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Costume Categories: Contemporary, Period and Fantasy

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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COBBIE YATES, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 91 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E3.1 From left to right, Elliot Edusah, Reda Elazouar and Jordan Peters. Set in the UK Garage scene in the early 1990s, costume designer Cobbie Yates created looks for *Pirates* (2021) which reflected the characters of that time, their aspirations and their reality. © New Year Film Ltd/BBC/BFI

The differences between fashion styling and costume design?

Coming from the world of styling, and moving into costume, what I took from it were many transferable skills. I studied sociology and psychology, which gave me a good foundation for dealing professionally with clients on set in a more corporate environment in styling. For me, styling is more about selling a product and expressing an individual's creativity – or it could be about selling or buying into a product, or engaging a specific audience with a product. Styling can be more natural when the recording artist has a strong point of view, but if they don't, it becomes more manufactured and about the marketing. There's a very scientific

approach to styling that I find quite exciting: sometimes you'd find a completely original artist with a lot of ideas, so it would be a collaboration, but when it was more manufactured, it would be about the creatives, the marketing director, the manager, a good photographer and me putting forward a selection of ideas which felt right for that time. You want to appeal to whatever area of musicality they're aiming for. It's exciting to take that data and translate it to a style, and also have some fun with creative expression.

I found myself becoming more interested in the character element when we were making videos that had narratives. When it comes to costume, you're in pursuit of clothing that will bring to life what you read on the

◀ page and what feels right for the character. Costume is about bringing the director's vision to life and creating characters that the audience can connect with. There's an abundance of questions that you start to build from when you are reading the script: how do you want these people to feel in the clothes? And the practical, like what feels comfortable for our actor, and how will it dye?

How has your psychology background impacted on your work?

I've always felt confident with research. I'm prepared to take on board other ideas, but I know that I can always bring something of value to a project. I'm fully invested in cultural archives and taking in information from places like the Smithsonian and the *British Journal of Photography*, particular photographers and exhibitions. I'm inspired by behavioural theories as well. I enjoy case studies and focus groups in sociology, and tapping into subcultures and communities that I know. This gives me real strength in the rooting or starting point of a character. I am inquisitive about human behaviour and society – a little bit of psychology, bits of sociology, anthropology, ethnography – all those different things are part of my study of character. There's so

much to be learned in our industry, and no one has the answer to everything. I think it's really beautiful, this culture of sharing information. It's a healthy space for us all to be in as creatives.

Your thoughts on teamwork?

Collaboration is an amazing thing, and when the trust is there, it only builds. I was given associate producer role on *The Silent Twins*, which was a real accolade. The producers understood that my involvement brought value beyond costume. I was very lucky to have producers who were sensitive to that and wanted to empower it. In the costume business it's important that you recognize your position, and you honour it. Even when you are hired as an assistant designer or a trainee, you can bring value to the project that is beyond your title. That value will eventually be recognized on future projects.

Even at my level, there's a hell of a lot of stuff I need to learn, and I'm not afraid to take a step back and assist another designer and learn from others. There's always more to give than what you're employed for/as and there's always more to learn too.

Visit Cobbie's website.

ANGELINA PIERONI, Period Costume Maker, Tailor

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 99 of *Get into Costume* book)

'It's called costume interpretation, isn't it? You could give the same design to five different people, and it'll come out completely different.'

Do theatre costumes differ to film?

Lots of designers want a costume to be very specific. Some insist on everything looking historically accurate to every last detail when they should ask, 'Will they look realistic on stage?' The argument for historical accuracy when everything's streamed is very true, but theatrical costumes are different, for lots of reasons: they're worn every day by the performers, sweating in them, so you don't make them like you would for film.

I started off in theatre because of my training and apprenticeship. When I moved into film, I found being in large workrooms quite difficult, and the long hours, on one project for months at a time. I loved the company, the people and the atmosphere, but I just didn't enjoy the work. The cutter was a sort of icon, and you were a lowly sewer: you weren't allowed in the fitting to engage with the designer. There was snobbery towards theatrical costume makers, who were looked down upon when you went into a film workroom role. ▶



Figure E3.2 Changing someone's body shape is another aspect of costume making, whether for a particular physique, a fantasy shape or to accentuate a character's personality, as here for the awful Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda the Musical*. Costume designer: Rob Howell. Costume made by Angelina Pieroni with body padding by Rob Allsopp. © Getty Images/Dave Benett

How should people record their work?

Be a paper tiger! Document everything you make – take lots of notes, photographs, make sketches – you never know when you might be asked to make a costume again or something similar. Get into the habit of carrying a notebook to jot down notes, ideas and sketches, and file it with any patterns or samples; this will be incredibly helpful if there's a cast change and you have to remake from scratch. It's amazing how you can do something and then completely forget how you did it!

Despite loving what we do, we can also find it a demanding profession. Do you find it so or are you able to rise above its challenges?

I do still love it. I have my bad days – everybody does – and I get very frustrated with the industry – when they give you thirty-five minutes to fit, or you've got a

month to make however many costumes and the fabric turns up the week before the due date and they still expect you to produce it within a week! The logistics can be a complete nightmare. But I love the creating and making of stuff. I do really enjoy that.

THE BEST COSTUME STORY EVER TOLD!

Somebody told me that you've 'arrived' when someone re-tells your story. When I was apprenticing for Fran [Bristow], we were doing a lady's eighteenth-century costume: green antique pleated, long train, walk down outfit. Fran went skiing and left me to finish the costume. I worked my socks off, got it finished and put it on the stand because you couldn't hang it up.

Fran had a lodger at the time. She also had cats and a house rabbit. I'd make absolutely sure every night

◀ that I closed the workroom door so the cats and rabbit couldn't get in. But her lodger thought it would be funny to open the door. And I went in the next day, and the rabbit had chewed through the entire train of this costume. It was like a giant antique-pleated green doily, and they were supposed to be picking it up in three days!

I went to the 'bit bag', and there was a little bit of antique pleating left, but not enough. I was like, 'Oh, my God, what am I going to do? I'm just going to have to ring them up and ask for more fabric.' I rang up the supervisor and said, 'I'm really sorry, but we haven't quite got enough antique pleating for the train. Is there any way you could send me more?' There was this long silence at the other end of the phone, and she said, 'Where's Fran? She's left you to it, hasn't she, and gone bloody skiing! What have you done, you stupid girl? I bet you've put the iron through it haven't you?' I was quaking in my boots!

I thought, *I'm not taking the rap*, so I said, 'You're right. I'm really sorry. Fran is skiing, and there's a problem with the costume.' But she was still being horrible. She said, 'Come on, what have you done?' And I said, 'Well, to be perfectly honest, it's not what I've done. It's what the rabbit's done. The rabbit has eaten the costume.'

There was this deathly silence on the other end of the phone. It went on for quite a long time, and I thought she would kill me. Then there was this roar of laughter at the other end of the phone.

'Oh, my God, the rabbit ate the costume!', she shouted out to the pattern room. They were all in

there, and they said, 'What, what? How has the rabbit eaten the costume?' They were all pissing themselves laughing, thinking it was the funniest thing. She said, 'Angelina, don't you worry about it. We'll sort it out. I'll get some more antique pleating done and I'll send it to you. It's on stage in three days' time. When's Fran back?' And I said, 'She's not back till Monday,' which was the day it was on stage, and she was like, 'Do you think you can do it in time?' I said, 'Yeah, yeah, I'll do it, it's fine don't worry.' Basically, I got this bloody train redone.

Then Fran came back the night before it was on stage. I put it on the table on the stand with the train, and she was like, 'Oh, look at you showing off, putting the costume on the table,' but I was keeping it away from the rabbit. She thought it was the funniest thing. She was laughing her head off, and I'm like, 'It really wasn't funny. That woman was so horrible to me.'

The next day, when we went to deliver it, Fran walked in the room, and I was reverently walking behind her. The supervisor ran across the pattern room, saying, 'Where is she? Where's Angelina? I need to speak to her.' She ran across the room and gave me this great big hug, and said, 'You were amazing. You made us laugh. We're gonna dine out on that!' She said, 'You'll know you've made it when somebody else tells you that story.' I was at a dinner party once when somebody asked me, 'Oh, have you heard about the costume that got eaten by a rabbit? That's the best story ever!'

CATHERINE DARCY, Founder, Darcy Clothing

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 101 of *Get into Costume* book)

Businesswoman or creative spirit?

I am absolutely both. To a large extent, I supply according to the needs I identified as being ‘costume perennials’. Supplying these is in response to unquestioned pragmatic decisions which define the business model. However, the style and detail of the garments is ultimately defined by my preferences and my preferred aesthetic. Costume supervisors are, at heart, people who need to balance the needs of the designer with the practical and economic requirements of the show. This is what I still do.

I wish I’d realized just how complex running a business can be, but then, if I had, I probably would never have started. Of course, there are downsides as with any

business, but I never regret moving away from the sharp end of the industry and into a world where the stresses are less acute. No more crying outside stage doors as the courier tells you he’s lost the principal’s hats!

Anything else you’d like to add?

In any production there is just one designer and anything up to thousands of support staff. Most colleges will encourage you to be a designer. If you want to lead a life of competition and rejection, follow their advice. If you want a more secure life, join the support staff.

Visit the Darcy Clothing website.



Figure E3.3 There are costume staples, such as the white dress shirt, which are repeatedly needed for formal evening settings. Attention must be paid to the type of shirt front, whether the collar is double, single, attached or separate, as well as the dress shirt accessories such as collar studs, dress studs and cufflinks – and to ensure it is right for the period! © Darcy Clothing Ltd

MICHELE CLAPTON, Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 105 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E3.4 Michele Clapton's costumes for *The King's Man* (2020) radiate privilege and power, class and tradition. © Walt Disney Studios/Alamy/Landmark Media

Would you consider designing your own collection?

I am absolutely not drawn to creating a fashion line other than it being linked to a film project. In partnership with the production company, then it's fun. I really didn't like the fashion business myself because essentially that's what it is: a tough business that favours only a few – and often even breaks those it chooses.

How is the costume department viewed from outside the profession?

Our business is far from perfect. I believe we are still viewed as a 'women's department', along with make-up and hair so therefore of lesser importance than, say, the camera department, which is historically male. This is reflected in pay grades and time given for free. But what is the camera filming? No matter how good they

might be as a DoP, if the actor in the costume doesn't tell the story coherently, then all is lost.

How do you find working across different periods?

Game of Thrones (GoT) was a breakthrough for me. I knew that I could create something special, but, as we all know, so many productions will not take a risk on an 'unproven' designer. It's so disheartening and even now it still happens to me. I often get so down about this. It was a huge undertaking to start GoT, but I was so determined that it should be thoroughly designed and that the standard of design and cut be of the very highest standard.

For the first three series, I dedicated all my time to realizing this ... pretty much learning on the job how to run a workroom and a huge extras and armour department with the help of a tireless crew and the

◀ support of the directors. In Seasons 4 and 5, I felt more comfortable and began to enjoy it a bit more. But I also realized from the other jobs I was being offered that I was in danger of only being seen as a designer of fantasy. So, when Stephen Daldry called me personally and asked me to design *The Crown*, I thought it might be a way to show that I could also design true period. It was also filming in London, and, after five years of being eight months of the year in Belfast, I felt like being at home a bit more.

Initially, working on *The Crown* was quite different, making sure that the costumes were authentic, especially when matching to existing footage. But the joy was in the way I was encouraged to explore the unseen private moments where there was more freedom to create and story-tell. The writing and every element of the show was beautifully considered.

I was then asked to return to *GoT* and for a couple of months worked on both shows simultaneously – which was hectic! I sometimes regret not returning to *The Crown*, but I decided to see *GoT* out as it gave me more

freedom to explore other projects. I enjoyed both, but I also learnt some hard lessons in trust. People promise so much when you work with them and then conveniently forget their words when it suits them. It's a tough business. The 'money' still speaks the loudest, no matter what the 'art' promises. I often feel like walking away, but I don't know what else I can do. My agent says to grow a thicker skin!

Do you work with the same team?

I try to keep my team together, but, as everyone knows, we're all freelance, and if you decide to take a break, you often lose your crew as it's so busy at present in the UK. We are desperate for more talented people to enter the industry at all levels. I find it hard to keep a supervisor when the good ones – in fact even the bad ones! – are so in demand. To find one that is skilled, fair, available, experienced and living in the UK is hard.

Find Michele on Instagram.

Bridal

Bridal is always contemporary. Even when influenced by period costume, it feels modern. Wedding dresses are principally for the mass market, which is more fashion related, but they are also made as one-offs or smaller collections with some costume people making for brides and bridesmaids alongside film and theatre work. It can be a savvy business model to cover both bases. Period costume maker Gwen Russell created her own bridal collection with a romantic period feel to her wedding dresses, reflecting her costume background. Costume designer and fashion stylist Kate Halfpenny trained in fashion at Central Saint Martins. Kate is equally at home styling celebrities and TV commercials as she is designing her hugely successful bridal collection at Halfpenny London.

Visit Gwen's website.

Visit the Halfpenny London website.

Period Film Examples

A Room with a View (1985); Costume Designers: Jenny Beavan OBE and John Bright OBE

Ammonite (2020); Costume Designer: Michael O'Connor

Anna Karenina (2007); Costume Designer: Jacqueline Durran

Belle (2013); Costume Designer: Anushia Nieradzick
Colette (2018); Costume Designer: Andrea Flesch
Cyrano (2021); Costume Designer: Massimo Cantini Parrini
Dangerous Liaisons (1988); Costume Designer: James Acheson
The Danish Girl (2015); Costume Designer: Paco Delgado
Death in Venice (1971); Costume Designer: Piero Tosi
The Duchess (2008); Costume Designer: Michael O'Connor
Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007); Costume Designer: Alexandra Byrne
Emma (2020); Costume Designer: Alexandra Byrne
The Favourite (2018); Costume Designer: Sandy Powell OBE
Gladiator (1992); Costume Designer: Janty Yates
Gladiator 2 (2024); Costume Designers: Janty Yates and David Crossman
Gone with the Wind (1939); Costume Designer: Walter Plunkett
Lady Chatterley's Lover (2022); Costume Designer: Emma Fryer
Lady Macbeth (2016); Costume Designer: Holly Waddington
Little Dorrit (1987); Costume Designer: Christine Edzard
Little Women (2019); Costume Designer: Jacqueline Durran
Love and Friendship (2016); Costume Designer: Eimer Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh
Marie Antoinette (2006); Costume Designer: Milena Canonero
Mary Queen of Scots (2018); Costume Designer: Alexandra Byrne
Mrs Harris Goes to Paris (2022); Costume Designer: Jenny Beavan OBE
The Personal History of David Copperfield (2020); Costume Designers: Suzie Harman and Robert Worley
Persuasion (2022); Costume Designer: Marianne Agertoft
Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019); Costume Designer: Dorothée Guiraud
Restoration (1995); Costume Designer: James Acheson
Wuthering Heights (2011); Costume Designer: Steven Noble
The Young Victoria (2009); Costume Designer: Sandy Powell OBE

Period Fantasy Examples

Alice in Wonderland (2010); Costume Designer: Colleen Atwood
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005); Costume Designer: Colleen Atwood
Fantastic Beasts (2016, 2018, 2022); Costume Designer: Colleen Atwood
Game of Thrones (2011–2019); Costume Designer: Michele Clapton
The Greatest Showman (2017); Costume Designer: Ellen Mirojnick
Harry Potter (2001–2011); Costume Designers: Lindy Hemming and Jany Temime
Maleficent (2014, 2019); Costume Designers: Anna Sheppard and Ellen Mirojnick
Pinocchio (2019); Costume Designer: Massimo Cantini Parrini
Pirates of the Caribbean (2003–2017); Costume Designer: Penny Rose
Poor Things (2023); Costume Designer: Holly Waddington
Snow White (2025); Costume Designer: Sandy Powell OBE
Wicked (2024); Costume Designer: Paul Tazewell
Wonka (2023); Costume Designer: Lindy Hemming

Recommended Period Costume Pattern Books

Arnold, Janet, *Patterns of Fashion*, 6 vols., London: The School of Historical Dress, 2021–3.

Barrington, Mandy, *Stays and Corsets Translated for the Modern Body*, 2 vols., London and New York: Routledge, 2015.

Waugh, Norah, *Corsets and Crinolines*, London and New York: Routledge, 1954.

Waugh, Norah, *The Cut of Men's Clothes*, London: Faber & Faber, 1994.