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Costume on Screen

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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ALEXANDRA BYRNE, Film and Theatre Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 13 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E1.1 Alexandra Byrne. © Getty Images/Vittorio Zunino Celotto, 2017

Your views on research and interpretation?

It's really important to study the period of the story to understand the clothes, the etiquette, politics, customs, hygiene, etc. By understanding the period of the story, I feel more able to make instinctive choices about creating a credible world to enable the story that the director wants to tell. In a way, though, period costume for performance is always an interpretation even when it's faithful: textiles, manufacture, dyes, printing and body proportions are all different. And we are storytellers, telling visual stories to our contemporaries.

How did you start out?

My first work was in regional theatre, where there was a new production on stage every month. I was part of a small, hard-working, badly paid, collaborative team, and learned so much in so many ways! Today we have almost no producing regional theatre and a huge

film industry with insufficient crew for all the projects wanting to shoot in the UK.

The transition between college into work can be difficult because initially you have no experience of film work until your first job; often crew are working at a level higher than they are used to ... it can be tough and bewildering in an environment where there is little time for training and explaining!

How do you manage your budgets?

I always create the budget with the supervisor, pedantically revising figures until we hit the right number. Working this way, I learn the numbers attached to character and workroom timelines so when we're working flat out to produce costumes, I have a sense of where I can spend and where I need to pull back, without having to check in every time; some decisions need to be made instinctively in the heat of the moment. My supervisor and coordinator run the day-to-day inputting of the budget, and we keep closely in touch. Demands, schedules and numbers of costumes change frequently during prep, and production are more likely to be receptive to requests if your budget is well run and organized. I have seen designers get very stressed about budgets and try to 'massage away' overspends; it's down to clear communication about the cost required to deliver what the director and schedule need.

In a hundred years' time when a designer is researching a film set in our time, how will they research it? Maybe Instagram, Netflix, news coverage, portraits, novels, magazines, diaries ...

How does costume design differ between film and theatre?

I think one of the day-to-day struggles for me in theatre was letting go of the fine detail. 'It's never going to be seen from the other side of the orchestra pit, let alone the balcony' ... but it's those details and perfection that can lift a costume to another level ... the stitch

◀ count, contrast colour thread. For *Cinderella*, the magic is in the movement, line and proportion, and looking at the different dancers wearing the same design but realizing that a slightly taller Fairy Godmother needs

an additional layer of net inner skirt to give the same buoyancy.

Visit Alexandra's IMDb page.

CAROLINE MCCALL, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 19 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E1.2 Caroline McCall's costumes for *His Dark Materials* (2019) fit the fantasy genre while keeping them credible for the characters. © HBO/Alamy/Landmark Media

Your fantasy costumes for His Dark Materials costumes have cohesion. Did you build your own design parameters?

Joel Collins, the production designer, had been working on the concept art for months before I came. When I went for my interview, he lit up because he was in the same 'mid-century technology' space as me. I was very specific about colour palettes for the crowd: London was all greys and muted pastels, which suited his concept

work with the white buildings, and then Oxford was more autumnal greens and browns. We upped the colour when we got to the Gyptians, so it became brighter, and this was also reflected in their houseboat sets and all the set-dec. Here they were closer to their daemons, so I designed their knitwear with animal patterns, and they had sets of trinkets associated with their being seafaring people. We used French workwear silhouettes for

◀ their clothes, which had to be practical, well-mended and looked after. Three books became three series. It's unusual to stay on a project the whole way through, but I couldn't leave the characters; when you've created something, you want to follow their journey to the end. We all found it hard to say goodbye.

How does your knowledge of making and supervising help you as a designer?

I find the pressure of costume-making deadlines horrendous, but, if there's a crisis, I like knowing I'm capable of fixing something quickly. That's a skill everybody should have. As a standby, you learn about working with actors, and what's important on screen. I learnt about budgets and schedules as a supervisor, and it's been invaluable to know what things cost. It's so beneficial to look at a script

and a schedule and to know, right, that's where we spend the money. There's no point in spending lots of money on something that's only going to be on screen for a few seconds unless that's what's called for. You also learn how much a hire is going to cost or what it would cost to make it. Factoring in all these things is good to know.

Now I have trainees, I tell them, 'Don't try to run before you can walk.' By working in every role within the department, you learn such different things. One job's completely different to the next, so we're learning all the time. I want trainees who say, 'I would just love to be part of the team. I really want to learn and I'm happy to make the tea.' They need to be keen, have a good 'eye' and make the most of every opportunity.

Visit Caroline's website.

VICKI RUSSELL, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 26 of *Get into Costume* book)

'One of the things I love most is nurturing newbies.'

Your approach to sustainability?

We always trawl the charity shops first before going to the major shops. It's so important now, the sustainability of our planet. There's a lot of waste on film and commercials, so I tell the producer up front that at least half of this is going to come from charity shops. They're delighted because they're saving money and helping the planet. We use cotton suit bags until they're falling apart, and we have a bag of our own hangers that we use all the time or get spares from a dry cleaner if we're doing a fitting.

Costume is in your blood. What did your mum [Shirley Russell, costume designer] teach you?

I started working at Mum's costume house The Last Picture Frock from sixteen years old. I loved watching her work. I helped her every school holiday, whether

collecting costumes in the market, or working on set, or helping with her beautiful vintage shop near Portobello. My dad [Ken Russell, film director] adored costume and set design and was really involved with the fittings. He inspired me because part of the joy of costume is bringing a character to life. I was lucky, I had an 'in'.

Mum collected original vintage clothing, period costume, from charity shops or markets. We always found something amazing wherever we went. I just love being a 'hunter gatherer' and finding something rare and unique. And when you nail it, it's like 'Oh my God!' Mum taught me how to fix costumes that were torn or broken so I learned to make stuff and alter things, because I was in that late punk era, and the New Romantics. We wanted to be unique, so it was all about finding amazing original period things. I think that was another aspect to my love of costume. ▶



Figure E1.3 Costume designer Vicki Russell is known for her costumes for pop promos. Seen here with the singer-songwriter Bryan Adams at a Calvin Klein party in 2006. © Getty Images/Dave M. Benett

Our fashion and costume work were integrated: Mum taught me by going through the charity shops and saying, ‘Oh, look at this blouse. It’s original 1885 stitching, look at the buttons, look at the lace, look at this embroidery ...’ She would tell me where it was from and how it was done. Her enthusiasm was infectious. We’d go to vintage markets every weekend for her collection. She knew period like nobody else and could date an outfit at a glance. She taught me as we went, rail by rail.

She taught me about fabrics too. She would show me as we found items and while we were sorting them. I learned so much on the go, and when we visited the galleries, the Wallace Collection and the V&A, to see the paintings, which are a superb reference. Mum was

chatty and had a good sense of humour, and I think that made the actors feel relaxed. How you collaborate with the actor and the director to get the feel of the character, and making it fun, were big lessons I learned from her.

What is your advice to costume hopefuls?

When I started, I used to run around helping designers for nothing. You’d get offered work eventually. Don’t be afraid to work for nothing. When I have trainees with me, I say, ‘Look, we can pay you expenses, and we’ll buy you lunch.’ Everyone’s happy just to start off with something for their CVs, and to get some experience. I tell them that, eventually, if you like it, and we like you, we’ll be able to give you a job.

When people are looking to find a way into costume, they would do well to work at a costume rental company. That’s how I learned so much. Not only from my mum, but when I worked at her costume studio, I learned from all the other designers who came in. It’s how I started in commercials. Commercials designers would come in, see how I worked and ask if I’d like to assist, and that was it. Commercials are like mini-movies and a brilliant way to build up confidence and get to know how to work with different directors.

When I’m interviewing new assistants, I meet them for coffee and a chat and can usually tell if they’re cut out for the fast pace, the long hours, working outside and the chaos – and if they have a creative eye. I ask about their interests and what they want out of it. There was one girl I met who all she wanted was to wear high heels and flounce around – that’s not gonna happen! I lay down the tricky bits so they know it’s not just hanging out with celebrities, and I ask them about sewing, washing or if they can do mood boards or drawing. Some of them say, ‘I can’t do any of that, but I really want to learn. I’ll do anything.’ I like those.

Visit Vicki’s website.

ZALDY GOCO, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 30 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E1.4 Zaldy Goco (centre), winner of the Award for Outstanding Costumes for Variety, Nonfiction or Reality Programming for *RuPaul's Drag Race* and for *Trump: The Musical*. With Susanne Bartsch (left) and Brooke Lynn Hytes (right) at the Governor's Ball during the Television Academy's 2019 Creative Arts Emmy Awards. © Colin Young-Wolff/Associated Press/Alamy

Amongst so many varied projects, you also designed your own collection?

I always knew what I wanted in my career but stayed open to go with the flow. It is what has led me to styling, acting, modelling, custom design for musicians, to working with Gwen Stefani on her collection, to designing Cirque du Soleil shows, designing my own namesake collections and working on my television shows! All these varied experiences were crucial to defining me as the artist I am today.

I launched my namesake brand with my show scheduled to take place in New York on 13 September 2001 ... two days after the attacks on 9/11. So, it was

cancelled, naturally, and it was a devastating and confusing time to start a high-end luxury brand in the midst of all of the destruction. We were all left questioning the importance of luxury at a time like that. I was then chosen by *Vogue* to be one of twelve NYC designers in a group show in October 2001, which was great but not the original vision I had for my launch. It was exciting to regain some hope for fashion, however I then got word, maybe a week later, that Anna Wintour had cancelled me from the show. So, once again, I was uncertain about a career in fashion, but I had to listen to what I wanted, to be there for myself and to persevere.

◀ **Tell us about your working relationship with RuPaul?**

I think our relationship has been so successful because of the deep sense of trust we developed from day one. It's so important more than ever now that we design six shows in the franchise so around eighty unique looks per year. There is pretty much always a Ru gown being worked on in the studio, no matter what

else is happening! So, the whole studio maintains an openness to Ru inspirations all year long. We buy fabrics and notions (trimmings) whenever something strikes us as a great Ru fabric!

Find Zaldy on Instagram.

SHEETAL SHARMA, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 34 of *Get into Costume* book)

How generous are Bollywood budgets?

Costume budgets in Indian cinema are the biggest irony. India is proud to boast 1,500 films across twenty languages, yet every time production approaches us with a standard line 'We don't have the budget.' After budgeting our actors, director, production and art department, costumes are even tighter on budgets. Thankfully, there are some director-driven productions that realize the importance of costumes and how essential it is to uphold the look and feel of the film and its characters. But still, the budgets are not

comparable to what we hear of in the West, and we always have to think of quick and economical solutions to our costumes.

Is Bollywood costume rental available? Do you make your costumes or do you buy them?

Indian cinema is now quite business driven, and there are a few rentals available in Mumbai and across India. But to maintain the flow and rhythm of the film, and to maintain the charm of the character, I tend to use them only where rentals fit in, or if budgets are too



Figure E1.5 *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022). Around 800 background cast were dressed for the crowd scenes and outdoor shots, and VFX was used to increase crowd numbers in post-production. Costume designer: Sheetal Sharma. Bhansali Productions. Pen India Limited. Pen Marudhar Entertainment.

◀ constrained to include costumes designed for the background dancers. Uniforms are a good resource for rentals, but if you have specific requirements or for period costume, they have to be specially made.

Are your dance costumes made from silk? It moves so beautifully, and the colour is so vibrant.

Silk is known for its beautiful drapes and soft sheen, but pure silk as a textile is a bit limited in costumes. Rich Indian silks like brocade, jacquard, jamevaar, patola, paithani, ikkat, chanderi and banarasi are beautiful weaves that showcase the opulence and rusticity of bygone years. But these are not worn on a daily basis. We don't cook in our kitchens wearing these ensembles!

I use a lot of organic cottons, wool and woven materials that have weight but can create a flair and 'fluff'. I also love to use flowing chiffons, crepe silk and georgettes for a more romantic expression. These

fabrics are durable and can be digitally printed. One can play a lot with digital prints to cheat the camera. A lot of colour and quirkiness can be added to the ensemble with printing.

Do you use costume jewellery or the real thing?

Gems and Bollywood are synonymous. Our bridal wear in wedding sequences is generally real and endorsed by brands who work closely with the costume designer to adapt to the film background. In-movie placements (product placement), where jewellery is in synch with the storyline, are a huge hit in India, and if the film has a star value, brands will not shy away from such opportunities.

However, if that's not an option, we make pieces with aluminium, brass and copper. This allows us huge scope to experiment and personally I prefer it this way. Bracelets, armbands, neck pieces and even crowns and



Figure E1.6 Kunal Kapoor in *The Empire* (released on Disney+ Hotstar, 2021), a television series about the Mughal warrior tribes that invaded India. Most of the fabrics and jewellery were sourced from Uzbekistan and Afghanistan whose weather conditions are drastically different from Mumbai's hot and humid climate where the series was shot during lockdown. Authentic embroidery and woven textiles were used as patchwork over dyed Indian mulmul [muslin] and lined to ensure the actors' comfort. It added movement and flow to the costumes, which was required for the action scenes. Tie-dye, shibori and wood-block printing techniques were used for the authenticity of that era. Costume designer: Sheetal Sharma. Disney+ Hotstar, 2021



Figure E1.7 Kunal Kapoor in *The Empire*. The headpiece is made in gold and silver zardozi (metal thread embroidery) to create the textural base. The turquoise stones were sourced during travels to Ladakh. The centerpiece is made from a necklace and the sides from earrings. Disney+ Hotstar, 2021

armour in period dramas are made from gold-plated aluminium.

How big is your costume team to dress and shoot a large Bollywood dance troupe?

In general, a costume team in Indian cinema has costume assistants who have a background in fashion or arts, who work with the costume designer and a team of costume *dadas* (costumers) who help in handling and the management of all costumes for filming, ironing and lining up of the ensembles for each scene and dressing the actors. The size of the team depends on the story and costume requirement. A big film with a lot of crowd or war scenes and period drama can have as many as ten assistants and a team of twenty-five *dadas* on set. A smaller film might have two to three assistants and eight to ten costume *dadas*. This equation can vary in musical sequences on big dance numbers.

How do young costume people start? Are there costume courses in India?

There are a lot of universities in India today which are either government or privately run and feature courses in fashion design. One can either take a long-term course in fashion technology or a short-term diploma. Some even prefer to do courses abroad after doing a degree course here. There's no single point to start in costume design, it's all based on experience. It's best to learn under a veteran designer. It depends on one's enthusiasm, coping mechanisms and grasp of the work. It's a welcoming industry for the best new talent.

Anything else you would like to add?

I would like people to take the job of a costume designer more seriously. As I mentioned earlier, we are a part of an industry that produces 1,500 films a year, so it's not easy to create a visual that stands out above the

◀ rest and becomes memorable to almost a billion people across the globe. My aim with every project is to make it completely unique in its concept and yet relatable to the audience. If it only connects with 25 per cent of the viewers, it is an achievement.

Films can embed themselves in people's hearts and emotions, and can create trends and patterns that can

change society. The most critical part of filmmaking is to connect with the audience, to describe their lifestyle and stir their emotions. It feels great to have been a part of creating such works.

Visit Sheetal's IMDb page.

Terms and Jargon

admin (administration)

appro (approval)

back-up

background artistes

cachet

cast

CFX

CGI

cinematographer

circuit

contingency

continuity

costume spectrum

crowd

curate

devoré

**director of photography
(DoP or DP)**

discipline

dress rail/rails

dress stand

ECU

fabrication

field

first AD

float

generic

genre

the organization, management, paperwork and accounts

when the person/people in charge agree to something

a second or more of the same thing – if needed

also known as supporting artists (SAs), crowd, extras

prestige, distinction or status

actors, singers, dancers, stunts and doubles, supporting artistes

creature effects

computer generated imagery

responsible for how each shot is set up and filmed; also known as *director of photography* (DoP)

a group attached to a part of the industry

an allowance of money or items just in case

tracking costume changes across the timeline of the story

the array or many different types of costumes

background, supporting artistes

creatively selecting valid and aesthetic images (or anything else)

a burnout velvet printing technique

responsible for how each shot is set up and filmed; also known as *cinematographer*

someone able to organize themselves with determination

fixed (like scaffolding), or on wheels for hanging costumes/clothes

mannequin or tailor's dummy

extreme close-up

more substantial costume construction using thicker or stiffer materials

the type of work in part of the industry

first assistant director ('first') who runs the film set

a monetary advance on the costume budget

non-specific item

a category

green light	about to start (production, filming, etc)
HD	high-definition cameras
head sheets	performer's details: head shot, contact details and basic measures
hero costume (suit, car, etc.)	the best one
HoD	head of department
honey wagon	mobile toilets used at film locations
IMDb	Internet Movie Database: global cast and crew listing
life cast	a physical or digital replication of a performer's head or body used as a mannequin
line-up	lining up and checking costumes for next day's filming
mock-up	a quick sketch of an idea in 3D
NDA (non-disclosure agreement)	document agreeing not to reveal any part of a project
petty cash	small amounts of cash or an advance on the budget
piano wire	high tensile steel wire used for millinery and headdress making
post-production	processes after filming: editing, VFX, marketing, publicity
POV	a character's visual point of view
prep/pre-production	preparation period before filming starts
production office	the central hub of production management
'pulling' costumes	gathering or selecting costumes at a costume rental house
rep	either 'repertoire' (a group of productions) and/or 'repertory', a theatre that performs multiple productions
returns	returning unwanted/unused items for refunds or returning stock to costume rental
second and third ADs	assist the first AD
SFX	special effects
showreel	compilation or 'demo tape' showing clips of work
straight play	the spoken word; no frills
tagging gun/tags	used for attaching labels to clothing; also used in costume
template	a pattern that can be repeated
toile	a test garment in plain fabric for fitting/testing
TV spot	TV commercial
VFX	visual effects
wings	the sides of the stage
wiremen	the stagehands handling flying apparatus (wires), used for stunts
wrap	concluding a filming day or a production

TV Costume Drama Examples

Belgravia (2020); Costume Designer: James Keast

Bridgerton (2020–); Costume Designer: Ellen Mirojnick

The Crown (2016–2023); Costume Designers: Michele Clapton, Jane Petrie, Amy Roberts

Downton Abbey (2010–2015); Costume Designers: Susannah Buxton, Caroline McCall, Anna Robbins

Faraway Downs (2023); Costume Designer: Catherine Martin

Gentleman Jack (2019–2022); Costume Designer: Tom Pye

The Great (2020–2023); Costume Designer: Sharon Long

Little Dorrit (2008); Costume Designer: Barbara Kidd

Mad Men (2007–2015); Costume Designer: Janie Bryant

Mary & George (2024); Costume Designer: Annie Symons

The New Look (2024); Costume Designer: Karen Muller Serreau

Peaky Blinders (2013–2022); Costume Designers: Stephanie Collie, Alison McCosh, Lorna Marie Mugan

Poldark (2015–2019); Costume Designer: Marianne Agertoft

Pride and Prejudice (1980); Costume Designer: Dinah Collin