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***Costume Design Process
by Austin Blake Conlee***



A photograph of a modern theatre stage. The stage is illuminated with blue and purple lights. A complex lighting rig is visible above the stage. The audience seating area is visible in the foreground, with rows of seats facing the stage. The overall atmosphere is dramatic and professional.

Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

Mission Statement: To bring new, relevant life to the world's classics for a diverse audience; and to use those masterworks to provide transformative experiences on stage and in classrooms. As a teaching theatre, the company is dedicated to using the classics as interdisciplinary teaching tools for artist training and arts education.

The Importance of Being Earnest

- Oscar Wilde

- **In Victorian England, Jack lives a “Double Life”. In the British countryside, Jack runs an estate and looks after his young ward, Cecily, but goes by the name “Earnest” when visiting London with his Bachelor friend, Algernon. Jack has won the heart of Algy’s wealthy cousin, Gwendolen, and the utter disapproval of Gwendolen’s mother, the formidable society matron, Lady Bracknell, who refuses to give them consent to be married. Through a series of mistaken identities, tea parties that end in feuds, and surprise entrances, this comedic romp is a satirical look at Victorian Society.**

Dramaturgy

**“Never speak disrespectfully of Society,
Algernon.**

Only people who can't get into it do that.”

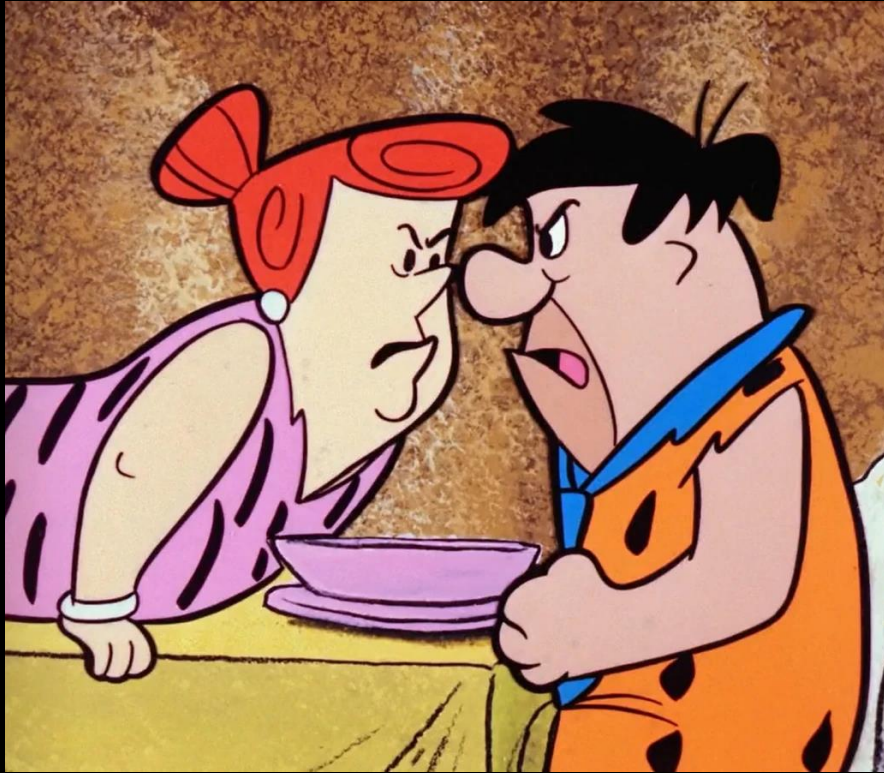
- Lady Bracknell

- **Satirical Comedy of Manners about Society**
- **Exaggerating the Victorian Silhouette for Comedic Effect**
- **Societal Conformity vs. Self-Expression through Fashion**

"If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated"

- Algernon

Designing a Monster -in-Law



Vivid Imagery

- “Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair.” - Jack
- “All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That is his.” - Algernon



Analyzing Lady Bracknell Quotes

- **"I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?"**
- **"I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately, in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever."**
- **"Your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A French lady's maid produces a really marvelous result"**
- **"To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness."**

Research Plates

Curated Images from Historic Fashion Plates, Archival Garments from Museum Exhibits, Editorial Images, and Film Stills.

Lady Bracknell - Act I



Lady Bracknell - Act III



Research gathered by Ramapo Students Reese Pasquerello & Jane Gerber, Curated by Prof. Conlee.

Fabric Swatching

Designers and their Assistants collect fabric samples or "swatches" from the Manhattan Garment District. The Director and Designer choose what fabrics the costumes will be made from.



<<< - Ramapo Students on a Swatching Field Trip in NYC.

Casting



Digital Rendering

The process of generating designs using an iPad or Tablet. Programs like Procreate are accessible, portable, versatile in the range of artistic styles, and flexible in their ability to manipulate images and adapt change things quickly.

*The Importance
of Being Earnest*
Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

*Lady
Bracknell*
Act 1



Designs

*The Importance
of Being Earnest
Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey*

*Lady
Bracknell
Act 1*



*The Importance
of Being Earnest
Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey*

*Lady
Bracknell
Act 3*



Costume Team

- **Costume Shop Supervisor (Full Time) – Daniel Ciba**
- **Cutter / Draper (Full Time) – Armando Perez**
- **First Hand (Full Time) – Sarah Beckel**
- **Stitchers - Daryl Lancaster, Marina Porter**
- **Wardrobe – Tate Olitt**
- **Design Assistants – Reese Pasquerello* & Jane Gerber***
- **Wigmaker – Jessica Carter**
- **Wig Assistant - Gianna Marie Edwards***

* - Indicates Ramapo Student/Alum



Planning

Budget:

- \$5,000 for Materials
- \$2,000 for Rentals
- \$16,000 for Costume Labor

Overall Budget: \$23,000

Timeline:

Pre-Production – Construct Mockups & Purchase/Rent Materials

Week 1 – Initial Fittings

Week 2 – Custom-Builds & Alterations

Week 3 – Final Fittings

Week 4 - Dress Rehearsals

Custom-Built Costumes:

- Undergarments for Lady Bracknell
- Undergarments for Gwendolyn
- Act 1 Dress for Lady Bracknell + Hat
- Act 1 Smoking Jacket for Algernon
- Act 1 Jacket & Vest for Gwendolyn + Hat
- Act 2 Dress for Cecily
- Act 2 Dress for Gwendolyn + Hat
- Act 3 Dress for Lady Bracknell + Hat

Mock-ups

Drapers make Costumes out of inexpensive Muslin to fit them on the actors prior to making them out of expensive fashion fabrics.



Fittings



Custom Wigs

Theatrical Wigs are custom-fit to each performer's head size and hand-tied or "ventilated" to match their unique hairline. Then they are styled.



****Wig Fitting Example from
2026 Frankenstein**



- **Lady Bracknell Wig built by Jessica Carter**
- **Styled by ABC**

Millinery

*We built 4 Hats for this
Production, with help from
Ramapo Students Reese
Pasquerello & Jane Gerber.*



Dress Rehearsals



Final Production

“The costume design, by Austin Blake Conlee, is also suitably posh, with the standout item being a positively jaw-dropping bird hat worn by Lady Bracknell. I have to admit, as I watched the play, there were times where I found myself staring at it, in wonder.” – Jay Lustig @ NJ Arts.net



Final Production

**“Costumes by Austin Blake help define the characters, especially Lady Bracknell’s voluminous skirts and fancy hats.”
– Liz Kiell @ Tap into Montclair**

