

# Dressing Up the Actor

Costumes, wigs, makeup—  
even underwear



Period Corsets supplied garments for the New York Metropolitan Opera's production of *La Sonnambula*

By Kevin M. Mitchell

Unless an actor is performing something like *Equus*, *Hair*, or *The Full Monty*, he or she may feel naked on stage even when they aren't. But the makeup, costumes, jewelry—even underwear—all play a part in getting the actor in character. More importantly, they add to the drama or comedy that's happening on stage. So where do you find that 1890s riding hat? Makeup that turns silicone prosthetics green? Support for that civil war-era hoop skirt? And what suppliers are especially theatre-friendly? *SD* did a survey and discovered there's more to accessories than meets the eye—even if the audience's eye doesn't see it.

## Period Corsets

Period Corsets is a company in Seattle that makes historic undergarments for theatres including corsets, petticoats and bloomers. "We've been in business since 1996," says co-owner Becky Kaufman. "We started out as a costume company, but now we just focus on this." She mentions that their unmentionables have recently been in the Broadway production of *Mary Poppins*. It was a special clothing item, and they sent the fabric to Period Corsets who created what they wanted to their specifications. A Santa Fe Opera production of *Tales of Hoffmann* did that as

well. "A lot of people take our products and change them—they send us amazing bright fabrics to make petticoats."

Another special project was for an overseas designer — the request was to install a small flat screen T.V. in a corset, which they did.

"We work with theatres on every level—community to professional opera," she says. "We try to accommodate people's budgets. Sometimes we have interns who make a corset we couldn't really sell, and we'll discount it for a smaller company that can't afford full price." But for those who do get their products, it's a good investment she says because their garments are created for the theatre—meaning they are high-quality and made with many alternation points so they can be used over and over again for actors of different sizes.

They do have to be content that their artful creations are adding to the production even when they aren't seen. "There was a touring Broadway production of *White Christmas* and we went to see it here in Seattle," Kaufman says, laughing. "And we were trying to figure out which one was wearing our work!"

## Mallatt Pharmacy & Costumes

"We're getting a lot of requests from people who are doing musical classics," says Karen Brown-Larimore with Mallatt. "We're getting a lot for *Cats*, for instance, where people are experimenting with makeup trying to recreate the Broadway show. They are sticking with cream makeup, but doing special orders with wigs."

She says she's seen a trend in request for accessories, wigs, and makeup from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. "We're getting requests for a lot of flapper wigs."

Brown-Larimore is a costume designer by training, and says she's often inspired to find and stock things that she herself is looking for in her productions. Her latest quest has been military and badges. "I just did *HMS Pinafore*, and I really wanted theatrical medals that looked different and real and that I didn't have to make myself!" she laughs. Now they stock a larger variety that aren't plastic but aren't expensive. She was very pleased with how her Admiral looked.

Mallatt has been looking at other important details—like buttons. Also, cotton gloves are important. "Polyester gloves, especially the longer ones, aren't as comfortable." Even facial hair has gotten attention, as they try to offer a big variety that looks great coming out of the package that you don't have to spend a fortune on. (She does offer a tip though: "Always thin

"Always thin a wig. Almost every wig you want you need to have the hair thinned out right away to make it look natural." — Karen Brown-Larimore

a wig. Almost every wig you want you need to have the hair thinned out right away to make it look natural.")

"We offer 10 percent off to all theatre students, schools, and small theatres," she adds. "And we have no minimums, so even if you need one container of eye shadow, we ship that off, and usually the same day."

#### **Graftobian Makeup Company**

"Makeup today is being fueled by changes in stage lighting," declares Janine Wardale, Graftobian Makeup Company. The more energy-efficient bulbs emit less heat and are good for the environment, but they are turning traditional makeup on its head. "Traditional makeup with new lighting will make people very orange. For that you need to have foundations that are not as pigmented as traditional theatrical foundations."

Graftobian is based in Madison, Wisc., and has a store in Brooklyn, New York. In both locations they've found a greater concern about natural skin tone, she adds. Ethnic diversity of actors is demanding something other than the one-kind-fits-all as well.

"Some of the smaller theatres, even in the economic downturn, are able to install new lights. With these you need less makeup and it's a case of less is more. There is still a need for

character makeup, aging, ethnic base—still a need for mustaches and bears and wigs and all of that. But it needs to be done a little differently."

A big trend is airbrushing, which is no longer for just the professional theatres. "Universities are teaching it," she says. "Yes, the system cost money, but after that point it's priced competitively. Airbrushing gives you some big advantages over cream. You don't have to worry about cross-contamination. You're not throwing away sponges." It's been especially great for theatres deadly serious about, say, their production of *The Wizard of Oz* where they are turning people silver or gold.

They offer an airbrush unit especially for schools and smaller theatres called the Walk-Around. It's battery operated, and costs \$300. "In five minutes you can airbrush an actor that would take 30 minutes to do with cream."

#### **Pierre's Costumes**

"I think a lot of people are doing adaptations of tradition works," says Rich Williamson, president of Pierre's. He knows tradition. Pierre's goes back to 1876.

Based in Philadelphia, he says they get a lot of special requests, though about once a month they are asked to read a script and give their thoughts as to the costume direction.



**FOR 28 YEARS THE PEGASUS NAME  
HAS BEEN RECONGNISED AS A LEADER  
IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY.**

The Pegasus showroom is the largest full-service theatrical showroom in the Midwest, stocking

**AUDIO • LIGHTING • VIDEO  
MAKE UP • SCENERY PRODUCTS  
DRAPERY • SPECIAL EFFECTS  
and so MUCH MORE.**

20570 West 8 Mile Road  
Southfield, Michigan 48075  
**248-353-6130**

**[www.pegasustheatrical.com](http://www.pegasustheatrical.com)**

**Come visit our  
showroom and  
talk to our staff  
as you shop our  
huge selection of  
Ben Nye products**



"We have had to read scripts to generate costume plots for newer shows like *Kabuki Macbeth*, *Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and several original operas."

The company has grown aggressively, having bought out 30 other companies in its history. With each business they've picked they gained not only in costumes, but knowledge. At one point he wanted to group items and label them but that proved impractical on several levels, as each theatre and production wants to be unique. "Theatres doing the same show don't want to look identical."

He sees some productions paring down while others are ramping up with more costumes. "We're seeing more double-casting, especially at the middle school level. That's a huge trend. While more work for the director, from their perspective, it exposes more people to theatre."

Pierre's offers special theatre packages for nonprofit, school, and community theatres. "They can get a costume as cheaply as \$2.32 a day," Williamson says. "We're very inexpensive, especially considering the quality of the costumes." These days 60 to 70 percent of his business is out of state, and they supply 400 to 500 productions in every state every year. They even get last minute requests: "It blows our mind, but we'll get calls two weeks, even days, before a production!" he laughs. "Maybe it slipped their minds, maybe someone let them down—but at that point, we're heroes!"

#### Paron Fabrics

Paron Fabrics is a retail/wholesale store in the heart of New York's garment district. Mark Glenn, vice president, points out that in addition to being open to the public seven days a week, there's no minimum order. "You can buy half a yard of something or more than you can carry," he says.

The store caters to a world-wide theatre clientele, working with professional theatre shoppers who work with costume houses and doing business on their website, [www.manhattanfabrics.com](http://www.manhattanfabrics.com). He says theatre costumes require fabric that takes into consideration not only how it'll look on stage, but how it'll hold up: Often the actors wearing them jump around, slide and generally abuse their clothes.

Special fabric is provided all the time for theatres around the country. Theatres will email pictures of fabrics for them to find, and swatches are mailed back to make sure it has the right feel and texture for the show. "We'll get request for flame-retardant fabrics for curtains too." For schools on a budget to the point that it's a no-budget, it's not uncommon for Paron to send a box of remnants for the price of shipping.

Otherwise it's matching what is appropriate in their inventory to the show: "Shows that are a little more rustic, like westerns, will want denim and corduroy. If you need clothing for a specific period, like the 1770s, you have a pretty good chance of getting what you need for the costume here."

As far as trends in costuming, "that's a hard question to answer, but a combination of black and white material never seems to go out of style. Prints also are always popular, and they could be anything you can imagine."



**MALLATT**  
PHARMACY & COSTUMES

**TAKE 10% OFF**  
*your school or theatre orders!*

\*Theatrical Hats\* \*Costumes\*  
\*Costume Accessories\*  
\*Wigs\* \*Facial Hair\*  
\*Stage Makeup\* \*Prosthetics\*

3506 Monroe St., Madison, WI 53711  
Toll Free: 877.687.5287 (ext 7)  
608.238.3106 • [info@mallatts.com](mailto:info@mallatts.com)

**[www.mallatts.com](http://www.mallatts.com)**



Karen Brown-Larimore with Mallatt Pharmacy and Costumes added more authentic military badges and ribbons to their collection when she went looking for some for a production of *HMS Pinafore*. Sir Joseph was played by Andrew Abrams.



"When the economy goes down, theatres will resort to making their own costumes; but with makeup they still need it to be good."

—David Grossman

**Paron Fabrics**  
UNIQUE & EXCLUSIVE fantastic costume fabric collection



Buy our fabrics online at [www.manhattanfabrics.com](http://www.manhattanfabrics.com)

**MANHATTAN FABRICS**

**SPECIAL COLLECTION OF FABRICS 50% OFF**

- PERSONAL SERVICE—Swatches gladly sent upon request
- Worldwide, Extensive and very successful history working with BROADWAY, OFF-BROADWAY, FILM STUDIOS, TELEVISION NETWORKS, SCHOOLS, THEME PARKS, ENTERTAINMENT PROFESSIONALS and individual Designers!
- Contact us by phone, fax, mail or internet. You can often have your requests filled by the next day!

VISIT US WHENEVER YOU ARE IN NYC, STOP IN FOR A LOOK and FONDLE OUR FABRICS!!!



**Paron Fabrics**  
206 West 40th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10018  
p 212.768.3266  
f 212.768.3260  
[www.paronfabrics.com](http://www.paronfabrics.com)

Over 20 years experience creating  
"Everything from Demons to Divas"

**AEO Studios, Inc.**  
Theatrical Make-up/Effects/Design/Production

2200 N. Forsyth Rd. #G28  
Orlando, FL 32807  
[www.aeostudios.com](http://www.aeostudios.com)  
Contact us today for all your  
Theatrical Artistry needs!  
Ph/Fax: 407-677-8706  
Orlando ♦♦♦ Hong Kong



**ACCESSORY WHOLESALE INC.**  
Wholesale Fashion Jewelry, Bracelets, Necklaces, Tiaras, Bridal Jewelry

Your extensive source for Wholesale Fashion and Costume Jewelry, Tiaras, Rhinestone and Bridal Jewelry, Bracelets, Pendants, Earrings, Hats and Mardi Gras

[www.awnol.com](http://www.awnol.com)

800.525.8793

504.736.0357 • FAX 504.734.8638

email: [sales@awnol.com](mailto:sales@awnol.com)

Accessory Wholesale Inc., 5845 River Road, Harahan, La. 70123



**Mehron, Inc.**

Mehron was called upon to provide for a very special production: *Shrek the Musical*. Prosthetic makeup designer Mike Marino created something that was silicone based, which bounces more like skin than latex—that was the good news. But makeup artist/sales manager Gene Flaharty says the challenge was that getting the right makeup to work with it and the skin of the actor as well. It took six months of development, and along the way they created something that was long lasting and was easy to apply.

Flaharty says in addition to that high-profile project, they've redeveloped their creams and reformulated them to make them especially user-friendly on the skin. They have also developed a whole new line of lipstick for stage and performances. "We selected blue reds, orange reds, and brown reds, which read really well on stage. It's no gloss, so it looks more natural. These are especially good when recreating a specific time period. We have recreated 16 colors, and I used them on stage last year and the girls absolutely loved them."

There's also Celebré Pro-HD foundation, that is has more flesh tones including darker ones from Asian to olive to medium blacks to blacks. "It's great for small theatres using more realistic lighting," he says.

Mehron has a policy of referring clients to their string of dealers throughout the country, but did say they have added an instruction book that is included in their student makeup kit. Written by Joe Rossi, former makeup artist on *Saturday Night Live*, it includes the basic tips everyone should know. "It's written for beginner students, and high schools are using it as a text book in their classes."

**AWNOL**

Their location is in their name: Accessory Wholesale New Orleans LA (AWNOL), and president/CEO Mike Gietl says they do a lot of business with local theatres, including Le Petit Theatre and Tulane University. But because their 7,000 pieces of jewelry and hats are online, they also cater to theatres everywhere.

"Theatre people come to us first for period things," he says. "We've been in business for 25 years so we have a lot of genuine vintage pieces—not just faux," says Gietl. Their hard-to-find hats, like bowlers, derby, gambler, straw, fedoras in hounds tooth, are a big draw. "Another thing that we've seen a huge increase in are our Venetian-style masks." Now prevalent in reality and game shows, they are



being increasingly needed in theatre productions.

Since they are a wholesaler, a minimum order of \$75 is necessary. But Gietl says it is pretty easy for a theatre to hit that number when ordering a variety of things for a production. Also, for orders of \$200 or more, there is free freight.

If there's a call from a theatre looking for something special and specific—or even if they aren't exactly sure what they want—Gietl usually takes the call personally. "I have a good understanding of the history of jewelry and hats, and I can usually help."

### **Pegasus Theatrical**

Pegasus does so many things—audio, video, special effects, staging, set design—but David Grossman also wants you to remember they also do makeup. Known as the largest Ben Nye dealer in Michigan, and one of the largest nationwide, their makeup division has contributed to making them a Midwest theatre powerhouse.

The makeup division began when Grossman went to a Halloween show in 1997. A conversation with Dana Nye of Ben Nye included Grossman telling him he wanted to serve the theatre business, and that led to them being a distributor. Pegasus was successful immediately.

"We sell to all the schools and universities in Michigan and the region, and have a total of 4,500 active clients," he says. "Ben Nye is a great product, has great support, and the few times there has been an issue, they've jumped on it and resolved it." Part of the reason for the success of the line is consistency. "What I get today is exactly what I got three months ago."

The economy hasn't affected the makeup business too much, though he does note that he does get calls from people who bought something off the Internet that turned out to be old and unusable, and then come to them because of the consistency and quality of the product. "When the economy goes down, theatres will resort to making their own costumes; but with makeup they still need it to be good." Their staff can often help with tips or refer them to someone who can help them if needed.

Lately they've been getting requests for latex masks and custom ones as well. "We occasionally also get especially large orders for blood," he laughs. "As you know, Ben Nye has the best-tasting blood in the country!"

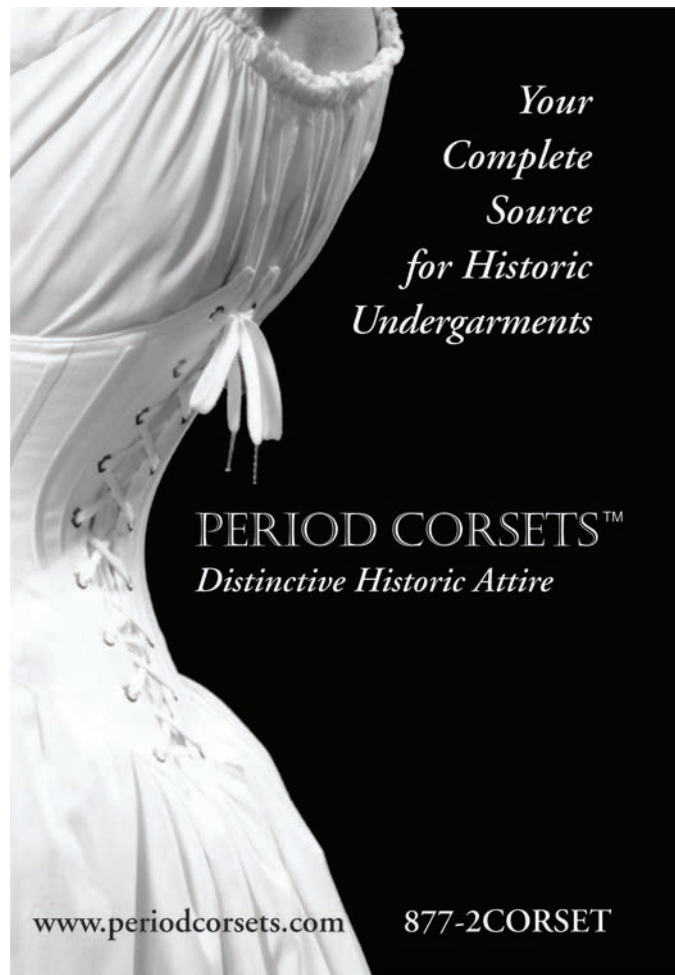
### **AEO Studios**

AEO Studios has been called on to create everything from cow udders that shoot milk to quick-change witch prosthetics. "We love challenges, and we always urge designers and directors to shoot for the moon when planning a production," says AEO president/creative director Alan Ostrander. "We help create effects that work within budgets."

"A few years ago, we created a prosthetic nose specifically for a school for their production of *Beauty and The Beast*," adds Drew Dalire, managing partner. "Though it was hard to convince them to use prosthetic pieces instead of a traditional wax or latex build out, it turned out great."

Dalire says that he's noticing that theatre clients want the "wow" factor, but special makeup needs to be easy and quick to apply and as clean as possible. Alternatives need to be examined, too. "Recently a potential client wanted green airbrush makeup for a zombie that could be applied in 90 seconds, but then eventually change back," he says. "I suggested that a properly wigged and detailed pullover mask would probably be better."

Dalire says that he senses a return to naturalism as far as makeup design is concerned. "However, some of the 'Fringe' type productions do require elaborate makeup designs and effects."



*Your  
Complete  
Source  
for Historic  
Undergarments*

**PERIOD CORSETS™**  
*Distinctive Historic Attire*

[www.periodcorsets.com](http://www.periodcorsets.com) 877-2CORSET



Specializing in Theatrical  
Costume Rentals, Design  
and Construction since 1943

**PIERRE'S  
COSTUMES**

211 N. 3rd St. -Philadelphia, PA 19106

*Your show... the way YOU want it!*

*No extra cost for plus size actors!*

*Tiered production discounts*

*Full Plot Services!*

[www.costumers.com](http://www.costumers.com)  
215-925-7121

Ask about our many theatrical discounts

## Special Section: Costumes, Wigs & Makeup

And musical theatre will always have some of the cooler makeups, which are getting more complicated. But there are always ways to simplify an character's elaborate makeup and keep the wow factor."

AEO offers to analyze scripts and design suitable and appropriate makeup for a production. They can do makeup support pre, during, and post-show. Dalire: "If additional show support is required, the AEO staff is trained to do many aspects of production including casting, directing, stage managing, and producing. Our goal is to be the one stop shop for the industry."

### DC Theatricks

Many theatres undertake the task of costuming their entire production in house, although David DeJac of DC Theatricks advises that there are several options that can simplify the process and cut costs as well. "We routinely costume partial or complete productions on a rental basis, but an increasing number of theatres are finding it cost-effective to have their suits and uniforms built by us using their fabric and specifications. This allows their production staff to concentrate efforts on other costumes while retaining their original design," he says.

The long-distance correspondence required to execute a detailed custom build has become very efficient in recent years, thanks to modern technology. DeJac points out that if issues arise during the production process, an immediate response from the designer is often needed to meet deadlines.

A recent uniform build for The Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park 2010 production of *The Winter's Tale* had its share of unforeseen problems for the staff at DC Theatricks to solve. "Design modifications and construction details were revised sev-

eral times and e-mailed to us so we could see the changes immediately, and respond just as quickly with any new concerns," DeJac explains. "I was in constant communication with designer Clint Ramos and the wardrobe staff at The Public to make sure we fully understood all changes."

"The use of cell phones, in particular, has been the most beneficial advancement allowing us to talk to designers wherever they may be, including while they're fabric shopping," continues DeJac. "We can convey yardage needed for a particular width of fabric, approve trim and button details in real-time, and receive pictures in seconds." This efficiency not only keeps the work flowing, but lightning-fast technology also helps the bottom line by avoiding expensive express fees to send information. **SD**



Jesse Tyler Ferguson in The Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park 2010 production of *The Winter's Tale*. DC Theatricks built the costume off of the design (on right) by Clint Ramos.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOAN MARCUS

## Costume Rentals & Sales

Complete show rentals - FREE PLOTS!

Celebrating our 30th Anniversary

## Custom Made Suits & Uniforms

\* Full service manufacturing facility

\* Your designs made to order

\* Our fabric or yours



# D-C THEATRICKS

747 Main Street Buffalo, NY 14203

Tel: 716-847-0180 Fax: 716-847-0186

info@costume.com

[www.costume.com](http://www.costume.com)

## CONTACT INFO

### AEO Studios

2200 Forsyth Road Suite K-20

Orlando, FL 32807

P: 407-677-8706

W: [www.aeostudios.com](http://www.aeostudios.com)

### Accessory Wholesale

5845 River Road

Harahan, LA 70123

P: 504-736-0357

W: [www.awnol.com](http://www.awnol.com)

### Ben Nye Company, Inc.

3655 Lenawee Ave.

Los Angeles, CA 90016

P: 310-839-1984

W: [www.bennye.com](http://www.bennye.com)

### DC Theatricks

747 Main St.

Buffalo, NY 14203-1321

P: 716-847-0180

W: [www.costume.com](http://www.costume.com)

### Graftobian Makeup

Company

510 Tasman St.

Madison, WI 53714

P: 608-222-7849

W: [www.graftobian.com](http://www.graftobian.com)

### Mallatt Pharmacy & Costumes

3506 Monroe St.

Madison, Wisconsin 53711

P: 877-687-5287

W: [www.mallatts.com](http://www.mallatts.com)

### Mehron, Inc.

100 Red Schoolhouse Rd.

Chestnut Ridge, NY 10977

P: 845-426-1700

W: [www.mehron.com](http://www.mehron.com)

### Paron Fabrics

206 West 40th St.

New York, NY 10018

P: 212-768-3266

W: [www.paronfabrics.com](http://www.paronfabrics.com)

### Pegasus Theatrical

20570 West 8 Mile Road

Southfield, MI 48075-5640

P: 248-353-6130

W: [www.pegasustheatrical.com](http://www.pegasustheatrical.com)

### Period Corsets

PMB 5584

10002 Aurora Avenue N.

#36

Seattle, WA 98133-9334

P: 206-264-0997

W: [www.periodcorsets.com](http://www.periodcorsets.com)

### Pierre's Costumes

211 N 3rd St.

Philadelphia, PA 19106

P: 215-925-7121

W: [www.costumers.com](http://www.costumers.com)

Copyright of Stage Directions is the property of Timeless Communications Corp. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.