

# SET AND COSTUME DESIGNING

## ERIN MADDOCKS AND THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER ROLE

Erin Maddocks originally comes from North Wales. She followed a foundation course in Art at Coleg Menai before moving on to Leeds University. She graduated in 2010 after studying Theatre Design. She's worked for many different companies across Britain, including Cwmni'r Fran Wen, Theatr Clwyd, Hijinks, and Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru here in Wales. The productions she's worked on include 'Chwalfa', 'Gwydion' and 'Y Tad'. In addition to designing she runs costume departments and has travelled for many years with Opera North. More information can be found on Erin's personal website:

<http://erinmaddocks.com/>



## THE ROLE OF THE SET DESIGNER

The main duty of the Set Designer is to create something spectacular on stage that will attract and keep the attention of the audience. Also, it will help the audience to understand the context, theme, atmosphere and mood of the play.

The Set Designer needs to have a sensitive and creative mind, and the ability to communicate effectively with the manufacturer of the set and props, and with the Lighting and Sound Designers, who will help the set come alive on stage.

Set designing is an important part of any production whether the set is very realistic, minimalist or uses rostra or platforms.

The set will always support the play or the script and the Set Designer has an important role to play, as well as working closely with the Director.



# SET AND COSTUME DESIGNING

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD SET DESIGN?

A good set design will succeed in answering the following questions and the Set Designer should come back to these three questions while going through the creative process:

1. Does the set design assist the actor?  
The set should assist the plot rather than hold it back – e.g. a door at the correct angle, a prop or piece of furniture that's not too big or is too difficult to move etc. If the actor is moving and looks uncomfortable on stage, the set has failed.
2. Does the set add to the atmosphere, style and mood of the play?  
A good set will provide a frame around the action and introduce the characters and their environment. It will convey the period, location and possibly the country. The colours and shapes will suggest the mood of the plot: light colours will suggest happiness and dark colours will suggest that something sinister is about to happen perhaps. The quality of the set and furniture can reflect financial and social situation. The style can also suggest the genre of the play – such as tragedy, comedy, farce, romance etc. The information on set with regard to pictures, the type of books, furniture and props also contributes to information about the characters, their mental state and their circumstances.
3. Is the intention achieved?  
Many things can prevent this – lack of money, resources, time, and planning etc. A good designer will work within his/her budget and forward-planning and realism are essential. A chair and a table can create an appropriate atmosphere but only if they're in the correct period and style.

## SET DESIGN, THE PROCESS

### ERIN MADDOCKS, SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER FOR 'Y TAD' AND 'SWEENEY TODD'

Read the script and consider some initial ideas – create an imaginary picture in your head. Ask questions constantly:

entrances / exits?

time of day?

how many chairs are around the table?

how many rooms lead from the room?

Create a mood board of the initial ideas, and the feel and atmosphere of the play.

Consider the costumes and the furniture – the colour palette and the period.

Meet with the Director and discuss the initial ideas – make notes on the side of the script that answer a lot of questions.

Presentation of the white card model – how the set will possibly look. By this point you should have created a model with the first ideas of the structure of the set and the shape – not many details but a draft of how the set will look. Have a discussion with the Director, the Lighting Designer and the Sound Designer.

Write the feedback down and go away to think of what can change, what would work better, and develop that.

Further meeting using the model of the set – with any changes following the feedback. Discuss again with the Director, the Lighting Designer and the Sound Designer, and this time those who will be building the set.

The final presentation of the set will be to the cast.



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## Y TAD' SET – ERIN MADDOCKS

Notice that the design is completely white, apart from the furniture. Erin explained that was so the house can be many locations, and it would add to the audience's confusion as they constantly question whose house they were in and, of course, that was Arwyn's frustration – that he wasn't quite certain where he was. The set worked especially well when the white doors were closed to create hospital doors, and a hospital bed was placed in the middle of the room. The furniture was all removed from the stage, and the theme of loneliness became obvious as Arwyn is on his bed, crying in the arms of the nurse, completely confused.

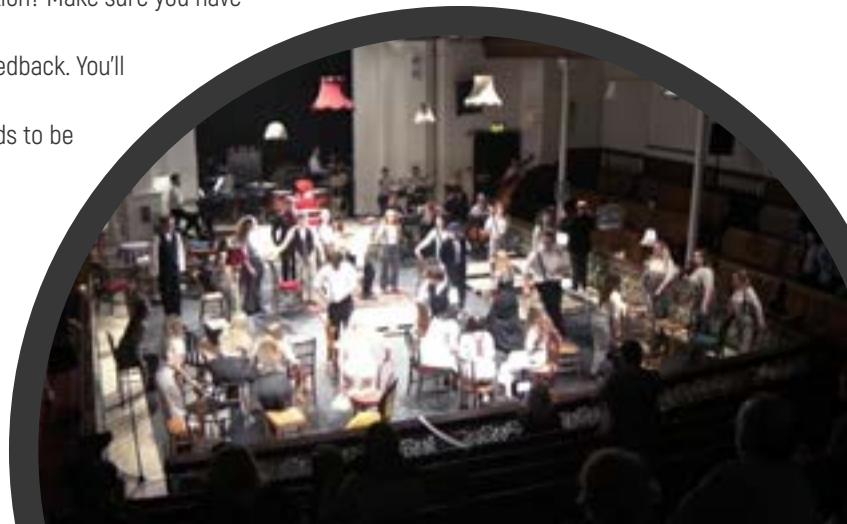


## ERIN MADDOCKS' SET FOR 'SWEENEY TODD' – BA PERFORMANCE COURSE

The Director, Angharad Lee, explained that the chorus were on the stage throughout the production and that they were in fact the set. The ensemble would position and move the set throughout the production by using chairs to change positions, using the wooden rostra to create different stages and repurposing props like the lamps by putting them on their heads and lighting them, or by moving around the stage carrying a bird cage during Johanna and Anthony's scene.

## ACTIVITY 1

- Follow these steps in relation to one of the plays that you are studying for your A Level course – 'Dros Bont Brooklyn', 'Blodeuwedd', 'Wbw', 'Gelyn y Bobl', 'Medea', 'Un Nos Ola Leuad', 'Sweeney Todd', 'Mamets', 'Jo Wy'...
- Make notes first of any ideas that come to you after reading the script – how many scenes and locations are needed for the play?
- In what period is the play set? Is the Director staging the drama in its original period? Research into the period. What type of furniture, houses, props were there in that period. What colours are relevant? Which furniture designers were popular etc.?
- Is there a particular play that's more appropriate to keep in its period? What would be your reasoning for keeping within the period?
- Create a mood board first with a collection of photographs of the set, furniture, props, colour palettes, images, words and photographs that create a collage of the play's visual and emotional ideas.
- Consider the colours carefully. Do you use different colours in the set or are you going to limit colour to the costumes, furniture and fittings, and props?
- Which other plays have you seen that have influenced you? What were the reasons for this? Was the set successful or unsuccessful in that production? Make sure you have definite reasons why.
- Create a white card model of the set in order to get feedback. You'll need to ensure that the model is on a scale of 1:25.
- Make notes following the feedback in case the set needs to be developed further.



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## ACTIVITY 2

You are the Set Designer for a production of a Shakespearean play. (Choose a Shakespearean play that's familiar to you – e.g. 'Macbeth', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Hamlet', 'The Comedy of Errors'.) You are discussing with the Director his/her vision for the production and they say that they're going to stage the play in a modern way. Answering this, design the type of set you'd like to see for the production, giving reasons for your choice.

## ACTIVITY 3

There are many set changes during the play 'Y Tad' – the furniture and fittings are pulled slowly from the stage at the ends of scenes. How do you consider tackling these changes while ensuring the play still flows easily?

## ACTIVITY 4

You are the Set Designer for a production of 'Sweeney Todd'. The Director is keen to have a naturalistic set. Collect photographs of past performances of the play and create a mood board of your ideas of how you'd see the set naturalistically. You'll need to have two levels in order to create Mrs Lovett's shop and Todd's barbershop. How will you create the furnace, the asylum, and Judge Turpin's house?

Which productions have you seen that have influenced your plans? Give definite reasons for those influences.

## ACTIVITY 5

### 'It appears that the whole village is crazy'

You are the Set Designer for the play 'Un Nos Ola Leuad' (One moonlit night). The play is set in a quarrying town – somewhere similar to Bethesda in the 1920s. The drama deals with poverty and men dying in the quarries or suffering horrible injuries. There are storylines about people going insane and being forced into the asylum. The landscape and the country surrounding the drama plays an important part, and it can be said that it's a character in the play. Create a set which will succeed in incorporating the images and themes of poverty and insanity in your design. Discuss how you, as a Set Designer, would convey those themes and the meaning of the play to the audience.

Make notes on the following:

the use of colour to convey the theme of insanity.

how important will the moon be and how can you convey that?

how can you convey the idea that the Man's journey to discover his past is in the drama?

how can you convey the many locations in the play, while remembering that the scenes are fairly episodic and there isn't much time for set changes?

how will you convey the scenes within the house, out in the country, and in the asylum?

how will you convey the moon at the end of the play as a symbol of insanity?

how will you go about conveying the horrible end of the play where the Man walks into the lake and takes his own life?

also discuss which other live productions in the theatre have influenced your decisions and ideas with regard to designing a set .

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## ACTIVITY 6

You are the Set Designer for a production of 'Dros Bont Brooklyn' (A View from the Bridge). The Director is keen to have a naturalistic set. Collect pictures of past productions of the play and create a mood board of your ideas of how you see the naturalistic set. You will need to ensure that there are a number of locations in your set: the street, Alfieri's office, the Carbones' house, the telephone box etc. How will you convey that we're seeing Brooklyn Bridge in the background? Which productions have you seen that have influenced your plan? Give definite reasons for those influences.

## ACTIVITY 7

The tree in the production of the play 'Y Tad' (The Father) is a symbol of the decline of the protagonist, Arwyn. The tree in the play 'Wrth Aros Godot' (Waiting for Godot) can be a symbol of many things – for example, the Cross that Jesus was nailed to. The tree in 'All My Sons' (Arthur Miller) is a symbol of the death of one of the characters. Design a set with that has a tree as a focal point – it can be an evergreen, a tree that sheds its leaves, or a tree that's dried up – and decide with the rest of the class what would be the theme of that scene.

## ROLE OF THE COSTUMIER AND HAIR AND MAKEUP DESIGNER

If costume and makeup design is chosen for the A Level examination, then the script or the devised piece should be the starting point. This should always be remembered. The script or devised scene should be discussed with other members of the group (in the theatre the discussion will be between the Designer and the Director). You must find out their ideas, whether the production is following a specific style or practitioner. Completely practical questions become important, e.g. how much movement work is in the production? Are there any quick costume changes etc.? In the end, everything that's done with regard to costume design and makeup should support the production.

The Costumier should always consider character and characterisation. In the same way, the Makeup Artist should concentrate on the performers and the characters they're portraying. Through costumes and makeup, the designer is ensuring that the general visual effect is complete and convincing.



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## COSTUME DESIGN

### RESEARCH

Research is important to anyone designing costumes and makeup. The script or play needs to be fully understood. Does the piece belong to a specific period, in a specific style? Is the piece modern or is it a fantasy? The internet can be used to look for examples of costumes from different periods and ideas for makeup that correspond to different styles in plays.

It's important to know about the history of costumes – for example, if someone is designing a costume for a performance in the period of Hamlet, a character wouldn't appear on stage in a t-shirt with a modern sports brand on the front. Costumes tell us a lot about the time period and location of a play. Costumes with an empire-line waist in light fabrics and light colours put us in the eighteenth century, for example – as in Jane Austen's novels. Blue jeans and bell-bottomed trousers in bright colours suggest that the character belongs to the end of the 1960s.

### COLOURS

As someone who designs costumes and makeup, the colours chosen are important. It should be remembered that colours symbolise certain ideas. In western cultures, red can suggest anger or danger so you wouldn't dress an innocent character in red. White, on the other hand, suggests purity or innocence in western cultures. You'll need to be aware that costumes give us information about the individual characters on stage. Consider your own wardrobe for example: you (probably) wouldn't wear the same clothes for a job interview, to wash the family car or to go on a night out with friends. This applies to characters in a play too. The audience will create links with the type of costume and colour of the costume that the character wears. The same is true for makeup. For example, if the character is an adult male suffering from depression, the costume and makeup can convey this with a costume that's messy, dirty, and creased, and the character unshaven, with messy hair. This will reinforce the story and realism of the drama.

### POINTS TO REMEMBER

The Costumier takes the cues from the characters and what's around them based on what's in the drama, as well as the production's chosen style.

The costume must be comfortable and flexible for the actor.

The Costumier and Makeup Designer should research into different hairstyles and the use of wigs. Sometimes the chosen style calls for the use of masks.

Makeup and hairstyles should correspond to the location of the play.

The Costumier must research the types of fabrics he/she can use that are appropriate for the nature of the production.



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## ACTIVITY 1

Look at Erin Maddocks' plans of her costume ideas for 'Y Tad'. Notice the colour palette that Erin decided to use for the costumes. Notice also how she differentiated between Ann, Pete, Man and Woman. Was this successful in your opinion? Did you like the costumes or would you have suggested something else? Discuss.

## ACTIVITY 2

Look at the costumes for the BA Performance production of 'Sweeney Todd', which were designed by Erin Maddocks. Notice the use of colour, style and modernity of the costumes. Notice also the hair and the makeup. What's your opinion of the costumes? Was Erin following a certain theme through designing the costume, makeup and hair? What's your opinion on this?

## ACTIVITY 3

Follow these steps in relation to one of the plays that you are studying for your A Level course – 'Dros Bont Brooklyn', 'Blodeuwedd', 'Wbw', 'Gelyn y Bobl', 'Medea', 'Un Nos Ola Leuad', 'Sweeney Todd', 'Mamets', 'Jo Wy'...

- Make notes first of any ideas that come to you after reading the script.
- In what period is the play set? Is the Director staging the drama in its original period? Research into the period. What type of costumes were worn in that period? What colours are relevant? What shoes and accessories belong to the period?
- Is there a particular play that's more appropriate to keep in its period? What would be your reasoning for keeping within the period?
- Create a mood board first with a collection of photographs of the costumes, colour palettes, images, words and photographs that create a collage of the play's visual and emotional ideas.
- Consider the colours carefully. Do you use different colours in the set or are you going to limit colour to the costumes and furniture and fittings, and props?
- Which other plays have you seen that have influenced you? What were the reasons for this? Were the costumes successful or unsuccessful in those productions? Make sure you have definite reasons why.
- Design costumes for 2 of the characters and set them in the play's original period, and then design costumes for 2 characters in a modern production that's appropriate for today's audience. Remember to give definite reasons for your choice.

## ACTIVITY 4

You are the Costumier for a production of a Shakespearean play. (Choose a Shakespearean play that's familiar to you – e.g. 'Macbeth', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Hamlet', 'The Comedy of Errors'.) You are discussing with the Director his/her vision for the production and they say that they're going to stage the play in a modern way. Answering this, design the costumes for 2 of the main characters, giving reasons for your choice.