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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Taylor (Kuzniar) Klouda, Class of 2007, presented her graduate costume design project based on Aristophanes' *"The Birds,"* in the Spring of 2012 at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (U of M) and joined the budding Found Object Costuming trend. With designs made chiefly out of household items such as zipties, bubblewrap and Swiffers, Klouda's designs point to theater work in an increasingly more green-friendly world.

While reading *"The Birds,"* Klouda said, "I envisioned a messy and disorganized world of found-objects, much like the cluttered nests made from anything birds can get their beaks on." She was inspired by a bird's nature to hoard elements of the human world as part of its nest, so Klouda began to do a bit of hoarding herself. She browsed re-use centers, surplus stores and thrift shops, selecting those items that seemed to jump out at her. She collected key-cutting scraps from local hardware stores and set up bins for donation of unwanted items.

Klouda's found materials caused her to deviate from her original research that was a lot more sculptural, but she decided to embrace the change. "Re-use can make you stretch your creative juices, letting the essence of the re-used item speak to you in a way that can be very exciting and inspiring," she said.

The Birds costume design by Klouda



The Birds costume design by



This unique design process was a big learning experience in which Klouda quickly discovered that a costumer is only as strong as his or her project staff, and that the help you have can make or break the design. She was continually impressed by her staff's ability to make her ideas come to life.

The end result was a wildly striking set of costumes that brought forth so much positive feedback that Klouda was overwhelmed. She has dealt with only a couple of traditionalist critics of her concept, who prefer much more classical and controlled designs, but a few nay-sayers were not enough to discourage her interest in Green Theatre.

Klouda's Wesleyan roots contributed to her cognizance of environmental sustainability. She graduated from Illinois Wesleyan with a bachelor's degree in English writing and theatre arts and a minor in Hispanic Studies. During her four years at IWU, Klouda worked as a student writer in the Office

of Communications and simultaneously dove headfirst into the world of costuming, using both sides of her degree to build a multifaceted résumé.

IWU's School of Theatre Arts (SotA) has been committed to creating environmentally-friendly projects for decades.

According to Director and Professor of the School of Theatre Arts Curtis Trout, the theatre department recycles scenery, props and costumes each year. They store scenic items, appliances, furniture and household items until they are needed again, and the designers refurbish them as they see fit. Shop workers take used metals to Morris Tick Co. Scrap Metal Yard in Bloomington and follow a complex paint reuse process. They dispose of all hazardous chemicals through the Center For Natural Science at IWU and use a painting spray booth for the safety of the workers and the environment.

Klouda's time in SotA provided her with the tools necessary to embark on all of her future work in the professional theatre. In particular, Klouda feels that assisting professional designer and Associate Professor of Theatre Arts Marcia McDonald taught her a great deal about organization, paperwork and sourcing materials, all of which are aspects of the design process.

"The biggest thing I learned at IWU was to find joy in my art," said Klouda. "Sometimes, in the professional world, we spend so much time and energy on our work that we can get bogged down and forget why we fell in love with theatre in the first place. My final design project at U of M was very much a rediscovering of my love for theatre."

In addition to her final project and various other productions in her graduate studies, Klouda has designed costumes for numerous professional productions. Since graduating from U of M in 2012, she has moved to Chicago, where she worked in the Goodman Theater's costume department for a season as a wig technician and painter/dyer. Currently, Klouda works as a teaching painter and also works in the theatre program at the College of Lake County, Waukegan, Ill., where she serves as a designer and an adjunct faculty member. She teaches courses every semester such as Introduction to Theatrical Costumes-Technical Portion and Scenic Painting and will teach Intro to Theatre this fall.

Recycled items used: phone and fax machine cords, clothesline, plastic bags, luggage tags; Actors pictured: Sam Krueger and



"There's something about teaching that re-ignites my love of theatre," said Klouda. "I think it's because I see the students light up when they learn something new or create something amazing. It gives me the excitement to show

them something else that will elicit the same response. I want them to leave my class and be able to go out into the real world as a capable theatre technician or designer, because that's what Illinois Wesleyan gave me. I want to pay it forward."

Drawing from her experience with McDonald at IWU, Klouda rediscovered another passion within her discipline. She is developing her own company, The Bearded Lady, for custom costume wigs and facial hair.

Recycled items used: cardboard, plastic bags, gardening trowels; Pictured: the Cast of The Birds



She said, "I was terrified of wigs before I took my wig class because I knew that a bad wig is so much worse than a bad costume. Wigs are about precision and nuance. They must fit perfectly, the color and blending must be correct, the style must be impeccable and the hairline has to be natural, or the wig will give itself away. These things were scary when I first began, but really, they are what drew me to wigs in the end. In my opinion, a great wig can really transform a person. Just look at some of the classic Hollywood characters that have wigs to transform the actor: Wolverine, Captain Jack Sparrow, Edward Scissorhands, every character on Saturday Night Live and any of the characters in Lord of the Rings."

Until the official site launches, she will continue to sell her products through online marketplaces.

Klouda attributes her success on many fronts back to

the guidance she received as a student.

"The thing Wesleyan did to help me want to start my own business is expose me to so many different interests," she said. "That's what is so amazing about a liberal arts education –every experience at a liberal arts school can inspire you to combine all your interests into one. I think I've found something that lets me do that."

However, wherever her fascinating and ever-changing career may take her, she hopes to share what she's discovered about sustainability in theatre.

"I'd love to explore unconventional materials in costume even further," said Klouda. "There are so many beautiful materials around us, just waiting to be discovered!"

For additional information regarding this profile, contact Hannah Dhue at (309) 556-3181.

Photo credits include: Story thumbnail – The Bearded Lady logo by Taylar Klouda; Story Photos – The Birds by Aristophanes, University of Minnesota- Twin Cities; Directed by Robert Rosen; Set and Media Design by Amanda Wambach; Lighting Design by Mary Montgomery; Costume Design by Taylar Klouda; Photo credit: Cody Baldwin

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