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## IN TOUCH with Performing Arts

# Scenes behind the scenes bring University Theatre alive

□ Sets costumes and lights take months of work

The preparation for a University play at the Robinson Theatre is nothing short of a Broadway production.

Months before the opening night performance, set designers, costume designers and lighting technicians collaborate their plans at rehearsals and production meetings so that backdrops, costumes and lighting all coordinate.

Deep in the basement of Villard, the costume shop and stage design area come alive with sounds of sewing machines and power saws echoing throughout the hallways.

A glance into the costume shop reveals several costume makers at work. Iron boards and sewing machines with character names like Frida, Cassiopia, Angelina, Salyria and Medusa, are arranged as an efficient assembly line for the makers. Boxes of buttons and an array of colored thread line the walls next to the old costumes. "Does this match, Sandy?"

Sandy Bonds, faculty costume director, answers the student with a nod of approval. Bonds oversees the manufacturing of costumes by graduate and undergraduate students and those in work study.

"The designer is responsible for the entire visual outlook," Bonds said. "It includes everything like hair, make-up, clothes, shoes, underwear — everything that touches the actors."

Bond said the design process begins as soon as she knows the plays for the season.

"I start thinking out the designs in my head and who is going to make what before I even put the pencil to the paper," she said.

Presently, the room shows signs of the up-coming production of *Equus*, by Peter Shaffer. "This play is not as elaborate as a Shakespearean, so everything is running smoothly," Bonds said.

The costume makers completed the horse heads for *Equus* two weeks ago. "We had to have them done because the actors must practice with them now in order to look completely natural with them on by opening night," Bonds said.

Down the hall from the costume shop is the source of the hammering and drilling noises. The smell of freshly cut timber lingers and the dust is thick. Evi-

*'We collaborate to find the type of world we want to create for our audience.'*

—Sandy Bonds,  
 Faculty costume director

dence of *Equus* in-the-making appears on center stage.

Graduate student Molly Eness is working on the set design for Shaffer's play with assistance from graduate students and actors fulfilling fine arts requirements.

"To design a set, the crew asks the directors for adjectives that describe the feeling of the play," Eness said. "Sometimes we'll hear 'dull and drab' and other times, 'sparkly and vivacious.' The crew designs with those words in mind."

In addition to the adjectives, Eness must design *On the Verge*, by Eric Overmeyer, as a module set so that it does not inconvenience other performances.

"We have plenty of time to design the set," Eness said, "but there's a dance recital a few days before and there's talk of running *Troubles* between them."

"Not only do the costumes and set have to coordinate with each other but the lighting during the production as well. "It is really important that everything meshes together from an artistic to a logistic standpoint," Janet Rose, faculty technical director, said. "Nothing can compete."

Rose has never had a problem with completing the set before a show since her first year at the University. "The crew finished the set the day of opening night. It was a ceiling piece that no one would have noticed, but me."

During the technical rehearsal, Rose will find any last minute changes if the lighting does not complement the scenes and costumes. About five students will learn to run the lighting and drop sets by cues during a performance.

When the last nail is pounded, the last stitch is sewn and the last light is plugged, the set designers, costume designers and lighting technicians are prepared to see their work come alive on stage. "We collaborate to find the type of world we want to create for our audience," Bonds said.

All expenditures for the costuming and set designs are paid by ticket sales. The University's Fine Arts Department also has a grant from the ASUO that helps keep cost down for student tickets.

—Kristin Genzer



Senior Ann Swanson helps senior Heather Linn into her costume for the University Theatre's production of *Blue Windows*. Photo by Kim Nguyen



University Theatre Director Craig Willis said he got hooked on theater after his second play.

## Student director finds niche in University Theatre works

□ "Blue Window" director says casting is toughest part of job

Theater director Craig Willis said acting didn't turn him on at all in the beginning.

The graduate student in Fine Arts who will be directing *Blue Window* this Halloween said a high school teacher convinced him to try acting, but his friends had to talk him into auditioning for a second play.

After that he was hooked on theater.

Last spring Willis directed the University play *Laughing Wild*. He has also directed two AIDS Awareness plays, *Andre's Mother*, and *Safe Sex*.

Willis said the diverse nature of directing is what draws him to it.

"Directing is a craft of the eclectic," Willis said. Willis said his job not only entails leading the actors in their rehearsals, but collaborating on the set designing and casting the actors.

In casting for the upcoming *Blue Window*, Willis had to select seven actors from the 110 that auditioned in just one week.

"I believe that 90 percent of a director's job is casting," Willis said. "Casting and inspiring the actors are most challenging. I also enjoy the leadership that the role demands."

Willis grew up in Bellingham, Wash. As a child he was inter-

Turn to DIRECTOR, Page 4B

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