



Jeff Cone's costume renderings for the upcoming production of *Oklahoma!*

"[Some] musicals are a heightened sense of reality—a glossy, heightened reality. My goal is that the clothes look like real clothes... as if you were to take a photograph" of real people at that time.

—JEFF CONE, COSTUME DESIGNER

graduate student in art, Cone took a few elective courses in design for the theater. The head of the theater and speech department suggested he pursue a master's, and Cone became the first MFA student in costume design at University of South Carolina.

According to Cone, being outed the way he was profoundly impacted his views of his own capabilities. He never thought of himself as worthy and he "never pursued anything," he shares. "[The experience] changed the course of my life in many ways that I couldn't see at the time."

Loss of self-esteem prevented him from going after opportunities, but some things fell into place for him. Despite the early setback, the designer has enjoyed a long and successful career. "I've been employed in the arts for 30 years, but I've never applied for a job," he says.

Cone is both the costume shop manager

and the resident costume designer at PCS, which means he deals with both the business and creative sides of costume design. The costume shop has a staff of six and the team can only build six complete costumes from scratch. That includes everything—corset, petticoat, dress, chaps, etc. Once he determines what the costume shop staff can create, he calculates the rest of the labor needs. "It's all different. It's like a constantly changing big puzzle," Cone explains.

He is quick to point out that he does not exist in a vacuum. "There are so many people working on the show. Without the support of my staff and Portland Center Stage, we couldn't solve the problem," he says.

Cone's research portfolio for *Oklahoma!* includes photos of period homesteads, cowboys and even a madame and her girls at Kansas City Junction. The working ladies served as inspiration for the play's "postcard girls."

Most women in the play will sport two outfits. Cone calls the first a "traveling costume." Comprised of a long dark skirt and a light blouse, "it was the jeans and T-shirt of the day," he says. The second is a "wrapper dress," popular at the time, which the ladies will wear for the story's box social. The dresses are made of calico, a preferred fabric because it was cheap but came in a wide variety of colors and prints, Cone adds.

The men will wear "one and a half" costumes, meaning a working outfit they can dress up, for example with a vest, to attend the box social. "They're working guys," Cone notes.

His job demands a lot of time and energy and is not the most lucrative out there, but Cone considers himself lucky. "I'm never gonna own a house because I don't make enough money... but I enjoy my job and I don't dread coming to work," he says. "It's the reality of life in the arts but, like I say, that's the trade-off—I like my job." JO

OKLAHOMA! runs Tues., Sept. 20–Sun., Oct. 30, Tues.–Sat., 7:30 p.m., Sun. matinees at 2, Sat. and Thurs. matinees vary at the Gerding Theater at the Armory, Main Stage, 128 NW 11th Ave. Tickets, \$39 and up, are available by calling 503-445-3700 or visiting pcs.org.

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