costumes can intensify the message by providing a visual aide/stimulus for audience members. By aligning the look of a costume with the lighting, music, and mood of the dance, you create the full effect.

The goal of costumes in dance is to create a visual of a mood or feeling for the audience unlike designing for a play or musical where you're creating clothing that fits into a world or is historically accurate. You're more so painting an abstract piece of art versus a still life.

Costume construction:

When creating costumes for dance specifically, there are certain helpful aspects that bring the abstract to life. Fabric, texture and color, all contribute to the process.

Fabric:

Certain fabrics are more commonly used in dance costuming because of the way it moves on stage as you dance and they are:

- Tulle
 - A meshy fabric that is very light and airy. Almost transparent. Flows really nicely and lets light shine through. Alternatively, it can have some structure to it like a tutu.
- Chiffon
 - A sheer fabric that flows like water on stage. Really great if you're looking for a lot of motion in your piece. Because it's so sheer, light goes right through
- Knit
 - The preferred fabric of dancers from what I've noticed. It's stretchy, and easy to dance in. This ranges anything from leggings to swing dresses. Brings a more vibrant color to the stage because it's thicker and becomes very saturated under light.

Texture:

Because there's so much movement that comes with dance, tiny details that are common in theatrical design can sometimes go by the wayside because they'll rarely be seen. There are other ways to create intriguing details to dance costumes through altering the fabric. Fabric can be dyed in a gradient, or ombre technique, tie dyed, distressed with bleach, or even painted on.

Colors:

Colors tend to look entirely different once onstage and under the lights. Things that might look dramatically different to the natural eye are washed by stage light and suddenly look like the exact same colors. Lighter colors always look much lighter, and can read white if not too careful. It's important to always go for a slightly darker, or richer, color because almost every time, it will read as the color you wanted once up on stage.

~Design Timeline~

1. You're hired. Yay!
2. Preliminary meetings begin
 - Meet with the production team and choreographers, to get an idea of what everyone is looking for
3. Dancer measurements
4. Any research, historical or otherwise, needed to begin designing the dance
5. Begin thinking of ideas. Make sure you are able to access all of the items you put in your designs by sourcing them from somewhere
6. Create rough sketches, collages, mood boards, etc to present to the choreographers to make sure you're all on the same page
 - If it's well received, great! If not, back to the drawing board
7. Once everyone is in agreement, it's time for final renderings. Once they are finished and approved, that generally when there can no longer be any changes or alterations to the design because they are now in process of being created.
8. Shopping time! Costumes can be curated from a multitude of places including:
 - A costume stock
 - Thrift stores
 - Rented or borrowed from another school or theater
 - Buying from various stores
 - Amazon
 - Made from scratch
9. Fittings- make sure everything fits!
10. Alterations- make everything fit!
11. Tech/ Dress rehearsal time. This is when we finally get to see costumes on stage for the first time and see what works and what doesn't. From there, we troubleshoot.
12. Once the show closes we strike all of the costumes and return them to their respective homes.

~FIN~