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SPOTLIGHT FEATURED

Busy stage doesn't need costume designer

By Srianthi Perera, Get Out Contributor 6 hrs ago



Tia Hawkes works on a candy factory worker's costume for the Gilbert Centre Theatre in Gilbert.

Srianthi Perera/Get Out Contributor

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3. DON'T FUSS WITH NON-U.S. ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

After completing their degrees in fashion design, most of Tia Hawkes' colleagues at Mesa Community College made a beeline to high-fashion centers such as New York and Los Angeles.

She opted for extra certificates in costume design and alterations.

"I started costuming and I just fell in love with the challenge," said Hawkes, 28, the resident costume designer at Hale Centre Theatre in Gilbert since October.

With just one assistant, Dustin Roa, Hawkes organizes the costumes at the theater, where a new show is opened every six weeks and each production requires 100-200 get-ups.

Just now, "Newsies" is running on the mainstage, "The Man with the Pointed Shoes" is the secondary show and "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" has a start in early July.

"Things move fairly quick, we're constantly opening shows," she said. "We're designing new costumes for the new shows. It's fun; I love it. It's part of the challenge."

Costumes are being rented for "Newsies," but even then, Hawkes has to submit actor measurements and take care of the inevitable minor alterations.

Hale has thousands of costumes in storage from past shows, "everything from men's dress pants to the Ursula costume we made for "The Little Mermaid," so riffling through them for current requirements is also part of her job.

"We use what we have as much as we can and whatever we need to build, we build," she said. "Every show, we make new pieces and it adds up. It seems like we always need more space."

Hawkes' wishes are coming true in this case, as the Hale is undergoing a huge renovation project, which will add a 10,000 square-foot expansion by September that includes an additional 2,000 square feet to the costume department.

When that's completed, they won't need to keep... save time.

Hawkes, a graduate of Desert Ridge High School, was an elective in high school. Her mom does a bit of embroidery when she was a kid, but she hadn't



school.

"I knew instantly that that was what I wanted to do," she said. "I just like it as a creative outlet."

Before she was hired at Hale, Hawkes interned with and was mentored by her predecessor, Mary Atkinson.

There aren't a lot of costumers in town. When she wanted to hire an assistant, only three people showed up for interviews and Roa was one of them.

"It's an art form that's not practiced by everyone and I'm afraid that it's dying out," Hawkes said.

Roa grew up in the performing arts with the influence of concert and marching band and when he was looking to express his creativity in a new way, he found sewing.

"From there, I started a costuming business for marching bands, and that led me to theater costuming," said Roa, who has an Associated in Arts in General Studies from Mesa Community College, and is mostly self-taught.

"Most of my sewing education comes from YouTube videos, some classes at community colleges, and just practice," he said.

Roa is also intrigued by the creativity of his profession.

"I love seeing things come together. So not only sewing, but the overall production as well. All the different pieces of a puzzle coming together to make something that is greater than the individual elements themselves," he said.

"In costuming, it's all the pattern pieces, fabrics and styling becoming a unified look to create a character and personality," he added. "With the scenic, costuming and everything else that comes together, it's a lot of effort that creates a special experience for the audience."

To create the costumes for a production, Hawkes (if there's one) to get inspiration for ideas. She sets the setting for its clothing. She then meets with the designer to discuss the look of the show and to the ultimate design.



After the designs are finalized, they are patterned. If the fabric is available, the sewing takes place. If not, she goes shopping.

Time is the biggest challenge of the job. Another is smooth communication.

“You’re constantly working with new people and everyone has their own ideas. Theater’s a lot of communication and planning and just making sure that everyone’s on the same page and working together, you create this vision for the show,” Hawkes said.

Hawkes and Roa take about one-and-a-half hours to sew an outfit in one of the two industrial sewing machines in their workshop. They also have at their disposal an industrial serger to neaten the clothes, and an industrial iron with a large steam tank to press them.

Each completed costume joins its ilk in one part of the room. Hawkes also puts together accessory bins for each actor, in which she stores their personal items such as arm bands, sashes, headwear and shoe spats.

The workspace is well organized with bins of fabric sorted by type and color. Jewelry is stored vertically by type as well. A shop’s-worth of shoes are at her disposal.

Hawkes’s employer, Dave Dietlein, said Tia excels in attention to detail and accuracy in her costuming.

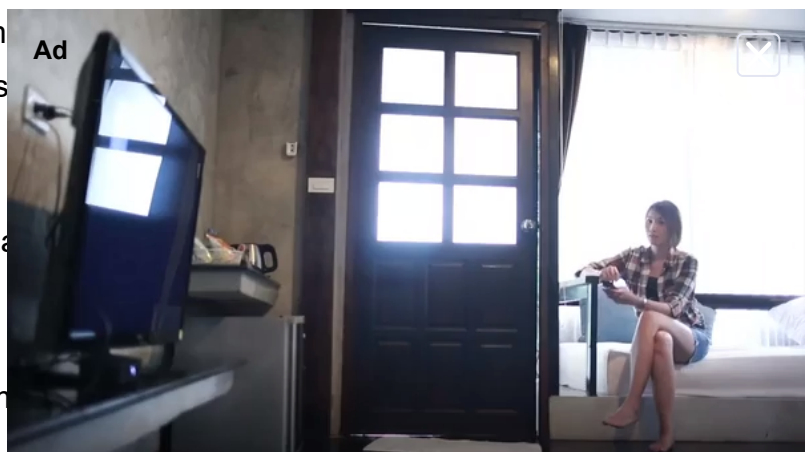
“Tia is a dream to work with and we couldn’t be happier,” he said. “We have had wonderful costumers in the past, and Tia is carrying on that tradition.”

All through summer the costumers will keep busy, but fall — particularly November — is when things become more hectic.

Hale’s traditional December staple, “A Christmas costumes. This is followed rapidly by the first s of time to produce those costumes.

“I feel like, when you work in theater, you’re ma on this beautiful Christmas show for everyone

Hawkes gets time off over the holidays, but ju



"I love it," she said. "And I'm happy here. Hale's definitely my home."

To see Tia Hawkes' and Dustin Roa's costumes, attend a production at Hale Centre Theatre. Details: haletheatrearizona.com

