A COSTUME AND MAKE-UP DESIGN OF JACQUES OFFENBACH'S

LA PERICHOLE

An abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theatre
by
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ABSTRACT

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by
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Master of Arts in Theatre

I. THE PROBLEM

A. Definitions. Stage costuming and make-up must be in accordance with the interpretative ideas of the director, and, of course, subject to his approval. The chief tools used by the costume and make-up designer are line, mass, colour, texture, ornaments, and accessories. The costume designer need not totally build the costumes or execute the designs single-handedly, but experience in these fields will enhance the designer's abilities as an artist in the special field of costume design.
B. Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this project (1) to design costumes and make-up for the forty-five principals and chorus members of the production of Jacques Offenbach's opera-bouffe La Perichole at California State University, Northridge, on October 28, 29, November 2, 4, and 6, 1977; (2) to select and buy the materials needed; (3) to organize costume and make-up crews; and (4) to supervise the construction of the show.

II. BACKGROUND AND DESIGN CONCEPT

A. Study of the script. In this case, the script was the libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halevy for the Metropolitan Opera version in English of La Perichole.

La Perichole was written in 1868 for a Paris which, as yet, "knew neither the humiliation nor the cost of defeat, a Paris still joyously imperial, a city of rustling crinolines and magnificent uniforms, of elegant carriages and top-hatted dandies . . ."¹

The plot revolves around the love story between Perichole and Paquillo, two street singers in Lima, Peru. The time is a certain day in Spring, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, and it is the

¹ Maurice Valency, "La Perichole: French Without Tears," Theatre Arts, Jan. 1957, p.34.
birthday of the capital's ruler, the Viceroy Don Andres de Ribeira. After many misfortunes, a lovers' fight, and a stay in the capital's jail, the two lovers will finally be reunited with the benediction of the Viceroy. This is

"an utterly charming story, and it is fundamentally joyous, impudent, and melodious. It was intended primarily to amuse the audience, not to edify it or to arouse in it magnificent emotions. The general mood is keen, bright, spirited, and, above all, witty. The operetta had room for sentiment, but the sentimental moment was never protracted into seriousness. The plot was simple, but pleasantly fantastic in its conception, and inexorably realistic in its view of life. It ridiculed everything, all that was hypocritical, pompous, solemn, and bombastic. Yet, it was chic, literate, and in excellent taste, often naughty, never bawdy."

B. Research. An intensive study of costume books on nineteenth century Europe and nineteenth century Peru was done to establish the silhouette of the period for men, women, and soldiers. An additional research of Peruvian colours helped determine the colour scheme for the peasant characters. Jewels, hairdos, headdresses, and shoes were also extensively researched.

C. Preparation of the Costume Design.

1. General Procedures. After a conference with the director, all the necessary costume changes for the different scenes were agreed upon. A tentative list of costumes was made, which required sixty sets

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2Valency, op. cit., p.34-35.
of costumes for the whole production, in addition to costume pieces and accessories such as shawls, purses, hats, headdresses, belts, and handkerchieves.

To stay within the budget limit, it was decided that, for the women chorus, costume basics such as skirts or bodices would be pulled from the available stock, and put together into court dresses. The costumes for the leading characters and the soldiers would be constructed, and, in a few instances, adapted from stock.

It is essential to note that, because this production was an educational venture, double-casting was used to provide additional experience to student singers. This, therefore, necessitated a difference in the costume design for the doubles, due to the difference in physical appearances.

a. The Chorus. The chorus people included the Viceroy's court members, the Peruvian peasants, and the soldiers. For these three levels of society, up to three costumes for each actor or actress would have to be provided. It was also the designer's responsibility to assure smooth and fast costume changes, and the costumes would have to be designed accordingly.

Since Peruvian costumes are essentially warm in colour, the contrast was achieved by putting the Viceroy's court in cooler hues. Ladies-in-waiting would all wear the basic dress of the Crinoline period, with low neckline, pointed waistline, and full skirt. The colours would range from different shades of green to ochre, with a prevalence of the green colour. Lavish jewels, feathers, and trim would be used to convey the social rank. The male characters in the
Viceroy's court would don black cutaway suits, with white shirts, cravats, and top hats. To become soldiers, they would change into uniform jackets over their white shirts and black pants, and would put on their soldiers' hats and baldricks. The Peruvian peasants would dress in colourful breeches, peasant shirts, vests, skirts, blouses, shawls, and straw hats.

b. Leading characters. Paquillo and Perichole would be dressed in warm earth tones. Their peasant outfits would bear the Peruvian look: Paquillo would have breeches, a vest over a full-sleeved shirt, gathered at the neck, a colourful sash around the waist, and a straw hat ornamented with pompons and feathers. Perichole would dress in an ankle-length skirt, a long-sleeved bodice laced up the front, and a decorative apron. Both would go barefoot. When in the Viceroy's court, Paquillo and Perichole would don garments of the upper class: White shirt, white neckcloth, black tail, and red sash for Paquillo; burgundy velvet dress, with satin sleeves and bodice front covered with lace for Perichole. A black lace mantilla was added for the prison scene. In the wedding scene, she would don a white lace, satin, and brocade dress, with a lace veil.

Don Andres de Ribeira, Viceroy of Peru, would appear in the first scene disguised as a watermelon vendor. His costume would consist of a ragged cloak, green with red trim, which would barely conceal his white cravat, black tail, black boots, and white gloves. When leading his brigadiers and dragoons in search of Paquillo and Perichole, he would be in a white tail uniform decorated with gold braid and epaulettes.
His subjects, Don Pedro, Governor of Peru, and the Count of Panatellas, would both have rags over their obvious court outfits, which would consist of cutaways decorated with gold trims, buttons and epaulettes, bright coloured sashes and baldricks. The Marquis de Tarapote, Lord Chancellor, would basically wear the same kind of garments, but to his costume would be added eccentric details and extravagant colours, such as a combination of hot pink and orange chevroned and striped decorations.

The three cousins' dresses would keep the same silhouette as the rest of the female characters on stage, but their skirts would be much shorter, and hiked up on one side. Their tight boots, bare arms, low cut bodices, and the outlandish trim on their costumes, as well as heavy make-up would be indicative of their profession.

The choice of colours, lavish decorations, and ornaments should convey lightness, gaiety, and comedy, which constitute the overall mood of the operetta.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Design concept and its execution.

1. Line and mass. The silhouette of the period was more or less achieved, and there was a certain unity respected. Because of a lack of experience in construction techniques, the designer had chosen not to delve into such things as crinolines and corsets, and the look of the period was restricted to very full skirts and fitted bodices.
Budget limitations necessitated the use and alteration of available stock dresses for female chorus members, which increased the difficulty of coordinating silhouettes and colours.

The look of the men's costumes stayed consistent throughout the show, whether they were court outfits, military uniforms, or peasant garments. The choice of the style for the court outfits was a good one, since it gave a pompous, yet flattering look to the men of the upper class.

2. Colours. There was some significance in the choice of colours, as described in the preparation of the costume design. The colour scheme for the ladies-in-waiting in the Viceroy's court was respected in general, and although an expert eye would detect some awkwardness in the combination of colours, the general audience would simply attribute it to the eccentricity of the court during that time. The use of bright sashes throughout the show, even with the men's black suits, reflected well the mood of the opera. The Peruvian costumes were quite pleasant with their warm, cheerful, and exotic tones. The general picture is one of brightness and colourful gaiety, and the designer succeeded in achieving it.

3. Textures. In texture, the show offered some meaningful connotations, with the selection of homespun, rough fabrics for peasants, shimmery satins, crisp taffetas, and rich velvets for the nobility, and woolen tailoring fabrics for the army.

4. Ornaments and accessories. The total look of the show was improved by ornaments and accessories. Thanks to very helpful
suggestions from the Faculty Advisor, trims, laces, metallic braids, ribbons, shawls, sashes, insignias, and medals gave a finished touch to the costumes. Head pieces, nicely executed with feathers, rhinestones, and ribbons added to the glitter of necklaces and earrings on the ladies-in waiting. Gloves, cravats, sashes, baldricks, shoes, and handkerchiefs were pulled and built to match the costumes.

5. Make-up. Straight stage make-up was used, with a darker base for the Peruvian society, and lighter and more sophisticated make-up for the upper class. The only two heavy character make-ups were done on the actors playing Tarapote and the Old Prisoner for whom special beards and moustaches were constructed. Tarapote looked very official, but at the same time ridiculous and funny, with his moustache going straight upward, and curly locks on his forehead. The Old Prisoner did not convey an image of misery and gloominess that would destroy the general mood, but his make-up rather defined his character which was one of amusing craziness.

Paquillo's make-up had to be darker than that of the other court men, and, since one of the two actors playing the role was light complexioned, make-up had to be applied to his chest, legs, and hands. One of the actresses in the role of Perichole had blonde hair, and the use of a dark hair wig was considered. It was finally decided that her own hair decorated with flowers would be more adequate and would look more natural than a wig.

B. Final Product. To the average audience, the costumes worked well and served their purpose of conveying the style of the opera,
its mood, theme, and ideas. They helped clarify some character relationships and establish the locale, as well as the socio-economic status of the characters.

To a more technical-oriented eye, although the principles of design were observed, some weaknesses were noticeable. All the costumes in the production constituted a unity, but some of the individual garments seemed collections of disparate parts, rather than complete wholes. However, monotony was avoided, and variety was attained by the use of colours and ornaments, and by the treatment of details within the same silhouette.

Proportion was realized in the amount and distribution of colour and line, resulting in harmony, grace, and sophistication. Awkwardness, ugliness, and ridicule were intentional, subtle, and never in bad taste, as in the case of the Old Prisoner, whose 'outfit was an eclectic mixture of colours, lines, and textures.

There was an effort to create a centre of interest in each scene. Major points of interest were attained, but somehow the subordinate ones were forgotten, and, in some scenes, costumes that should attract the eyes just got blended into the set, or washed out by the lights.

The make-up for the production was successful, since it established age, class, and psychological qualities. It was also indicative of the style of the operetta. It achieved its practical purpose of restoring colours and forms to faces under stage lights, and in the space of the theatre.
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A. Summary. The final product of La Perichole's costumes is the typical result of a learning process. It was adapted to meet:

1. The demands of the opera, with its double-casting, especially in this case, when two very physically different persons were cast in one role. This added to the problem of coming up with two identical costumes for one character. The opera also used the chorus people in many different scenes as different characters.

2. The limitations imposed by working conditions such as budget, time, manpower, experience, and skills.

The designer, in the desire to be well-prepared and well-researched, took too long to organize the materials, thus facing the reality of running out of time before construction even started. The absence of full details in the renderings contributed to slowing down the execution of the design concept. In addition, the set and lighting designer and the costume designer did not confer often enough, and the colours of the set and lights did not enhance the colours and lines of the costumes.

B. Conclusion. The production of La Perichole at California State University, Northridge provided an opportunity for the student designer to realize design interests in production. It was also a challenge and a very important change from class projects, small shows,
and children shows. The large scale of the production and the intricacy of costume changes forced the designer to face problems that had not been encountered before. The designer was finally aware that (1) research is important, but needs to be applied to the production at an earlier point; (2) renderings need to be more detailed and to provide technical instructions; (3) communication and coordination with the set and lighting designer are crucial and have to be pursued throughout the production; and (4) more experience in costume construction and pattern-making is necessary to design totally feasible costumes.
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Don Andres, Viceroy of Peru
II, 5, 6, 7
Left to right:
Peruvian Peasants
Perichole & Paquillo
Peruvian Peasants
Left to right:
Viceroy
Don Pedro
Count Panatellas