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Props Class Delivers the 'Impossible' with *Cinderella* Production

May 5, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — There are parallels between the task Professor of Theatre Curtis Trout set for his “Properties for the Theatre” class and the lyrics of a song from the musical *Cinderella*.

“Impossible,” the fairy godmother sings of the likelihood four white mice can become horses, a yellow pumpkin turning into a golden carriage, and a country bumpkin and a prince can join in marriage.

This semester Trout and his class took on the nearly impossible task of staging *Cinderella* as puppet theatre. The 12 students created all the puppets, their clothes, the puppet theatre, all the scenery, and all the properties for the show under Trout's guidance. Associate Professor of Theatre Arts Scott Susong's “Acting the Song” class recorded the score and book as the performance soundtrack. More than 125 people attended the open final production, including dozens of children.

“We took off a very big bite,” Trout admitted. “I had never tried to stage a production as a result of this craft-oriented making class.”

As the song goes, however, impossible things happen every day because people keep hoping for them. The students learned that as well. “Early on we asked ourselves, ‘is this possible?’ and we said ‘yeah, of course,” said Tuxford Turner '19. He admitted the students underestimated the time and amount of work it would take. “For me, though, I learned anything can happen if you have good people who want to make it work,” Turner said.

Here, we present a pictorial essay of the course and what the students will remember most.



“Everyone in the class rummaged through scrap bins of fabric, trim and jewelry to find the perfect materials for our puppets,” said Ilyssa Kosova '19, who created the stepmother puppet. “The stepmother’s fabric was mostly recycled from the costume shop’s scraps. My biggest takeaway from this class is learning just how much time and care crafting something as delicate as a puppet can take.” (Photo by Robert Frank III '14)



Students constructed a puppet theatre from flats saved from the November main stage production *The Boys from Syracuse*, which utilized “old-school fabric-covered flat frame scenery,” said course instructor Curt Trout, professor of theatre. Students also painted six backdrop scenes ranging from the interior of Cinderella’s home to the ballroom. Here, class members prepare to close the main drape during a run-through. (Photo by Marc Featherly)



Professor of Theatre Curt Trout shows the stagehands the mark for the entrance of Cinderella’s carriage. The puppets were constructed to one-fourth human scale, with the props scaled accordingly. The carriage was crafted from a form from one-half of a beach ball. The horses are carved styrofoam covered with paper mache. (Photo by Marc Featherly)



Whitney Meltz '19 produced this bourgeois gentleman puppet. Students in the class estimated each puppet took at least 50 hours to create, from sculpting and painting the faces to fashioning each detail of the costumes. Meltz also made the Fairy Godmother. (Photo by Marc Featherly)



In addition to creating the puppets, the 12 students enrolled in the course also made every prop for the production. Dominic Gambaiani '19 estimates it took about 15 hours of painting, gluing, drying and sculpting to create the pumpkin patch. "I had not realized how much dedication designers need to build props," Gambaiani said. "My biggest takeaway from the class is the ability to see what I can make with basic craft materials." (Photo by Robert Frank III '14)



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Puppeteer Cami Tokowitz '19 manipulates Cinderella during a run-through before the open final performance. "I think one of my biggest takeaways from this experience is perseverance," said Tokowitz, an acting major. "As it got harder and harder, it was more difficult to say 'we can still do this.' But I'm so glad we stayed with it. We have an incredible product and portfolio pieces and we put on a really, really good show of all the hard work we put into this course." (Photo by Marc Featherly)



Class members marionette puppets in the scene where the Herald announces the Prince is having a ball. Puppeteers (from left) Cami Tokowitz '19, Olivia Sarkis '19, Tuxford Turner '19, Ilyssa Kosova '19, and Dominic Gambaiani '19 presented an open final performance of *Cinderella* for a crowd of more than 125 people in the Jerome Mirza Theatre. "I just love theatre," said Tokowitz. "Whatever I can do to be part of something like this in any way – I'm in." Tokowitz also did the scene painting for Herald Square. (Photo by Marc Featherly)



Vianey Salazar '18 crafts the Queen's throne in Shaw Hall. The class made all the props for the production of *Cinderella* in addition to creating more than 20 puppets and the scenic backdrops. (Photo by Robert Frank III '14)



One of the students' early tasks included historical research of Georgian-era fashion. "We make boards that are collages of ideas," said Tuxford Turner '19. The King, pictured here in his finest Georgian dress, was crafted by Anne Warnke '19. (Photo by Marc Featherly)



Professor of Theatre Curt Trout rallies the troops after a long day of run-throughs. "Remember the first day of class when I asked you if we should even attempt this?" he asked. "What we are doing with the final performance is what I have envisioned. It is essentially a small main stage production, which is huge. It might not be as polished, but it shows the amount of work we've done." At the end of the performance, however, the 125-plus audience members rewarded the class with a standing ovation. (Photo by Marc Featherly)