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GTKos:

THE ASSOCIATION OF THEATRE COSTUME MAKERS

GTKos ('Gesellschaft der Theaterkostümschaffenden') is a non-commercial platform for all costume makers in the German-speaking world.

The hat making group from GTKos, Berlin 2019

BY ANTJE LÜCKE

CONNECTING PEOPLE

In 2002, a group of 25 costume directors from German-speaking theatres met and had an idea: to bring together costume designers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Five years later at Showtech, the international trade fair in Berlin, 250 participants were keen to take up the idea. So on June 8, 2011, a new association was founded and GTKos came into being.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Today, GTKos has 333 members and is home to 13 specialised groups. There are costume designers, wardrobe supervisors, costume dyers, hat makers, shoemakers and armour specialists, to name a few. In addition to those occupations that require formal training leading to qualifications, GTKos also dedicates itself to less professionalised types of work. Here, knowledge can be shared; for example, how to deal with hazardous chemicals used for dyeing materials, an issue is not uncommon in the field of costume painting.

In occupations that are in decline, such as in the case of armour specialists, as much knowledge as possible is recorded and archived. The meetings are a place for members to make contact with each other and to discuss the issues. Today Showtech is known as Stage|Set|Scenery and convenes every two years for the general meeting and the specialist group meetings that follow.

REPRESENTING THE COSTUME MAKERS

GTKos is able to update all members continually with information relevant to the profession, and serves as a contact point and a forum for networking, while organising specialist meetings, seminars and workshops. Furthermore, the organisation provides representation for costume makers to professional associations and institutions.

GTKos is not just an organisation for permanent employees: the body also represents freelance costume makers from the theatre and film world as well

as other independent technical and artistic workers. As such, the various professions in the industry are given representation, and the different costume departments can liaise and mutually support one another.

THE HAT MAKERS

The hat making group has some 29 members and is very active. They meet alternately: once a year for the general meeting in Berlin and then in the following year at a chosen theatre. The hat maker who at that time is working at the venue will arrange to show the work area, give a tour through the theatre, prepare a workshop and plan an on-site visit that caters to the particular interests of the participants and that shines a light on a specific aspect of the region.

The group leaders Eike Schnatmann and Ina Breuer, both from the Staatstheater Stuttgart (the Stuttgart state theatre for opera, ballet and drama), are fully committed and engaged with the organisation. The

members come from all parts of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and represent the theatre houses in the big cities as well as the smaller regional theatres, which are mostly state-funded, and also some private theatres.

Theatre houses differ as to the type of production they stage - drama, opera, ballet and musicals - and so the particular tasks of individual milliners will vary accordingly. All this makes for an exciting exchange among the various professionals involved. The meeting will start with a round of introductions, followed by a presentation of interesting projects from the last season. Here, information can be given about the whole design process, from finding the right materials to putting the final touches to the pieces. Original headgear and material samples are especially welcome, but if the objects are being used in ongoing productions or are too big to transport, photos can be shown.

SUITABILITY FOR THE STAGE

The designs of costume makers are developed in cooperation with the 'triumvirate' of director, set designer and costume designer. The particular approach of each costume designer will vary. Sometimes the ideas will be clear, and the appropriate materials can then be selected from the sketches. So as to stay close to the design, various factors are taken into account, such as proportion, choice of colour, suitability, and the practicality of using the costumes on stage. If the ideas of the designer are more vague or less formulated, hat makers can be called upon to put something forward towards the process.

It is helpful when there is information about the special requirements for the performances on stage. What must the actors/singers/dancers be able to do with the headgear on stage? Do they move a lot? Is there any contact with dirt, paint, water, etc.? Are there any costume changes, and if so, how much time is there to do this?

In the rehearsal phase, therefore, designers always consult with the costume assistant who takes care of the rehearsals. Feedback is valuable so as to ensure that the costumes are comfortable to wear and able to last through the performances. As such, the work done in the various theatre houses is similar in kind. However, while something like a large choir might be common for an opera house, it is not usual in a theatre that is used to putting on smaller scale plays. Another consideration is that when dealing with productions that involve changing casts, such as musicals, costumes sizes must be variable.

In addition, theatre is subject to changing fashions and trends. At the moment, there is a tendency to go for productions with big name costume designers, and this raises further questions. How do the others involved cope with this? Do the houses award commissions to independent companies? Will the hours be increased? How can this all be managed?



Photo: Matthias Horn

Production: 'Häuptling Abendwind'
Theatre: Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg
Performers: Sasha Rau, Samuel Weiss, Josef Ostendorf
Costume Designer: Sara Kittelmann
Hat/Material: Wool felt base, draped in fabric



Examples of 3D prints at the GTKos exhibition stand
Stage / Set / Scene Berlin 2019

If the hat casts a shadow, the lighting department will examine the issue; make-up artists check the wigs under the hats; the props department prepares items for the stage, from the food as required to the blood capsules and other objects vital to the performance. In the last week before the premiere all efforts are concentrated, which puts huge demands on everyone in terms of flexibility and professional conduct. And it soon becomes clear how well the advance planning and arrangements have worked.

Mention should also be made of the works that do not make it to the stage, as for example, when a scene is deleted. This will be disappointing, to be sure, but the time and effort will still have been worth it as it will then go into the archives and can be used later for another production.

INSPIRATION FROM ALL ERAS

The issue of storage in a theatre is an important subject for the group. The archive is more than just a source of inspiration for costume designers. One finds costumes and hats from all eras, and although they seldom fit right away, they can be used again on the stage after some reworking. Organising all this takes a lot of space and detailed planning. Nevertheless, this can provide a welcome way to wind down and bring things to a close. This is the time when the atmosphere is a bit more quiet, before the end of the season and after the first performances.

EMBELLISHING THE STORY

It helps to see a production to understand why a part of the costume might come back damaged after a performance. If during the course of a dramatic piece one is able to detect signs of destitution, desperation and destruction on the clothing, one may

be able to appreciate a consistent and effective way for the costumes to acquire a certain used look over time. In one production at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, a stiffened black pork pie hat is crushed and covered with fine plaster dust. For the next performance the hat has to look like new again. To be able to put across and embellish the story as it unfolds, the work of a hat maker in the theatre relies on fantasy, fashion and mood. But it will always help to have experience, technical skill and, not least, a strong inquiring mind.

BACK TO GTKOS

By confronting specific challenges, sharing research results and exploring different approaches and solutions, the meetings are enriched and serve to foster a sense of community. This is something very valuable in a profession where people often have to stand on their own two feet when carrying out their tasks. It is not therefore surprising that there is a lively exchange of ideas shortly after the GTKos meeting begins. These two days are filled with inspiration, workshops, excursions as well as conversations about the everyday work experience. And of course the time always goes by far too quickly.

In the evening, the programme is rounded off with a meal together or a visit to the theatre.

And when at the beginning of the year the email arrives from GTKos saying, "We are planning our next meeting," there is always a great feeling of anticipation. And maybe their shared dream is not so far away: a study tour to see the costume and hat museums around Lyon, followed perhaps by a trip to Florence.

MORE INFORMATION

www.gtkos.net
www.stage-set-scenery.de

USEFUL TIPS

The group agrees that they go to unusual lengths when it comes to the selection of materials. Helpful tips are particularly important at the meetings and are duly recorded and kept on file. In this way nothing is lost and one can refer back to how colleagues have resolved a particular issue before.

Possible ideas for making headwear workable might involve such things as the use of construction helmet inlays, hat umbrellas from the last football championship or thermoplastic materials such as Varaform, Worbla and Fosshape. New materials such as insulated matting, filter material from aquariums or tricks to make objects last longer, like using latex rubber milk on paper, might offer a way to meet requirements and facilitate the work. Members can offer a wealth of experience concerning the quality of a variety of traditional materials, and they can also share a wide range of sources and references.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE THEATRE

Things really take off after the first rehearsal and when all parts of the production team come together for the first run-through. Then there is a final spurt right up to the first performance. It is important to make sure the original costumes are easy to work with and that hemlines and other practical aspects are fully checked.

Production: 'In Einer Kalten Winternacht'

Theatre: Junges Schauspielhaus Hamburg

Performers: Hermann Book, Christine Ochsenhofer, Katherina Sattler

Costume Designer:

Katrin Plötzky

Hat/Material: Wool felt, fibreglass, gauze, fleece, cable ties. Constructed from fibreglass, attached from a wool felt cap covered with gauze and fleece, prepared with single, painted cable ties

Photo: Sinje Hasheider



Photo: Thomas Aurin

Production: 'Der Haarige Affe'

Theatre: Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg

Performers: Charly Hübner, Lilith Stangenberg, Marc Hosemann

Costume Designer:

Adriana Braga Peretzki

Hat/Material: Peacock feathers, hairband with foam rubber (top hat from stock, slightly reworked)

Production: 'Rose Bernd'

Theatre: Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg

Performers: Maik Solbach, Lina Beckmann, Gregor Bloéb

Costume Designer:

Adriana Braga Peretzki

Hat/Material: Stiffened pork pie, fur felt

Photo: Lalo Jodlbauer

