



CULTURE CLUB NO TIN SOLDIERS. NO TOY GUNS.

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ive theatrical productions offer a special kind of illusion not found in other forms of entertainment. While film images are often enhanced and manipulated electronically, live performance requires real, tangible, yet seemingly magical skills to convey mood, character and subtext.

Costumer and professor Darrin Pufall started early. “Some kids take their bedspreads and make forts; I would drape mine into period bustle skirts! When we would go on family vacations, I wouldn’t bring home tin soldiers and toy guns from historical museums. No, I brought home period dress pattern books!”



Photo Orin Zyvan

Pufall began college focusing on musical theatre performance. His trajectory changed when many of the small productions he worked with couldn’t afford a costumer. He would step in to save them. He says, “For a few years I was performing and designing simultaneously and slowly began to appreciate the rewards of simply being a costume designer.” It’s a decision for which he has no regrets, “I love the collaboration process with the production team and the actors. I feel I am very fortunate to offer the first glimpse of a character, through my sketches, to both a director and an actor.”

Pufall was a resident of Portland for just a few years, but continues to have strong professional and personal ties that bring him back several times annually. This summer he’ll be designing the costumes for The Mock’s Crest production of Gilbert & Sullivan’s *The Gondoliers*. Later this year he’ll be producing costumes and puppets for Triangle Productions staging of *Avenue Q*.

Though Pufall has designed many shows throughout his career his start was in musical theatre. His early mentor, Paul Favini, felt that he needed to step beyond the glamour and sparkle. He suggested *Waiting for Godot*. “Suddenly all that glitz and sequins turned into existentialist dirt and grime. I really had to dig

deep into Beckett’s text to find the meaning and pathos behind these characters. It is a seemingly simple play, but so much happens. It pretty much changed the way I approached the design process from then on.”

That doesn’t mean designing an operetta is easy. “I think Gilbert and Sullivan can be tricky, especially those [shows] in the well-known cannon (*The Mikado*, *The Gondoliers*, *The Pirates of Penzance*). Audiences have a certain expectation with those productions. Because of the comic nature of G&S I hardly become a slave to a particular clothing period. I will often mix periods to create a world specific to the production.” That world will be in place at the Mago Hunt Theatre at University of Portland throughout most of June.

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