

Cymbeline in the Wooden O

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As company dramaturg at the Utah Shakespearean Festival for the past nineteen years, I have had the privilege of serving on design teams for over sixty professional Shakespeare productions, but none more exciting than our 2002 production of *Cymbeline*, one of the Bard's most difficult and challenging scripts. Replete with over fifty characters, an episodic, sprawling narrative, and a denouement featuring twenty-four separate plot revelations in the final breathless scene, the play demands much from in its transition from page to stage. In the following words and pictures, I offer to take the reader behind the scenes in our work on this fascinating show, moving chronologically from the earliest stages of the process to design meetings, casting, rehearsals, and, finally, to our opening night.

Approximately two years prior to the beginning of rehearsals, the play was selected by the festival's team of producers: Fred Adams (Founder and Executive Producer), Douglas Cook (Producing Artistic Director), Cameron Harvey (Producing Artistic Director), and Scott Phillips (Managing Director). Adding a special poignancy to the season, Doug Cook retired this season after thirty-six years at the festival and was replaced by Associate Artistic Directors Jim Sullivan and Kathleen Conlin (who has also done a fine job as our Casting Director for several years). The play was then sequenced in with two other Shakespearean productions in our outdoor Adams Theatre, *Othello* and *As You Like It*, and three plays in the indoor Randall L. Jones Theatre: *Harvey*, *Hay Fever*, and *Man of La Mancha*. Production schedules were roughed out, publicity and fundraising began, and the script started its inexorable progress towards performance.

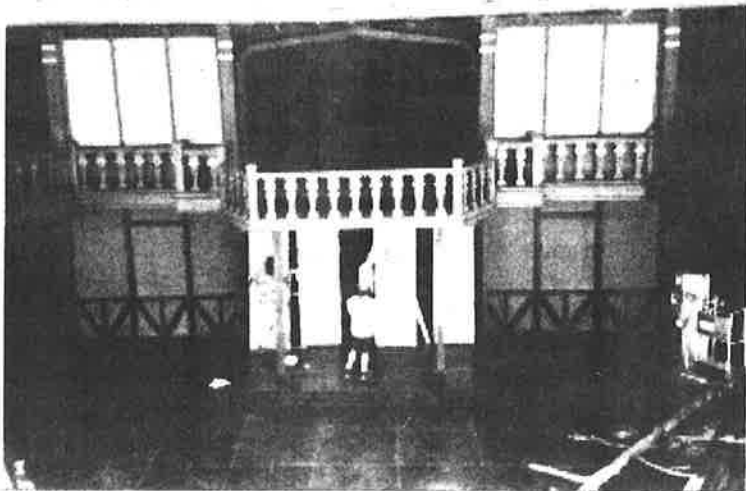
In July 2001, verbal commitments were made with the director of the play, New Yorker Russell Treyz, whose brilliant directorial talents had been on display previously at the festival in *King John* (1998), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1999), *The Pirates of Penzance* (2001), and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (2001). By October 1, the director, designers, and lead staff members were contracted,

including veterans Bill Forrester (Scenic Design), Janice Benning (Costumes), Donna Ruzika (Lighting), Christine Frezza (Composer), Amanda French (Hair and Make-Up), Robin McFarquhar (Fight Director), Karen Wegner (Production Stage Manager), and myself (Dramaturg). Since most of us have served on many different productions at the festival, we work together easily, each equipped with a well-defined role, abundant artistic energy, and genuine respect for other members of the design team.

The actual creative process began when Russ sent us his director's notes in early November, which expressed his concept for the play, broke down the script into different scenic locations, discussed characterization, and suggested a starting point for eventual decisions about set design, costumes, lighting, music, and



(Left) Making the props. (Right) Scenery Supervisor Grant Hilgencamp discussing blueprints.



Loading the *Cymbeline* set into the Adams Theatre.

all the other important theatrical elements. For example, Russ explained in these early design notes that

“Cymbeline seems to jump between four different worlds: the fairy tale society of Cymbeline’s court, the Renaissance excess of Philario’s court, the ancient Roman civilization of Caius Lucius and his legions, and the primitive society of Belarius and his two sons. I would like to create our own world that encompasses all of these worlds Instead of basing the design on particular periods and styles, I’d like to invent our own storybook location for the play. Cymbeline’s court is elegant and simple; Philario’s is decadent; Rome is more formal and military; and Belarius inhabits the natural world I would like to keep the setting to a minimum. I’ll need some levels and seating areas to break up the stage, but overall I’d like to depend upon the costumes and props to indicate the shift of locale rather than any major changing of scenery.”

Equipped with these suggestions, each of the designers worked for the next two months creating a plan for the production that would flesh out his or her own area of responsibility. For instance, Bill Forrester produced a scale model of the set along with several computerized scenic designs, while Janice Benning gathered costume ideas from many different sources and created sample sketches of the main characters that included fabric swatches, trim, and hair/make-up ideas.

During the same time period, I put together a huge research book on the play that featured material on ancient Britain, reviews of



Actor Brian Vaughn during a costume fitting.



Costume designer Janice Benning selecting jewelry for one of her costumes.

previous productions, and other pertinent information to be shared with the director and designers and, eventually, the actors at the beginning of rehearsals. Russ and I also began the task of cutting the script down to the two-and-one-half-hour running time requested by the producers.

In early January, approximately six months before the play opened in Cedar City, all the directors, designers, and other key festival personnel were flown to Los Angeles where at the Doubletree Hotel near LAX we put together all six professional productions, three Green Shows, and a Royal Feaste in four whirlwind days of intense and exciting meetings. We began our *Cymbeline* sessions sharing all the work we had done in the past two months, including Bill's proposed set designs, Janice's costume renderings, Donna's initial thoughts about lighting, and Christine's early suggestions about music and sound effects. We also talked about how to deal with problem areas in the script, such as the



The wig storage area shows a few of the wigs used in *Cymbeline*.



Actress Sara Kathryn Bakker having her hair done by Amanda French.

headless corpse, the Eagle, the appearance of Jupiter, the ghosts, the battle scenes, and getting Iachimo's chest on and off stage. The tables around which we worked were littered with photographs, pieces of fabric, scale models of the set, and books such as Terri Hardin's *The Pre-Raphaelites*, M. P. Vernevil's *Behind Golden Screens: Treasures from the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum*, Miranda Green's *Celtic Art* (including gorgeous pictures of Wales),

and designer Issey Miyake's *Making Things*. Finally, we did a "scene-by-scene" analysis of the script during which design team members began narrowing down choices in each conceptual area of the production.

Early decisions at this stage ricocheted into many different design areas. Based upon Russ's original concept notes, we opted for simplicity of design with Asian and Celtic overtones. A single "mythic" set would be used, with red curtains around the inner below to signal Philario's residence; a throne, banners, and the slip stage for Britain; costumes and music to suggest Rome; and translucent oriental shoji panels illuminated by strip lights for Wales. Because of the space required for the lighting instruments, we wouldn't be able to use staircases; as a result, we knew we would need ramps and vomms to bring characters on and off stage, which meant that the aisles of the theatre would have to be lit. Since the 8:00 p.m. curtain time is still broad daylight in the outdoor theatre, we transposed two scenes in the script so that we would be in Wales after dark, and the back-lit scrims would then be visible to the audience. Costumes began to take on an Arthurian motif, with lots of animal skin and human flesh in Wales, reds and golds in Italy, and rich, saturated colors in Cymbeline's court. Christine's preliminary musical plot included concert harp and viola for Cymbeline's court; snare drum, woodblock, and cymbals for Rome; and primitive wind instruments for Wales. We also decided that Guiderius and Arviragus would sing and that the roles of Posthumus and Cloten would be doubled, which meant that Kathleen Conlin would have to take these facts into consideration when she cast the roles.

Following the January conference, all members of the design team continued working on their respective areas. The set was further refined and modified, and scale architectural drawings were produced; more precise costume sketches were created, which included swatches of the specific fabrics to be used; the lighting design was



Director Russ Treyz addressing the design team at the March Meetings.

developed; music was composed; and I finished the cuts, sent the edited script off to the festival, began writing song lyrics, and worked on program notes. In the meantime, Kathleen auditioned over six hundred actors in six different cities, craftsmen and women were hired, and publicity specialists and box office personnel were hard at work selling tickets. The festival "machine" was ratcheting up towards full intensity.

Our next big group meeting was in Cedar City March 14-17 where, surrounded by new-fallen snow, we expanded to a much wider circle of designers and technicians, including those responsible for hair and make-up, stage fighting, choreography, sound design, music, props, electrics, set construction, costume crafts, publicity, graphic design, and a host of other specialties. Bill Forrester shared his newly revised set design, Janice Benning



(Left) Preliminary design of Jupiter's Eagle. (Below) Costume Designer Janice Benning discusses renderings with Russ Treyz.



showed her latest costume renderings and her drawing of Jupiter's eagle, and a preliminary cost analysis of materials and labor was begun.

At this same meeting, all scenery, costume, and prop lists were finalized; music and sound design cues were due; and a careful scene-by-scene review of the script took place to make certain we had prepared for all possible problems inherent in the production. We also determined which scenes and characters would be photographed for the souvenir program, decided which scenic elements would be moved indoors in the event of rain, and finalized rehearsal schedules.

On May 6, seven weeks before opening, all the actors convened for the first read-through, which is always a joyous time of seeing old friends and meeting new ones. Following several days of "table work," during which the actors and director explored the script in

great detail, everyone moved to the Adams stage for outdoor blocking rehearsals. Each show rehearsed for sixteen hours per week for seven weeks, although discounting previews and dress rehearsals, the actors only had approximately one-hundred hours to prepare for each production. During the same time, actors memorized their lines, were fitted for costumes, had voice and dramaturgical sessions, began the hair and make-up process, and participated in photo calls, media interviews, and dance and fight rehearsals. Simultaneously, the sets were built, props were constructed and placed into the prop cabinet, wigs were prepared, and costumes were completed.

After all this intense preparation, *Cymbeline* opened on June 25 to packed houses, appreciative audiences, and admiring reviews. It played twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays from opening till August 30 and was seen by over 22,000 spectators—96% of occupancy. Blessed by the regenerative love between Imogen and Posthumus, the primitive goodness of Wales, the benign magic of Jupiter, and months of hard work by hundreds of talented people, our production was extremely successful. And just when we had begun to savor that delicious feeling of a job well done, the process started all over again with a new season and six new plays!



And it finally all comes together . . .
USF production of *Cymbeline*, 2002 season.