

# TRAVESTIES

A PLAY BY TOM STOPPARD



## The technical team – Set and costume design

### Specific learning outcomes

Students will:

- evaluate the effectiveness of set and costume design for this production.

[These learning outcomes relate to the Communication and Interpreting in Drama (CI) strand in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*.]

### Tracy Grant – Set and Costume Designer



Tracy Grant is one of New Zealand's leading stage designers. She trained professionally at the Mercury Theatre in Auckland and her work had included many major opera and theatre productions in both New Zealand and Australia.

She now works as a freelance designer based in Auckland and her range of work remains extensive with an increasing involvement in the training of young professional performance designers in New Zealand at the Prague Quadrennial in the Czech Republic in 1991, 1995, and 1998.

Tracy is a Winston Churchill Fellow (1987) and has a Bachelor of Spatial Design from Auckland University of Technology (1996).

She was a finalist in 'Best Craft in Short Film Drama' at the NZ Film and Television Awards (1997) and won Best Production Design at the St Kilda Film Festival (1999) for her work on *Possum*.

Highlights of Tracy's work in recent years includes the two spectacular outdoor opera productions at the North Harbour Stadium of *Carmen* and *La Traviata* and the acclaimed *Ihi FrENZy* for the Royal New Zealand Ballet featuring the work of Te Matarae I Orehu and Split Enz.

Her work for ATC includes designs for *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Arcadia*, *Masterclass*, *Wit*, *The Judas Kiss* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She is currently working on the RNZ Ballet's 2003 production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

*You trained at the Mercury – what did this entail?*

The Mercury Theatre was the largest professional theatre company in this country up until its closure in 1992. It employed, at times, between 60 and

100 fulltime professional actors, directors, designers, technicians, production and administration staff. Facilities included onsite rehearsal, wardrobe, prop, set and scenic workshops, creating approximately 16 productions a year. These included a musical, 1 or 2 operas, classical and contemporary drama. The design department averaged a staff of between 4 and 6, depending on the workloads of the time. I began my training as a design assistant, in 1982, serving an apprenticeship in each of the design related areas, working toward eventually designing for all areas of production and became Head of the Design Department and an Associate Director of the theatre before my resignation in 1990.

*Did you have any inkling that you wished to move into theatre design at school? What subjects did you take?*

I was always drawn to the performance activities at school. There were limited practical art subject options available to me at the time, however a good knowledge of English and American literature, art history, and the classics have proved very valuable throughout my career.

*Have you had any particular mentors, at the Mercury or any time, who encouraged and helped you?*

Many, many colleagues, directors, actors and designers, have passed on valued knowledge throughout my career. In particular Raymond Hawthorne, a director with whom I still work closely; Paul Minifie, another inspirational and wise man of the theatre; Iain Aitken, a designer of great skill, who taught me about the art of scenography and the importance, internationally, of this art form; Simon Phillips, a director now running the Melbourne Theatre Company, who creates production of significant visual intensity; Sarah Pierse and Elizabeth Hawthorne, New Zealand's premiere actors, from whom I have learnt the meaning of performance integrity.

*What was your brief for Travesties?*

To serve the script, the intentions of the writer, the needs of both the actors and the audience, and the Auckland Theatre Company, to the best of my ability.

*What design process do you take? How do you go about this?*

My design process begins with research, a period of discussion and conceptual development with the director and lighting designer, the creation of an initial design concept which would include informal renderings of costume and set, a working 'white' model and sketched plans, in order to finalise the design with all those involved. Once this has been achieved I can then begin to complete the designs, model and drawings to a standard, which enables the costing and manufacturing of the design by the production company.

*In Travesties, you are responsible for both set and costume – is this usual? Do you prefer to work this way or specialise in one area?*

I trained as a designer of both, which is my most preferred way of working. This has been very common historically, however with decreasing opportunities of professional work, and an increase in designers seeking work in all areas of stage design, specialisation has become more commonplace, resulting in fewer designers gaining the experience or skills in order to do both.

*Your ideas for this play - what are they and how did they come about? You are using a two level set and made the decision for the stage manager to be viewed all times, why is this? (And how did the director and SM take to this idea!)*

Raymond and I had several meetings at which we talked, listened to music, looked at books, photographs and discussed our ideas for the production. It was a very non-specific series of opinions, from us both, about the themes of the play. These themes can be loosely defined as life, art and politics, interspersed with moments of wit and absurdity offered by Oscar Wilde (via Stoppard) from his portrayal of the characters in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Raymond had a set of photographs of actual moments from WWI in his archives, and I was very moved by the reality of these images juxtaposed against the ridiculousness of this piece of writing. I decided to include them in the design, but only in the sense of them "hanging on walls" as if revered as pieces of art, perhaps even passed over, as they might be if hanging on the walls of a large institutional library. To me this suggested the "travesty" that conceptually could sit at the heart of the design. I have made the columns supporting the mezzanine platform intentionally two-dimensional, another travesty of structure. In the same way the follow spots on stage, and the position of the stage manager within sight-lines, describes the "travesty" of production. The library ladder and platform have advantages of offering a variety of levels on which the actors can work, but specifically they are there to recreate one of Lenin's historical speeches, which he delivered from a high level.

*If money was not an issue – what would you have changed? (If anything!) i.e. what would your ideal design have been?*

I don't let budget considerations impact on the standard of design ideas that I offer. If money is an issue, it will perhaps show in the standard of realisation or finish of the design. The quality of production value is directly related to the resources available.

*This is the second Tom Stoppard play you have designed for ATC. Do you have a special interest in his work? Do you find them a challenge?*

Stoppard's plays are wonderful - rich with ideas, and very rewarding to work on. It has been a pleasure to design both *Arcadia* and *Travesties*.

## *Travesties set*

Set designers supply drawings and a scale model box before the set begins construction. This gives proportions, colours and the general feel of the stage set to the director and actors.

The images below are of the model box that Tracy supplied. It is interesting to note the size of the set that has been designed. Look at the levels that Tracy has created and the different acting spaces.

Note the follow spot, which Tracy uses onstage



Note the use of levels



Note the use of images from World War One (as Tracy describes in her interview)



The creation of the library area – separate from the drawing room of Henry Carr

## Travesties costumes

Below is the costume list that Tracy supplied to the costume makers of The Auckland Theatre Company. Along with this list, she also supplied detailed drawings and designs.

<b>Travesties Costume List</b>	
<p><u>LENIN – PAUL GITTENS</u>            Grey trousers            Grey waistcoat            Black jacket            Black heavy boots            White shirt and collar            Black tie            Grey coat with pocket detailing            Cloth cap            Braces</p> <p><u>JAMES JOYCE – MICHAEL HURST</u>            Green tweed jacket            Grey waistcoat            Grey pinstriped trousers            Pinstriped jacket            Tweed trousers            White shirt and collar            Green tie            Heavy shoes            Bowler hat            Spectacles            Walking stick            Moustache            Hairpiece            Braces x2</p> <p><u>TRISTAN TZARA – ROSS GIRVEN</u>            Black jacket            Black velvet trousers            Brocade waistcoat            White shirt and collar            Black and gold striped tie            Bowler hat            Black shoes            Monocle            Paper carnation for buttonhole            Black and gold striped blazer            Grey boater with striped band            Braces</p> <p><u>CARR – MICHAEL EDWARD</u>            Act 1 - Pearly grey flannel 3 piece suit            White shirt and collar            Black and white loud tie            Elegant black lace up shoes            Striped black and white blazer            Grey boater with matching black and white striped band            Monocle</p> <p><u>OLD CARR</u>            Heavy weight Chinese style grey brocade long coat with red lining, frogging detail down centre front pocket, broken down Chinese style hat with tassel            Bi-focals            Braces</p>	<p><u>CECILY – ANNA MEECH</u>            Crepe de chine cami-knickers            Lace edged chemise            Taffeta corset            Stockings and suspenders            Heeled boots            Tea hat            Gloves            Bag            Sheer delicate lace blouse with high collar, full sleeves, c.f. opening, cuffs            Silk velvet c.f. opening, pleat detail on skirt, sleeveless dress            Sailor collar attached to dress            Hat            Gloves            Handbag            Shawl or short cloak</p> <p><u>BENNETT – ROSS DUNCAN</u>            Pin striped grey trousers            White shirt and collar            Grey spotted cravat            Grey cutaway coat            Black patent leather shoes            Grey waistcoat            Bowler hat            Gloves            Braces</p> <p><u>NADYA – NANCY SCHROEDER</u>            High waisted skirt            Pintucked high collared blouse with c.f button detail            Black boots            Grey Russian-style coat            Black fur hat            Gloves            Shawl</p> <p><u>GWENDOLEN – SOPHIA HAWTHORNE</u>            High-necked red chiffon under layer dress            Velvet and fur trimmed over dress            Fur muff            Velvet, fur, feather and sheer hat            High black boots            Gloves            Bag</p>

## Costume Design

Source: *New Zealand Herald*, Wednesday, July 17 2002

If the Auckland Theatre Company's production of Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties* gets too heavy you can always focus on the stunning costumes. The play, a satire of *The Importance of Being Ernest* incorporating political history and artistic debate, deals with the historical coincidence that Lenin, James Joyce and Dadaist Tristan Tzara were all living in Zurich in 1917.

Stoppard imagines what could have been if they'd met. Costume and set designer Tracy Grant has come up with some brilliant gear for this bunch of intellectuals and their hangers-on. It's a beautiful period – very elegant, great lines, she says of the late Edwardian clothes.

She kept the colour scheme monochromatic and opted for red accents to reflect the birth of the Communist Party, the modern art movements of the period and the passion of the arguments in the play.

Cecily, played by Anna Meech, is a librarian and as such wears a silk velvet pleated dress with a sensible sailor collar. Thanks to a male fantasy, the audience gets to see her gorgeous taffeta corset underwear – so much more alluring than the modern-day sports bra. Sophia Hawthorne's character Gwendolyn is altogether more flash as a woman about town. She gets to wear a sumptuous fur-trimmed silk velvet sleeveless coat, a jaunty fur and velvet hat with feathers, and carries a fur muff – Just the thing to keep us stylish and warm this winter. The play starts tomorrow at the Maidment Theatre.

## Set and costume design: classroom activities

Classroom activities have been developed specifically for:



Working on with a class prior to viewing the play



Working with a class after viewing the play



Associated activities using resource material generated by the play



### Set design (activity)

Tom Stoppard provides the set designer with the following instructions in the script:

*The play is set in Zurich in two locations: the drawing room of Henry Carr's apartment, and a section of the Zurich public library.*

*Most of the action takes place within Carr's memory, which goes back to the period of the First World War, and this period is appropriately in the design and the costumes etc.*

*The room must have the main door Centre Upstage. Double doors would be best. However there is at least one side door. There is a centre table with a good chair on each side, and a side table, apart from other furniture.*

*The library suggests a larger scale – tall bookcases etc. In Act Two Cecily the librarian requires a counter or desk, which need not necessarily be in view at the beginning of the play. Some of the entrances are probably through a door rather than the wings.*

*The library in the Prologue and the second act does not necessarily have to be presented from the same angle.*

Choose either the library or the room. Sketch a bird's eye view of the set that could be used. Include furniture, ideas for colours and textures that could be used to show that the play is set during WWI.



## Reflecting on the set (activity)

List all of the design elements that reflected the WW1 time setting. You might like to consider costumes and props as well as the set itself. Think about style, materials and use of colour, as well as music.

- How faithfully do you think that the set designer met Tom Stoppard's directions?
- What were the major differences?
- What did you like about the set design? What did you expect to be different?

This set required some parts of the backstage to be visible to the audience. This is most unusual.

- What ideas do you think that the set designer was representing by setting the play in this way?
- Comment on the effect that this had on the production? On you as an audience member?
- What did other people think about having the stage manager on stage?



## Gathering inspiration (activity)

In the planning stages of the production, director Raymond Hawthorn and designer Tracy Grant listened to music of the period, looked at photographs and images of Europe in WWI, read books about the history of the times, as well as fiction written at the time. This enabled them to develop a sense of the times to use in direction and design.

Gather resources for a play that you are working on in class. Source music, images, books and artefacts to help you to develop a sense of the people and places in your text.