

Theatre People: Accessories (Wardrobe)

Accessories put the finishing touch on a costume, and are vital details to give clues about the character. They can be soft, like ties, gloves, and scarves; or hard, like glasses, jewellery, or medals. These might need to be decorated, altered for look or for function – like a necklace that is pulled off but cannot break – or even made from scratch. Especially in shows from the past, there can be a lot of accessories in a production.

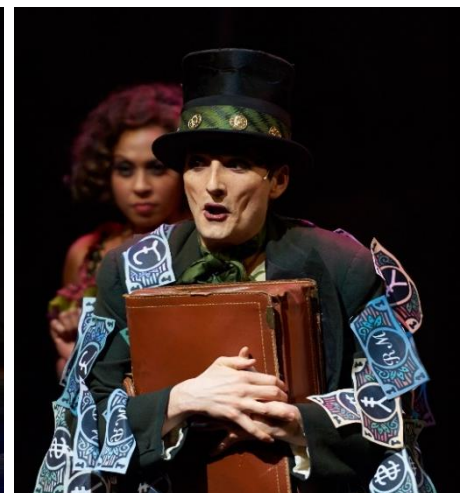
In a large theatre, there might be a person completely devoted to accessories. At Royal MTC, shoes are part of accessories and need to be bought, altered for fit, and even painted. The wardrobe Buyer also handles these areas. At the Stratford Festival, shoes are their own department, hats are their own department, and the Bijoux department deals with decorating those as well as other soft and hard accessories. In smaller companies, there might be one or a few wardrobe workers who do everything!

Tasks and activities in a typical day

- Look at costume sketches for details about each costume, and list accessories that you can see
- Research and understand the time period in which the play takes place
- Get measurements of each actor for relevant accessories – head size for hats, hand size for gloves...
- Meet with costume designer to ask questions about each costume
- Build or alter accessories as necessary. This could involve pattern making, wire sculpting, sewing, gluing, painting, stencilling, dyeing, and more.
- Organize accessories by actor
- Hold specific fittings for hats and shoes as needed
- Get notes from costume fittings on actors for changes or finishing details
- Clean, organize and maintain storage areas
- Maintain wardrobe shop tools



This sketch gave a good idea of what accessories would be needed, and they were created exactly to match. (Designer: Brian Perchaluk; lighting Scott Henderson)



There was lots of accessory work in this production of *Cabaret!* Left: Sally's shoes had to be good for dancing in, period-appropriate (1930s) and also match her outfits. Shoes with the right look and durability were bought, then painted to match. Centre: The MC's hat, tie, and shoes (again, good for dancing and painted) were the responsibility of Accessories – and so were the gorilla's bow and parasol. Right: The MC's Money ensemble featured graphics of bills laser-printed on fabric, and a top hat from the theatre stock embellished with coins. (Designer: Tamara Kucheran; lighting: Hugh Conacher)

Theatre People: Accessories (Wardrobe)

10 skills that a wardrobe accessories person uses:

- Communication
- Attention to detail
- Time management
- Creative problem solving
- Computer internet and research skills
- Collaboration
- Textile skills (sewing, dyeing, fitting)
- Jewellery making and working with wire
- Colour theory, painting and dyeing
- Garment and shoe fitting



Accessories give clues about the time period and a character's personality, status, and background, but also about the show itself. In *Harvey* the colourful, patterned, exaggerated accessories help convey that this is a whimsical show. (Design: Brian Perchaluk)

Building Abilities

There are probably lots of things you are already doing, and things you can start to do, that will serve you in a career in wardrobe. Some of these are:

- Sewing and textile projects
- General arts and crafts! You never know what you might need to adapt.
- Looking at labels: what fabrics are things made from and how could that affect how they will take paint or dye?
- Jewellery making, beading, wire work
- Learning about accessories from different periods in history
- Noticing costumes in the plays, TV, and films you watch. What do the accessories tell you about the character or production? (Eg, what kind of person wears a watch, wedding ring, etc)



Theatres have to balance how much storage space they have with how hard pieces are to purchase or rent, and which they are most likely to use again. Royal MTC has a collection of hats, shoes, and all sorts of pieces to pull from. Historical pieces are more likely to be kept than modern ones.